

Toras



Aish

A project of the AishDas Society

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd have Aharon make lotteries on the two goats, one lottery for G-d and one lottery for "Azazel" (Vayikra 16:8). What (or who) is this Azazel? Our sages (Pirkei d'Rabbi Elazar 46, Zohar 3:248) and many of the commentators (including Ibn Ezra, Ramban, Chizkuni) say that Azazel is none other than Satan! Here it is, Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, yet we are commanded to bring an offering to one of G-d's administering angels! Isn't that the epitome of idol worship? And of all of angels to choose, it's the one G-d uses to tempt us to sin! How could G-d command us to bring an offering to anyone other than Himself, and why is this part of the Yom Kippur service?

The Ramban tries to lessen the severity of this action, explaining that since we are not bringing this offering on our own, but are doing it because G-d commanded us, we are really bringing both goats for G-d, with G-d giving one of them to Satan. And since we are not the ones that actually give it to Satan (which is why a lottery is used), it is not idol worship.

While this may get around the technical issue of idol worship, it is still extremely strange that this type of service should be commanded at all, much less on Yom Kippur. Especially if you consider the Rambam's approach to animal offerings, that they were necessary in order to wean the newly freed nation off of the Egyptian idol-worshipping culture. If the offerings were designed to train them not to worship G-d's underlings, why is there an offering that seems so similar to precisely that? The very next thing the Torah teaches us is that offerings should only be brought to G-d, in the Temple, and not to anyone or anything (or anywhere) else (17:1-7)- indicating that there is a danger that sending an offering to Azazel might lead to such prohibited offerings. Why introduce such a "dangerous" offering on Yom Kippur? Additionally, the Midrash understands this "gift" to Satan as a bribe so that he won't interfere with our service towards G-d. How will this "bribe" help, and why does G-s want us to give it?

The Vilna Gaon is quoted as having compared spiritual growth to climbing a ladder. We can climb the spiritual ladder one rung at a time, perhaps even two rungs at a time. If, however, we attempt to climb three

rungs at once, not only will we not reach the third rung, but we will lose our (spiritual) balance and fall all the way to the ground. The key is making a steady climb, so that there is constant growth.

Although the goal of each person (over a lifetime) is to minimize physical needs and concentrate on becoming as spiritual as possible, very few people can successfully shut out everything that is mundane and deal only with things that are holy. If we try to hold back things that are essentially permitted before we are ready, rather than bringing us closer to G-d it will ultimately move us further away. It is important to know in which direction to head, and to have an idea of what the destination is supposed to be, but if we try to get there earlier than we can really handle, we will probably end up going backwards.

This may be what the Midrash means by "giving a bribe to Satan." Since things of a physical nature are his domain, by allowing (when permitted, and when appropriate) oneself to participate in things that are not intrinsically holy, it may allow the individual to continue the climb up the spiritual ladder.

One of the things that is not holy, but not "unkosher" either (although some of the peripheral things might be), is sports. There is no question that one would be better off learning Torah for three hours rather than following a baseball game. Or that memorizing Mishnayos is infinitely more important than memorizing box scores or statistics. But if someone is not going to spend those hours learning, or if forcing oneself to do so will ultimately lead to "spiritual overkill" and cause a backlash, how many things are there that are less harmful than sports. Would G-d prefer that a person be on the level to be fighting with his chavrusa over a Tosfos instead of whether or not there should be a DH? Of course. But if he's not ready to be doing that all the time, there are (unfortunately) much worse things he could be doing. If a person recognizes that he's not ready to completely give up the mundane, he should give a little bit to Azazel. Make sure your intention is for G-d, to be able to (eventually) reach higher levels, and that it is something that is permitted, but don't try to reach for the stars when doing so might leave you holding nothing but dirt.

On Yom Kippur, when the Book of Life is opened, and we know that G-d is about to determine what kind of year we will have, it can be very easy to make resolutions about how much one will improve

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that year. We are on a spiritual high, and motivated not only by the desire to reach even greater heights, but also because the level of prosperity (or otherwise) for the coming year hangs in the balance. There is a danger of promising to reach a level higher than that person is capable of reaching (yet), and once that reality sets in, even the level that could have (should have?) been attained is no longer attempted. Once the promise has been broken, it becomes much harder to set a new, more realistic goal. Therefore, it is specifically on Yom Kippur that the Torah includes the "gift" to Azazel, in order to teach us that we can't ignore where we are actually at when making our resolutions. It is better to set lower goals that can be kept than to set the bar too high to reach.

If we know that we cannot completely give up (permissible) mundane hobbies, rather than promising not to waste three hours on a game anymore, promise instead to set up a chavrusa for a few hours on as many nights as you would commit to a game. Or only "waste" two hours, committing to one hour of Torah for each game.

Just as the Torah follows the "gift" to Azazel with the warning not to be drawn to real idol worship, we must be try not to allow the mundane to become primary in our lives. And perhaps because there is a danger-once the Torah recommends (for some) allowing certain non-holy activities-of focusing just on the mundane, next week's Parsha, Kedoshim, starts off (according to the Ramban) with the commandment to not become a "menuval birshus haTorah," a "lowlife within the boundaries of permitted activities."

As we come off of the seven (eight) days of Passover, when we (hopefully) experienced real spiritual growth and are then thrust right back into our regular lives, may G-d give us the wisdom to know how much more spirituality to grab, and the pace at which to grab it. © 2003 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Why were Nadav and Avihu, two of Ahron's (Aaron) sons killed? The Torah states their Death came when they brought an eish zarah, a foreign fire into the Temple. (Leviticus 10:1) But what was the nature of this fire?

Some maintain that because the prohibition against drinking is found in the sentences that Follow their death, (Leviticus 10:9) the fire alludes to the possibility that Ahron's sons served in the sanctuary while intoxicated. This may be the reason for the punishment of death.

Others insist that the fire relates to their being "hot" in deciding halakhic matters themselves without consulting Moshe (Moses). Note that the preceding sentences (Leviticus 9:23) stresses the leadership role of Moshe and Ahron.

I am convinced that when many answers are offered, it indicates that none are truly compelling. It can be suggested that we cannot comprehend the reason why Nadav and Avihu's actions were deserving of death. Only God can grasp the unfathomable, we cannot.

This may explain why the Torah tells us at the beginning of this week's portion, that the Lord spoke to Moshe immediately after the death of Ahron's two sons. (Leviticus 16:1) The lesson: despite the suffering of sufferings, the horror of an untimely ghastly death, dialogue continues. God tells Moshe to speak to Ahron and Ahron does God's will. In fact this may be the central point of the Nadav - Avihu story. Although not understanding why his son died, Ahron and the priesthood continue on in a relationship to God.

Not coincidentally, soon after the first sentence of our portion, Ahron the high priest is commanded to select two identical goats and, by lots, designate one as an offering to God and the other to be pushed over the cliff for Azazel. (Leviticus 16:6-11) It is extraordinary that although these goats are identical in every way, they experience different fates. This to teach Ahron and all of us that sometimes life takes tragic twists and turns that are inexplicable.

When confronted with such inexplicable suffering we ought all remember the words of Esther Wachsman, mother of Nachshon (the young Israeli soldier murdered by Arab terrorists a number of years ago). She said, "When tragedy befalls us we should not ask 'why?' but rather, 'what shall we do now?'" It is our choice whether to approach our tragedy by only crying 'woe is me' or whether to allow it to elevate us, giving our lives new meaning and direction and bringing us closer to God."

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik makes this very point when distinguishing between "fate" and "destiny."

Fate casts each of us into a dimension of life we cannot control. Destiny, on the other hand, "is an active existence in which humanity confronts the environment into which she or he was cast...Humanity's mission in this world is to turn fate into destiny, an existence that is passive and influenced to an existence that is active and influential."

A lesson to think about especially these days when Israel is under attack. Like Nadav and Avihu, no one can explain why it's happening. But like Ahron and the priesthood, against all odds, Am Yisrael will continue to connect with God and, in the end, prevail.

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RABBI AARON ZEIGLER

National Council of Young Israel

When the Parshiyot of Acharei-Mot and Kedoshim are read separately, the Haftorah for Acharei-Mot is "Ve'ata Ben Adam Ha'tishpot," from Yechezkel HaNavi. Yechezkel admonishes the people of Yerushalayim for their great sins.

According to Rav Soloveitchik, we should read the Haftorah "Haloh Kivnei Kushi'im" for both Acharei-Mot and Kedoshim, and never read "Ve'ata Ben Adom Ha'tishpot." This was the custom of the Vilna Gaon. The reason for this is based on a Gemara (Megilla 25b) which states "Hoda Et Yerushalayim Et To'aivatehah," (Make known to Yerushalayim her abominations), "Nikrah Um'targaim" (is read and translated).

According to Rabbi Eliezer, it is forbidden to read this portion as a Haftorah. There was a story of a man who was reading this before Rabbi Eliezer. Rabbi Eliezer interrupted him, saying: "Before you explore the abominations of Yerushalayim, you should explore the abominations of your mother." After careful investigation, a blemish of descent was found in this individual's family history.

Rabbi Eliezer said that we may not publicly read a Haftorah that defames or condemns Yerushalayim. Although Yechezkel HaNavi's statements were true, it is not our responsibility to repeat it.

A student once came to the Netziv and began to criticize the inhabitants of Eretz Yisroel for their lack of religious observance. Upon realizing what this student was doing, the Netziv immediately stopped him. The student exclaimed: "But Rebbe, it is all true!" The Netziv responded: "Hoda Et Yerushalayim Et To'aivatehah" is also true, since it appears in Tanach. Nevertheless, it should not be repeated.

The message is quite clear. We must think hard and carefully before expressing any negative aspects concerning Eretz Yisrael. Even a statement such as "I would not suggest you visit Israel because it is extremely dangerous to go there," can be

considered, in the Heavenly Courts, as repeating the sin of the Meraglim.

It is interesting to note that a careful reading of Parshat Shelach reveals that what the Meraglim expressed was indeed the truth. The Rabbinic commentators are hard pressed to find what the nature of their sin was, for they merely conveyed to Moshe and Bnei Yisrael the truthful facts of what they saw. The Ramban comments that the key word in their report that revealed their lack of faith was the word "efes" (13:28), but. The Land is great and wonderful, but, - "the people that dwells in the Land is powerful, the cities are very greatly fortified..." The "but" changed their objective reporting to subjective opinions which were not called for.

For one to state an objective and truthful fact that many innocent civilians have been killed by suicide (or homicide) terrorists is correct to say. However, to add an opinion, saying, because of that Israel is a dangerous place to be in - is wrong. For the facts are that many more innocent victims are killed by road traffic accidents than by terrorist bombings. That does not minimize the danger of terrorists, but it puts the danger aspect in a different perspective.

All of our previous gedolim, Rabbi Yisrael Meir, Hakohen, of Radin (The Chofetz Chaim), Rabbi Eliezer Yehuda Waldenberg (The Tzitz Eliezer), and Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (The Igrot Moshe), who were extremely sensitive about the issue of Lashon Hara (Lo Teilech Rachil B'amecha), agreed, that at times certain exceptions are made and the truth must be told. If it was for a situation of saving a life, saving from financial loss, or preventing an improper marriage. But they all stress, that for these exceptions to apply, the person must be absolutely certain of potential harm, no exaggeration of information be presented and the reasons for divulging the information are purely altruistic.

When we speak about the "dangers" that exist in Eretz Yisrael in our times and thereby dissuade a potential student from learning a year in Aretz, or convince someone not to visit the Land as a tourist, can we truly say that our information is all factual, that we are absolutely certain of potential harm and that our motives are purely altruistic? If not, then we ought to heed well the words of the Netziv, "Hoda Et Yerushalayim Et To'aivatehah" is true, but it should not be repeated. © 2003 National Council of Young Israel

RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

RavFrand

The beginning of Parshas Acharei Mos contains the laws of the Service of Yom Kippur - the Day of Atonement. The Torah begins with the words "And G-d spoke to Moshe after the death of Aaron's two sons when they approached before G-d, and they died" [Vayikra 16:1]. This first pasuk [verse] appears to

be unnecessary. It really has nothing to do with the Service of Yom Kippur. Chaza"l comment and explain that there is a connection: Just as Yom Kippur is an atonement, so too the death of the righteous is an atonement.

I once saw a homiletic insight that I believe is highly appropriate for us. At the end of the entire portion of the Service of Yom Kippur, the Torah writes "And this should be to you an eternal decree to bring atonement upon the Children of Israel for all their sins ONCE A YEAR..." [16:34]. Why does the pasuk need to say "once a year"? We all know that there is only one day of Yom Kippur a year! Obviously, if this is the service of Yom Kippur and Yom Kippur only comes once a year then this whole service is done one time a year!

The answer that I saw is as follows: The Torah is giving us a blessing -- that we should only NEED one Yom Kippur a year. The status of the Jewish people should be that they only need one atonement per year. If the Jewish people need more than one atonement per year, then (G-d forbid) G-d may need to resort to the other type of atonement-the death of the righteous. The Torah's blessing is that we should not need that second type of atonement. © 1999 by Rabbi Y. Frand and Project Genesis, Inc. Transcribed by David Twersky; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd the Lord spoke unto Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew near before the Lord and died.” (Lev. 16:1)

Two weeks ago we read in the Tora how Nadav and Avihu, two sons of Aaron, were killed by God for bringing a "strange fire" that had not been commanded. The Bible faults them for having brought this strange fire. But was this crime so heinous as to merit summary capital punishment?

This week's portion of Aharei Mot sheds light on the nature of their crime. Our portion opens like most of the portions in Leviticus: "And the Lord spoke unto Moses ...," but immediately goes on to review the exact chronology in case the two intervening portions of Tazria and Metzora have clouded our sense of time. This week's portion takes place "after the death of the two sons of Aaron ..." God's subsequent speech to Aaron is introduced by a warning: "Speak unto Aaron your brother, that he come not just any time into the holy place with the veil, before the ark cover, so that he may not die." (16:2)

Clearly the two ideas are interconnected. As Rashi points out, a doctor's warning not to eat a specific food is much more effective if the patient is also told that so-and-so died from eating this very dish.

So, the reasons why Aaron should not enter the inner chambers of the Sanctuary at will are spelled out.

If he does, he risks the penalty which befell Nadav and Avihu. Therefore we infer that the "strange fire which they brought before God which He had not commanded them" (Lev. 10:1) was linked to their entry into the Sanctuary at an improper time, in effect making improper use of the House of God.

As the text continues, the importance of precise Sanctuary rituals becomes even clearer. Indeed, on the Day of Forgiveness (Yom Kippur), it is crucial for the right person to be in the right place at the right time; after all, the fundamental forgiveness of Yom Kippur is dependent upon the High Priest's entry into the Holy of Holies on the 10th day of Tishrei.

By connecting the Yom Kippur ritual with the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, it becomes even clearer that their sin was the commission of a superfluous and therefore unordained act of divine service.

In order to understand the biblical perspective, we must remember that prior to the dedication of the Sanctuary, there was nothing wrong with building an altar, bringing fire, or bringing a sacrifice whenever and wherever one chose. Throughout the Book of Genesis, we see how Abraham, Isaac and Jacob brought sacrifices and built altars as the spirit moved them. These spontaneous acts of worship are called bamot.

But after the Exodus, the people of Israel begins to take on a new identity, and experiences a transition from the looseness of the extended family to the structure of a nation. A nation requires a central rallying point. It is to this end that the Almighty commanded the construction of the Sanctuary. There is to be no more building of altars hither and yon. The families and tribes have merged into a nation, and that nation must redirect its religious efforts towards one unifying structure.

Israel has entered a new stage in its history. The spontaneous sacrifices of the patriarchs are over. What was appropriate for them is no longer appropriate for Nadav and Avihu. Not even Aaron the High Priest, with his access to awesome spiritual heights, has the right to step beyond strictly defined boundaries of service. The highest priority has now become national - not individual - service, and so any movement against centralization must be swiftly condemned.

In his commentary on Moses' final charge to Israel, usually translated: "Remember the days of old, ponder the years of each generation" (Deut. 32:7), Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch translates the word shnot as changes, suggesting that we must understand the changes of each generation, and act accordingly. We have to probe each age, discovering the unique features and special demands of that period. This was something Nadav and Avihu neglected to do, somehow believing that the realities of the past would remain the realities of the present and future.

Nadav and Avihu, fine religious Jews, were guilty of not understanding that the world had moved

on. But they have good company. Apparently a good number of Jews in the world today are not yet aware of the central importance of Israel. Their continued presence in New York, London and Paris seems to say they think it's possible to be a good Jew without intending to return to the Holy Land. © 1994 *Ohr Torah Institutions and Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI YAAKOV HABER

Thought for the Week

In this week's parsha, we find the Jews journeying in the desert. They have not yet developed a national character—nor do they have a country. But for now they are travelling from one country, Egypt, to another, Canaan, and being warned severely against emulating the national character of either. The Jews are expected to develop a national character from the Torah, and then live by it in their own country, Eretz Yisrael. "After the doings of the land of Egypt, where you lived, you shall not do, and after the doings of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you, you shall not do" (Lev. 18:3). Rashi asks: why is it necessary to mention Egypt? Why not just say: "Don't do such-and-such misdeeds"? He gives the answer: Because Egypt was the most immoral, depraved country in the world. Similarly, he asks, why mention Canaan? Because, he answers again, the seven nations inhabiting Canaan were even more immoral and depraved than the Egyptians.

So the Jews had a tremendous job on their hands. Not only were they supposed to rise above the moral level of the Egyptians and the Canaanite nations (which might not be too difficult), but they were supposed to rise above the moral level of EVERY nation on Earth, "to be a light unto the nations"! It seems they were starting off at quite a handicap, considering where they were coming from and where they were going. So if G-d wanted them to become so great, why didn't he supply them with a more conducive atmosphere to holiness instead of from the bad to the worse?

An answer to this problem can perhaps be found in the cabbalistic concept of "klipa". Like all cabbalistic concepts, it is rather deep, and I only want to touch on it. Literally, "klipa" means "shell", such as the shell of a peanut or the peel of an orange. In more mystical terms, it refers to an outer, mundane, covering, which protects something holy within. The Ari (the famous sixteenth century cabbalist) writes that it is not by chance that oranges with thicker peels usually have sweeter contents.

The Ari also makes a connection between dust and klipa. In the Torah we read: "And the L-rd G-d formed man from the dust of the earth" (Gen. 2:7). We can think of the dust as a klipa for the neshama (soul) within. The Ari writes that the purpose of life is to

animate the dust. The dust, in turn, protects the neshama.

It is not surprising that it is so difficult to get up in the morning. The neshama having left the body during sleep in its dust form, it then wants to return to the body, but the dust wants to remain in its inanimate state. That is why there is such merit in attending morning minyan—because it is not easy!

After every Shemone Esrei we say: "Let my soul be as dust to everyone." Why, we may ask, if the purpose of life is to animate the dust, do we want to be like dust to others? The answer, says the Sfas Emes, is that the dust is here functioning to protect the neshama within. (We are praying to G-d that we should not be oversensitive to the insult and ridicule of others. In this respect being as inanimate as dust is of benefit!) This shows the positive role of a klipa: to protect its holy contents.

We can now understand the relationship of the Egyptians and Canaanites to the Jews: as a klipa. In this sense, having them as neighbors could actually aid the Jews in their spiritual progress.

All too often, in our striving for spiritual development, we may sense a hostile environment. If this happens you should think of it as a klipa which protects you. You should remember that the thicker the peel, the sweeter the orange. © 1987 *Rabbi Y. Haber*

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Home Rule

We have discussed the concept of chukim on numerous occasions in these transmissions. Chukim are laws that have no rational explanation. They are directives from the Almighty, and their observance is testimony to our constant and unconditional commitment to His every desire.

That is why it is difficult to understand the juxtaposition of two verses mentioning chukim. "Do not perform the practices of Egypt where you have dwelled or the practices of Canaan where you are going and in their chukim (decrees) do not follow. (However,) My laws and chukim (decrees) you shall follow" (Leviticus 18:3-4).

Chukim are hard enough to follow as Jews. So why would anyone follow irrational and unexplainable customs and decrees that are meted by gentiles? Jews who find themselves driven by rationale and reasoning often scoff at the complexities of decrees that transcend the human mind surely would not fall prey as to follow blindly the strange whims of idol-worshippers or cults. Or would they?

As a student in the Philadelphia Yeshiva, I heard a story that was probably as apocryphal as it was amusing:

An eighteen-year old student was travelling by train from Philadelphia to Harrisburg. The young man sported a beard, wore a long dark coat and a large

wide-brimmed black hat. After placing his bags over his seat, he sat down next to a well-groomed businessman who looked at him scornfully. For the first twenty minutes of the trip, the secular gentleman kept eyeing the student as if he wanted to tell him something.

Then he could no longer contain himself.

With passion in his voice the man began to shout, "You know I'm sick and tired of Jews who think they are still in the Middle Ages! You are a disgrace! I'm Jewish, too. I even speak Yiddish. But do I wear a black coat? Do I let my beard grow? Must I wear an oversized hat? No! Why do you wear those clothes? Why do you wear that beard? Why do you need that hat? It's time you woke up and joined the modern world - the world of America!"

The startled student looked at his accuser quizzically. In a perfect Pennsylvanian accent, he began to speak.

"Jewish? " he queried. "Excuse me, sir, I'm Amish, and I'm on my way back home from a visit with relatives in Philadelphia. I am sorry if I offended you with my style of dress, but this is part of our heritage and culture. It was passed to us from our families in Europe to our families here in Lancaster. I am sorry if I have offended you."

The businessman's face turned ashen. "I'm awfully sorry," he whimpered, "I truly did not mean what I said. In fact, I think it is wonderful that you maintain your heritage, culture, and tradition with such enthusiasm. It shows courage, fortitude, and commitment. Please forgive me. I was truly insensitive.

Suddenly a wide smile broke across the young man's face. In perfect Yiddish he asked the reeling businessman one simple question.

"For the gentile it's wonderful but for the Jew it's a disgrace?"

Sadly, mitzvos that are difficult to understand often discourage Jews who have not encountered a total Torah-experience. Those mitzvos become the scapegoat for their lack of adherence of even simple and very understandable commands. Yet, many of those same intellectuals struggle to understand the culture, customs, and unexplainable rituals of both the societies they live in and, in many instances distant cultures. While the misplaced sensitivity is undoubtedly due to the inherent sensitivities that Jews have for all humans, there must be a balance.

I have met scholars who studied the anthropologic and sociological nuances of Zulu tribes but never delved more than Talmud-Torah level study of their own heritage. One can study the sartorial Chukim with awe and admiration if they sit on top of a gentile's head, yet he would never give thought to that anomaly were it protecting a skull adorned with a beard and payos. Thousands of unaffiliated college youth would buy tapes of monotonous Gregorian chants, but shudder when approached to enter the halls of a

Yeshiva just to hear the melodious sound of "vas zugt Rava, vas zugt Abaye? (What do the Talmudic scholars say?)" The Torah tells us to stay clear of the actions of the Egyptians no-matter how politically correct that may be. There are no better chukim to try to understand than those that come from your very own home. © 1997 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & Project Genesis, Inc.

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Sinai Adler, "Meretz" Kollel,
Mevaseret Yerushalayim

“**A**nd G-d spoke to Moshe, after the death of Aharon's two sons, when they approached G-d and died" [Vayikra 16:1]. It is simplest to assume that the next verse explains why they died. "And G-d said to Moshe, speak to your brother Aharon, and let him not come at all times to the holy place, inside the curtains, above the cover of the Holy Ark, and he will not die. For I will appear on the cover in a cloud." [16:2].

The warning, "For I will appear ... in a cloud," is not to be interpreted as the Tzedukim did, to bring a cloud of incense when entering. Rather, "the incense should be put on the flame, before G-d" [16:13]. The cloud must be created in the holy area itself. This can be compared to burning parts of a sacrifice, and to pouring the ritual wine and water on the Altar. In the same way, the incense should be put on the flame, which is the equivalent of the Altar (from which the flaming coals were taken), inside the holy area and not outside of it. This is the essence of the service expected of us - to sanctify the physical pleasures of the world before G-d. However, Aharon's sons did not do this. "And Nadav and Avihu, Aharon's sons, each took his pan and placed fire in it, and they added incense. And they offered before G-d an alien fire, which He had not commanded them to do." [Vayikra 10:1]. They placed the incense on the flame outside and only afterwards approached with it to G-d. This was an alien flame, not in accordance with G-d's command.

In spite of this, it is written in the Talmud, "And I will meet Bnei Yisrael there, and I will be sanctified by my glory" [Shemot 29:43]. Do not read this as by my glory, but as if to say I will be sanctified by those who honor me ... When Aharon's sons died, Moshe said to him: My brother Aharon, your sons died only to sanctify G-d's name." [Zevachim 115b]. Rabbi Chiya adds in the name of Rabbi Yochanan, "You are awesome from your Temple" [Tehillim 68:36]. Do not read this as 'from your Temple,' but as if to say from those who are holy to you. When G-d is strict with those who are holy, He is feared and elevated, and He is praised." Rashi explains that the name for G-d, Elokim, refers to the trait of judgement. When this is revealed, especially with respect to righteous people, showing that nobody

is favored in judgement, G-d is seen to be awesome, and he is thus sanctified in everybody's eyes.

The terrible tragedy that befell our nation fifty years ago was an awesome revelation of the trait of judgement. The judgement of the Almighty not only effected the simple people but also harmed the most righteous and holiest people. The above verse, "I will be sanctified through those close to me," refers to them also. And when the Almighty is strict with the righteous people, He is feared, and elevated, and His praise is revealed. Anybody who cannot understand all of this is answered by the words of Yeshayahu, "Just as the heavens are high above the earth, so are my ways high above your ways, and my thoughts are high above yours" [55:9]. © 2000 Zomet Institute

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

This week's parsha begins with the sad reminder of the death of Aharon's two sons on the day of their installation as priests in the Mishkan/Tabernacle. It is not easy to recover and return to normal human life after great disappointments, perceived failures and personal tragedies. Yet, we all know that such events are almost unavoidable during one's lifetime. The Torah therefore uses this personal tragedy of Aharon and his family as an example, a paradigm, for dealing with the sad and disappointing times of life. Life must go on. But it will never be the same. But Judaism does not allow the individual to wallow in self-pity or to withdraw from the fray of living productively. That is perhaps implicit in the message that God delivers to Aharon telling him not to enter the Mishkan/Tabernacle under the influence of alcohol. This command is not just a "dry" (pun intended) matter of halacha and technical law. It is a warning sign that one is not allowed to drown one's sorrows, so to speak. It teaches us that Godly service requires tenacity, discipline and sobriety. And that Godly service remains, after all of life's experiences and vagaries, the prime purpose of human existence and certainly of Jewish living.

The tendency in our world society to gloss over reality, to fantasize, to always seek new forms of leisure and escape, legal or illicit, has made it much more difficult for modern humans to deal with tragic events and hard setbacks. A society of substance abusers and thrill seekers is not only a jaded group, it is a doomed group. There are always moments in life when one is impelled somehow to escape from reality and to look for solace outside of our normal routine. But these are the rare and exceptional moments in our lives. They should never set the pattern for normative living or everyday behavior. Ultimately, all solace is from God. In the words of the Rebbe of Kotzk, "Only He Who can inflict such discomfort upon humans can effectively bring healing solace to them." Therefore, Aharon's very obedience to God's law and his

resumption of his role as being the leader of Israel in Godly service in the Mishkan/Tabernacle becomes the greatest source of comfort and solace to him and his family.

Public mourning over personal tragedy by the kohanim, the priests of Israel, was restricted by the Torah. The kohanim were to be the symbol of strength and fortitude, of healing and solace, of serenity and peace. Because of this unique role of spiritual leadership, the personal pain of the kohen was to be diffused and shared by all of Israel, but the kohen himself was required to be stoic and strong in his outward behavior and appearance and in his service to God and the people of Israel. Hard as this task may appear to be on its surface, it eventually brought comfort and strength to the inwardly mourning kohen himself and through him to the entire Jewish society that he served.

Best wishes for the balance of Pesach and for a healthy and happy summer. © 2003 by Rabbi B. Wein

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah presents the Jewish nation in a unique manner. In his last words of prophecy the prophet Amos addresses the Jewish people and describes them in most peculiar words. Amos says in the name of Hashem, "Aren't you likened to the Kushites, to be My people?" Who are the Kushites and in what way are the Jewish people compared to them? Chazal in the Yalkut Shimoni explain that the term Kushites refers to the Ethiopian community whose skin color is distinctly noticeable amongst all other nations. This physical trait renders it virtually impossible for the Kushites to intermingle with other nations and lose their national identity. Chazal continue that in this same manner Hashem regards the Jewish people a distinct and significant nation which rises above all other nations. The moral and ethical code of the Jewish people renders it an elevated and distinct identity and inhibits it from intermingling with the nations of the world. The dramatic contrast in skin color of the Ethiopians serves as an analogy to the contrast between the ethical behavior of the Jewish people and other nations.

The prophet continues and reminds the Jewish people that it is their distinct ethical conduct which renders them Hashem's chosen people. After likening the Jewish people to the Kushites, Amos concludes his analogy with the profound words "to be Mine." As the Metzudos Dovid (ad loc.) understands, we were established as Hashem's people because of our distinguished ethical conduct, and will remain His special nation as long as we maintain our elevated ethical standards. The prophet then draws our attention to our earliest origins and says, "Didn't Hashem bring you up from the land of Egypt?" The

Malbim explains that these words refer to the distinguished qualities of the Jewish people in whose merit they were liberated from Egypt.

Although they lived amongst the Egyptians for two hundred years in a corrupt and immoral environment, the Jewish people remained a distinct and distinguished entity. Their moral code of dress and speech reflected their pure attitudes upon life and rendered it virtually impossible for them to intermingle with the Egyptians. For the most part, the Jewish people's values were not polluted or distorted and even under such adverse conditions they remained a distinguished and elevated people.

The prophet concludes that in this same merit we will finally be redeemed from our extended painful exile. Amos says, "On that day I will erect the kingdom of David.... so that you, upon whom My name rests, will inherit Edom and all nations." Our identity as Hashem's people will play a significant role in our final redemption. The Jewish people will inherit their archenemy Edom because Hashem's name rests upon us. Our distinguished standards of morality truly identify us as His people and in their merit we will finally be liberated from the nations and removed from their corrupt influence and environment.

This special lesson reflects this week's sidra of K'doshim, with the highest call for spiritual elevation found in the entire Torah. We are commanded with the mitzva of K'doshim, as the Torah states, "Be holy for I, Hashem, am Holy." (Vayikra 19:2) The Ramban (ad loc.) shares with us his classic insight into this mitzva. "Be holy," says the Ramban, refers to our obligation of introducing sanctity and spirituality into every dimension of our life. Even our physical and mundane activities should be performed for the sake of Hashem. We are forbidden from excessively indulging in worldly pleasures and are expected to curb our passions and limit our pleasures to productive and accomplishing ones. Morality and spirituality should encompass our entire being and our every action should be directed towards the service of Hashem.

This philosophy is diametrically opposed to that of the nations of the world. To them physical pleasure and enjoyment have no restrictions or limitations, and religion and morality do not apply to their passions and desires. Our standards of morality are truly unique and it is they which elevate us and distinguish us amongst the nations of the world.

Our sidra concludes with this same message and says, "And you shall be holy unto Me for I am holy and I have separated you from the nations to be Mine."

As stated above, we merit to be Hashem's people specifically because of our holiness. We are truly separated from the nations of the world through our elevated moral and ethical standards. It is this distinguished level which establishes us as His people and it is through these elevated standards that we will

soon merit our final redemption and be privileged to permanently dwell in the presence of Hashem. © 1996 by Rabbi D. Siegel and Project Genesis, Inc.

RABBI ZEV S. ITZKOWITZ

A Byte of Torah

“If any Israelite ritually-slaughters an ox, sheep or goat whether inside or outside of the camp, and he doesn't bring it to the Tent of Meeting, to offer it as an offering to Hashem before His sanctuary, that person is considered to be a murderer... They shall be offered [instead] as peace-offerings... They shall stop sacrificing to the he-goats that continue to tempt them... (Leviticus 17:3-5,7)

There are two possible ways to understand this section. One way, is to simply think that an offering could only be made in the Tabernacle, and nowhere else. Alternatively, in the desert, if a person wanted to eat meat, he must first bring the animal as a peace-offering and only then could he eat from its meat (Chullin 16b). According to this latter interpretation, what is the significance for a person to first bring the animal before Hashem in order to eat it?

Every animal sacrificed away from the Tent of Meeting, was as if it was being "sacrificed to the he-goats". This image is used to contrast the nature of animals, who run uncontrolled and wild in the desert, to the Sanctuary of Hashem. Man can live as a wild animal or he can live in Hashem's domain. A person living in the realm of animals, can look at the animals, see their 'free', unfettered and irresponsible life, and desire to imitate it. By lusting after it and claiming freedom for himself from the moral laws of Hashem, he eventually turns himself away from his humanity. His offering, which is to represent himself, thus shows that his real goal is the 'animalistic wildness of the desert'. Or, a person can strive to live in the realm of Hashem. In this case, to prepare himself to eat, he must first subject himself and the animal to Hashem's domain. He, thus, raises the level of his animalistic activity, and can come closer to Hashem. (R. Hirsch).

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