If he shall offer it as a *todah*, a thanksgiving offering…” (Vayikra 7:1).

The gemara reads, “Rabbi Yehudah said that Rav said: There are four who have to thank [Hashem] – those who go down to sea, those who traverse the desert, one who was sick and was cured, and one who was trapped in jail and was freed.”1 Rav’s source is a chapter of Tehillim that praises Hashem for taking us out of Egypt.

The Maharsha2 explains that these four things are actually examples representing categories of distractions that prevent man from accomplishing his goal in life. First, that the person has no income, and is too busy plying a trade – going down to sea – to pursue a higher goal. The second is being plagued by enemies, so he is forced to flee, as if to a desert, rather than choosing a place where he could succeeding and force him to invest his time and effort defending what he has rather than progressing. The third is having one’s energy and productivity sapped by disease. The fourth thing that prevents spiritual growth is being imprisoned by wealth and the drive to work for financial success, which can distract a person from Torah.

The *todah* is not just thanking Hashem from saving us from a physical close call, but is appropriate because after losing the proper physical groundwork, one’s spiritual life also decays. “Im ein kemach ein Torah – without flour, there is no Torah”.

When the wine steward tells Yosef his dream, Yosef gives it a positive interpretation. Not only is this the steward’s personal redemption from imprisonment, it also is the first step toward Yosef assuming the post of second to the king, and therefore lays the groundwork for the Exodus. In describing the dream, the Torah uses the word “kos” (cup) four times. According to Bereishis Rabba, this is the reason why we have four cups of wine at the seder. The better-known reason is the four terms of redemption in the Torah: “vehotzeisi... ve-hitzalti... vega'alti... velakachti...” (I will take you out from under Egypt’s oppression, I will save you from their servitude, I will redeem you, I will take you as My nation.)

The Maharal explains that both are the expression of freedom from these four basic kinds of distractions. In his view, the four cups of the *seder* are an expression of the thanks of the *korban todah*. It is therefore relevant to compare and contrast the *korban pesach* with the Todah.

“If he offers it as a *todah*, he shall offer with the *todah* unleavened loaves... With loaves of leavened bread he shall bring his *korban*.” The *todah* was offered alongside both *matzah* and 10 loaves of leavened bread. Obviously the *pesach* is accompanied by matzah alone. Why?

Both the *pesach* and the *todah* are bounded by strict time constraints.5 The usual *shelamim* can be eaten the day after it was brought. These two *korbanos* can only be eaten through the first night.6 This forces the person to share the *korban* with others; a person cannot eat an entire lamb in one night. Particularly if you consider that *achilah gasah*, gorging oneself, is not considered eating nor a fulfillment of the mitzvah. A *todah* can be served to any Jewish passerby. A *korban pesach* can only be eaten by people who joined the offering in advance. Again why?

People relate to mitzvos in two basic ways: There is the expression of what one is feeling, and there is the performance of an act to learn how one ought to feel. The joy of the farmer bringing in his crops could be expressed through his taking the four species on *sukkos*. However, even if one does not feel that joy and gratitude to Hashem one still is obligated to take them, so as to learn this attitude. In the ideal, both are true – action sparks emotion and atti-

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1 Berachos 54b
2 Ad loc
3 Avos 3:21
4 Shemos 6:6-8
5 Beitzah 19b
6 Which rabbinically is then limited to before midnight. See Michnah Berachos 1:1.
Leavened bread is appropriate for a todah celebration. 10 loaves, to share the wealth he feels with others. This is not someone who needs to learn that what he received is a gift rather than the product of “kochi ve’otzem yadi”, his own might. The pesach, the lesson in gratitude, must take a step back and carry with it the reminder that one should be humble. It is therefore eaten only with lechem oni, poor man’s bread, lechem she’onim alav devarim harbei, the bread upon which we learn many things, matzah.

While both korbanos are shared, the reasons for the sharing are very different. The motivation for sharing the todah is the natural desire to share one’s joy with others. The pesach is a historical joy, the joy that one could only feel if one were connected to our people and its history. As a lesson in connecting to the Jewish people, the joining together to eat the korban is a necessary precondition to the joy, not something that follows from it. 7

Parashas Tzav continues the commands and begins with the following: “G-d spoke to Moshe saying, ‘Command (tzav) Aharon and his sons, saying: This is the law of the burnt-offering (olah)…” (Vayikra 6:2-1). Not only is Moshe told what to say to Aharon, he is further told to command Aharon and his sons on this matter. This unusual1 formulation is noted by the Sifra and is explained, as quoted by Rashi, 2 “The term tzav denotes only ‘encouragement’ in reference to the present and for future generations. Rabbi Shimon said: The verse must especially encourage where there is a loss of money.” Since this verse commands about the olah sacrifice, which is entirely burnt and from which the kohanim therefore do not receive any financial benefit, the Torah must emphasize the need to be zealous in performance of these commandments.

It is quite odd, though, that the Torah suspects Aharon and his sons of being less than zealous when they have no financial stake in the matter. We are not speaking here of the average businessman who is constantly concerned with profit margins and deal closings. These are righteous people whose lives are dedicated to serving G-d and fulfilling His commandments. Is the Torah really suspicious of them?

The answer, R’ Elyah Lopian suggests, 3 is yes. Not only do great people face the same challenges as the average, the obstacles they must overcome are larger. As the famous Gemara in Sukkah (52a) says, when the day of judgment comes, the yetzer hara will appear to a righteous person as a mountain and to a wicked person as a strand of hair. The commentators explain that, because the greater a person is the greater is his yetzer hara, the righteous see this large mountain against which they struggled and which they overcame. The wicked, though, did not have as large a yetzer hara and, despite that, were still unable to defeat it. Aharon, too, had a yetzer hara and needed to struggle against it. 4 Perhaps not even very deep down. Aharon and his sons had an urge to treat more casually the sacrifices that did not benefit them and, for that reason, 5

1 Although not unique. The various midrashim that discuss this issue, as brought in the commentaries to the Sifra, deal with other instances of this formulation, as does the Malbim at length.
2 Vayikra 6:2
3 Lev Eliyahu, ad loc.
4 This assumes that even a totally righteous person like Aharon had a yetzer hara. I hope to address dispute on this topic in a future column.
had to struggle not to do so. This commandment was encouragement and a reminder of the need to do so. Even moreso, it is a reminder to all of us that no matter how great we may someday become we can never “trust in ourselves until our day of death.”

R’ Avraham Shmuel Binyamin Sofer, the famous Kesav Sofer, quotes a midrash that says that the olah sacrifice is only brought by those who are haughty. This arrogance is what brings people to sin and requires them to bring the olah sacrifice. If so, suggests the Kesav Sofer, we can understand the connection between the specific encouragement of Aharon and this particular commandment. R’ Bachya Ibn Pakuda writes in Chovos HaLevavos that there are two types of haughtiness: for physical matters and for spiritual matters. Someone can be arrogant about his beauty and great riches, but can also be haughty about his wisdom and his lofty accomplishments. While Moshe was tall, independently wealthy, extremely strong (all of which we know from the requirements of a prophet), wise and the greatest of all prophets, he was still the most modest of men. He was able to achieve modesty in both areas.

A person who contemplates his true existence will realize that he has no reason for being haughty over his physical acquisitions. His wealth can disappear overnight, as has been seen many times in history. His physical health can deteriorate in ways beyond his control. His good looks, his tall height, everything physical about him can leave without notice. Not only did he not necessarily gain them through his own effort, he can lose them without any ability to stop that from happening. It would seem that a person has more reason to be haughty over his spiritual accomplishments. The wisdom he has acquired, the Torah he has mastered, the proper personality traits in which he has trained himself are all much more stable acquisitions. However, in reality, they, too, can leave him quickly. People forget, lose their track, accidentally sin and end up on the wrong path very easily. It has happened before and can certainly happen again. In truth, there is no reason for anyone to be overly proud of their accomplishments because these acquisitions can quickly be lost.

However, the rights of a kohen to the animals of sacrifices means that this guaranteed sustenance cannot be lost. As long as there are sacrifices offered, the kohanim will have a source of income. Therefore, perhaps regarding korbanos, where there is no possibility of kohanim losing their wealth, the Torah has to specifically charge them with zealously. They must work to avoid haughtiness because, unlike other people, they have a guaranteed income and, absent the great tragedy of the cessation of the regular sacrificial service, can never lose their physical acquisitions.

Next up, the Torah blessings. For now, we will concentrate on the berachos. Suffice it to say that while the traditional requirement of daily Torah study requires a tripartite division into Scripture (Mikra), Law (Mishnah) and Methodology (Gemara), the lifetime goal remains to establish Torah so that it “drips from one’s lips.”

These are the first communal berachos that are really attached to the mitzvah act – we learn a little Torah right after saying them.

We say three berachos. The first is phrased as asher kid’shanu bemitzvosav vetzivanu, a real mitzvah beracha. The second supplicates and the third thanks G-d for giving us the Torah. In a way, they fulfill the minimum daily requirement of prayer: praise, request and thanksgiving. A minimal sampling of Torah learning follows, fulfilling two mitzvos with one stone. Chasidic and Kabbalistic literature (Nefesh HaChayim, Tzavaas HaRivash, etc.) inextricably link prayer and Torah study.

1 Ran, Nedarim

Let us look at the berachos themselves. When we say asher kid’shanu, G-d sanctifies the body of Israel. That is, mitzvos are physical acts. Torah study demands speech, not just thought, as we say in Shma, ledabeir bam. The story of Beruriah and the “foolish Galilean” in Eiruvin 53b reinforces this – he did not recite his learning aloud, so she kicked him and corrected him.

What is the mitzva in the brocho? La’asok bedivrei Torah: la’asok from esek, waking up and turning one’s will towards an act, making the potential in the act into...
The third beracha thanks G-d for singling us out as the am segula. The am hatorah. The giving of Torah continues today, through lower forms of ruach hakodesh. As R’ Aryeh Kaplan says:

The gift of divine guidance is granted to those who teach Torah publicly, bringing the people closer to G-d. It is thus written, “This book of the Torah shall not depart from you and you shall observe everything written in it, for then you shall have good success” (Yeshoshua 1:8). Therefore, any Torah leader whose works have been accepted by all Israel is assumed to have been divinely guided.

Women, too, say these berachos. Perhaps they need not learn li’ishmah, but they do learn the laws of Torah, so we ask G-d to sweeten the words of Torah, so we gain pleasure from Torah publicly, bringing the people closer to G-d.

Where do these show up in the Seder? In Baruch HaMakom. R’ Yitzchak Mirsky (Hagadah Hegoyonei Halacha) notes that this paragraph is a precis of the third Torah beracha, preceded with a call/response (baruch HaMakom/baruch Hu) analogous to Barchu. This seems to bless the special kiyum of Talmud Torah that is the Muggid portion of the seder. Just as we say the Torah beracha over the special kiyum of learning from a scroll even without a minyan, we say this here over Muggid. I would speculate that this also works for women and children who might not necessarily have said Torah berachos in the morning – they get the mitzva with the beracha, in fullness.

The second beracha begins ambiguously. What is ha’arev? Do we ask G-d to sweeten the words of Torah, so we gain pleasure from study, or will G-d pledge to partner with Israel in Torah study? Both work well. We seek these words of Torah befinu, echoing the Ran’s advice that Torah should be sh’guros befinu, secure in our mouths.

We ask this for us and our descendants. This echoes G-d’s guarantee (reinforcing the second definition of ha’arev mentioned above) quoted in Bava Metzia 85 that we and our descendants will all have Torah.

We should all know Thy name, recognize Thy greatness, as in Ps. 9:11, “all who know Thy name are confident in You”. Another verse states, “all who know Thy name are rewarded”. As Antigonus Ish Socho says:

The second beracha begins with a nosein haTorah. The third beracha thanks G-d for singling us out as the am segula, the am hatorah. Note the conclusion: nosein haTorah. The giving of Torah continues today, through lower forms of ruach hakodesh. As R’ Aryeh Kaplan says:

The gift of divine guidance is granted to those who teach Torah publicly, bringing the people closer to G-d. It is thus written, “This book of the Torah shall not depart from you and you shall observe everything written in it, for then you shall have good success” (Yeshoshua 1:8). Therefore, any Torah leader whose works have been accepted by all Israel is assumed to have been divinely guided.

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Another note, following up on the recent Vayosha discussion, via R’ Shlomo Aviner’s haggadah. We discussed the first half of the verse, “the people feared G-d”. What does the second half, “and believed in G-d and His servant Moshe” mean? It suggests (ch’v) two powers: G-d and Moshe. Rather, as the Gra comments on “not via an agent”, Moshe was not a separate agent he was a pure keli, an instrument of G-d’s will. Thus belief in G-d and in Moshe were the same thing.

On an ethical note, R’ Avraham Yitzchak Kook comments on even ma’asu habanim in two ways with one lesson. The builders are talmidei chachamim, as we say “not banayich, but bonayich”, who rejected the chalutzim, the builders with stone, not realizing that the chalutzim make their Torah in the land of Israel possible. Or, the builders are chalutzim, who reject the Torah, not realizing that it creates the Jewish character of lands, state and people. Both are necessary, and both must acknowledge the good done by the other – without physical needs, there is no Torah; without Torah, physical deeds are pointless.

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2 See Bereishis 26:20 – the well was called Esek, because the shepherds of Yitzchak and the shepherds of Gerar turned their will against each other.

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