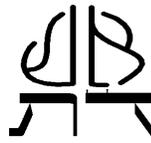


Toras



Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Those who seek reasons for Jewish ritual (ta'amei ha-mitzvot) by and large view such observances as a conduit to better feel the presence of God. But ritual can also have an alternative goal - to teach ethical lessons in accordance with God's will.

A good example is the laws of family purity found in this week's reading (Leviticus Chapter 15) which can be viewed as teaching the Torah ethics of love. The laws include immersion in a mikveh (a natural pool of water) which permits husband and wife to re-engage in sexual relations. This can be seen as a tool through which couples can learn basic lessons about love.

On its simplest level, water is associated with birth. Consider the following: the world begins as God hovers over the face of the waters. (Genesis 1:2) We become a people as we march through the split sea. (Exodus Ch. 14) We enter Israel as a Jewish people, after crossing the Jordan River. (Joshua Ch. 4) Bearing in mind that marriages too often become monotonous and even boring, can it be argued that immersion is an attempt to inspire husband and wife to rekindle their love-as if it was reborn?

No wonder, water in the Bible, is often associated with the exciting onset of love. Yitzhak's (Isaac) wife, Rivka (Rebecca) is found at the well. (Genesis Ch. 24) Yaakov (Jacob) meets Rachel as flocks gather around the water. (Genesis Ch. 29) Moshe (Moses) comes in contact with his wife to be, Zipporah, after saving her and her siblings at the river. (Exodus Ch. 2) From this perspective, immersion may be understood as an attempt to mystically bring husband and wife back to those Biblical moments suffused with beautiful romance. The moments surrounding mikvah should evoke memories of the first natural bodies of water mentioned in the Torah—those in Paradise, in the Garden of Eden. (Genesis 2:10-14)

Not coincidentally, water and love have much in common. Without water, one cannot live. Without love, life is virtually impossible.

But, as my dear friend Dr. Bob Grieff pointed out, water, like love, can be fleeting. As water can slip through one's fingers, so can love, if not nurtured, easily slip away.

Ritual requires meticulous Halakhic observance; but this external observance should be a manifestation of a deep internal message. In the case of mikvah, the immersion can remind us that relationships must be nurtured, and that each and every day couples ought strive to love each other more deeply than yesterday - as if their love is born anew. © 2004 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“Rabbi Simlai said, 'Just as the formation of man was after every animal and fowl during creation, so were the laws pertaining to him explained after the laws of animal and fowl'" (Rashi on Vayikra 12:2, quoting Vayikra Rabbah 14:1). In last week's Parasha we were taught which animals were kosher and which were not, and their tumah (ritual impurity) status, while this week we learn about the tumah status of certain people at certain times. Although one might think that since a person is more important than an animal his law details would precede those of an animal, Rashi brings Rabbi Simlai's words to explain why this is not so. Numerous questions have been asked on Rabbi Simlai's statement, with various approaches given by different commentators on Rashi (see, for example, Sifsay Chachamim).

First of all, why should the order of creation impact the order of the laws being taught? The Talmud (Sanhedrin 38a) brings several reasons why animals were created first (i.e. so that no heretic can claim that man was G-d's partner in creation, so that if one becomes haughty he can be reminded that even the mosquito was created before him, so that he can observe the Sabbath right away- as he was created right before Shabbos, and so that everything should be prepared and ready for him). These reasons do not apply to the order of the laws- only to the order of creation- so why does Rabbi Simlai equate the two?

Additionally, the laws are not really taught according to the order of creation. Birds were created before land animals, yet non-kosher birds aren't listed until after we are taught which animals are kosher and which aren't. Similarly, the requirements for a kosher fish are listed after those for a kosher animal- even though fish (and birds) were created on the fifth day and animals on the sixth (the same day as man). The first law of tumah taught that applies to a person (rather than

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an animal) is that of a new mother, despite the simple reading of the text indicating that man was created first. If Rabbi Simlai's point was that the laws were taught in the order of creation, it would seem that the order wasn't being followed anyway. If so, why weren't the laws of man taught prior to those of the animal kingdom?

In one of the Tehillim we say everyday as part of Pesukay d'Zimra (158), King David describes how all of creation sings praises to G-d. In verse 10 he mentions the animals, followed in verse 11 by human nobility. In Beraishis Rabbah (8:1) we find a parallel midrash to the one Rashi quotes: "Rabbi Simlai says, 'Just as his (man's) praise was not until after the animals and birds, so too his creation was not until after the animals and birds.'" Obviously creation must come prior to the created saying praises, so Rabbi Simlai is not just giving cause and effect (or he would have said that just as man's creation was after the animals so was his praise listed after that of the animals). Instead, he is comparing the placement in creation to the placement in the order of praises- and therefore (by extension) also to the placement of the teaching of the laws.

Both midrashim (in Vayikra Rabbah and Beraishis Rabbah) have a similar flow. There is a discussion about whether there is an earlier (hidden) reference to man in the creation story (either the "spirit of G-d" that hovered or the "soul of the living thing" possibly referring to the human soul), with the implication being that if one's spiritual nature is primary he can be said to have been created before the animals (as his soul is more prevalent), while if his animalistic behaviors are primary then he is said to have been created even after the mosquito. This is followed by Rabbi Shmuel (in B.R.) or Rabbi Yochanan (in V.R.) saying that even his praise is mentioned after the praise given by the animal kingdom. In other words, in both cases it is an insult that the animals are first. On this,

Rabbi Simlai says that the order is the same by creation, praises and laws. We see that in Sanhedrin there are some opinions that man was created last precisely because he is more significant. It is possible that Rabbi Simlai is (also) arguing with the statement(s) that precede him. Rather than man and animal being listed in order of their importance (hence a putdown to man), Rabbi Simlai contends that the significance of what is being described is listed in ascending order.

However, rather than indicating that man is listed last because he is more important, Rabbi Simlai is referring to the specific process being discussed. The creation of man (not just a more developed "animal" but the combination of an animal-like body infused with a divine soul) is more significant than the creation of a living animal. It is the "formation" of man that is more noteworthy, not man himself. As a proof-text to this Rabbi Simlai (in B.R.) compares the verses of the formation of animals ("and G-d said let the water bring forth," "and G-d said let the land bring out," where the created comes only from the physical) to the verse by the formation of man ("and G-d said let us make man," i.e. both the spiritual and physical worlds exist in man).

Similarly, the praise of man is more significant; not because man is more significant, but either because his having free will gives more meaning to the praises he chooses to give, or (if the praise is his mere existence, just as it is the existence of the other creations that is their praise) being a greater accomplishment is the greater praise. Either way, it is the kind of praise that is more significant, not the creature doing the praising. This is what Rabbi Simlai means when he compares the formation of man after that of the animals to mankind's praise being listed after that of the animal kingdom- not the comparison of man to animal, but of the type of creation and the type of praise of each.

We can say the same thing about the types of laws that apply to man and animal. Animals are either kosher or not kosher. The same (species) of animal is always going to remain kosher or non-kosher. A pig can never be kosher, no matter how far it sticks its feet out. It is rather easy to grasp the laws regarding animals when it's either black or white. With man, however, the same person can sometimes be tamay and sometimes tahor (spiritually pure). These laws are more complicated, and not as easy to categorize. A higher level of study is needed to master them, and the mere fact that one cannot always be categorized as either "tamay" or "tahor" demands a more than cursory look at the particular situation. When teaching the laws of impurity, the Torah once again followed the formula of listing the less developed, the less complex, before the more developed. "Just as the formation of man was (listed) after that of the animals, so were his laws." Not because man is more significant (although he obviously is), but because his formation and the laws that apply to him are.

If Rabbi Simlai is not merely comparing the order of creation to the order the laws were taught, but comparing the significance of each creation to the significance or complexity of each set of the laws, we can understand why it is irrelevant that the laws vis-à-vis kosher birds, fish and animals do not follow the order of creation (or that laws pertaining to a women were taught first). All birds, fish and animals are either kosher or not kosher, while humans (men and women) are more complex, and may not have the same status from one minute to the next.

Let us take advantage of the opportunity that these days of Sefira afford us, moving up from any levels of tumah towards obtaining kedusha and tahara (holiness and purity). © 2004 Rabbi D. Kramer

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA SICHA OF HARAV AHARON LICHTENSTEIN SHLIT"A

Adapted by Dov Karoll

Yom Ha-atzma'ut is integrated into the calendrical cycle of the Jewish people and of the State of Israel. Accordingly, our expectations for this day can be seen in comparison with other festivals, relative especially to Pesach, the holiday most connected to the history of the Jewish people. Therefore, we must examine three levels of our observance of festivals, and see how they apply to Yom Ha-atzma'ut.

In one sense, we must observe each festival both in accordance with its nature, and in accordance with our current situation. Clearly, there are specific halakhic and philosophical aspects that remain constant. Nonetheless, there is an aspect that relates to the circumstances which serve as the context for the festival. In the Haggada, we proclaim that "In every generation there are those who rise up against us, and God saves us from them." Even when one drinks the same four cups, eats the same matzot, and reads the same Haggada, one should relate, at some level, to the salvation and dangers that exist in that specific year, in that generation, in the particular historical context in which one finds oneself. This is one aspect: the contemporary, the existential, celebrating in light of one's current situation.

On the opposite extreme, we do not look at our current situation, but rather at the events of the past, at the beginning of the journey, the roots of the process. We examine the source of the holiday's significance and message.

Chazal have taught us through the contents of the Haggada that one must relate to two historical aspects of the holiday. On the one hand, there is the original situation of servitude, suffering, and hardship, and on the other hand, there followed redemption, salvation and the upliftment. The Mishna (Pesachim 116b) teaches that "In every generation one must see

himself as if he has gone out of Egypt." But in order to experience the salvation from Egypt, one must first feel the experience of the servitude and the suffering that our forefathers experienced, to internalize the notion that "Had God not taken us out of Egypt, we and our children would still be slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt" (Haggada). One must imagine—and it is not easy—that one is enslaved in Egypt, with the mortar and the bricks. Once one has done that, striking the proper balance between the "matza aspect" and the "maror aspect" of the seder night, having experienced some of the suffering, one can properly appreciate the magnitude of the Divine salvation.

The Rambam's formulation of this law (in his Haggada at the end of Hilkhos Chametz u-matza) sharpens this aspect even more. Unlike the usual version, in which each person must "see himself as if he went out of Egypt," the Rambam writes that each person must "present himself as if he is currently leaving Egypt." One is not to re-tell an old memory from previous years, but rather re-experience the exodus itself, as if one is currently caught up in the tension and shock of the original experience itself.

I believe there is also a third aspect to our observance of the festivals. The opening verses of Parashat Bechukotai (Vayikra 26:3-13) describe a period that stands in stark contrast to the two aspects of which we just spoke. The crisis the people faced in Egypt, like the period of the birth of the State of Israel, was a tempestuous, dramatic period, characterized by challenges as well as by bravery and courage on the part of the people to overcome those challenges. Our time, like many periods of Jewish history, has been characterized by challenges and threats, and we are constantly called upon to gird our loins to take on the challenges that face us.

The verses at the beginning of Bechukotai, on the other hand, describe a world devoid of all these challenges, a pastoral, peaceful existence. Both the reality described and the description itself are pastoral. This notion appears in several places in the Prophets as the idealization of "Each person under his own vine and under his own fig tree" (Melakhim I 5:5, Mikha 4:4). I ask myself: in the midst of such a prosperous period as described in these verses, how would one observe the holidays? Would one emphasize only the original exodus from Egypt, or would the current tranquility become part of what a person is meant to experience and to feel?

Since the Torah presents this pastoral scene as a reward for "follow[ing] My laws and faithfully observ[ing] My commandments" (26:3), apparently this scenario is desirable. Clearly, this parasha does not speak of spiritual stagnation and desiccation; spiritual growth and vitality are the order of the day in such a situation as well. Rather, the calm is promised with regard to the material aspects of life, relieving the pressure in those areas to allow for greater emphasis

on the spiritual. However, this does not tell us that one should relate to the festivals with less dynamism.

Beyond that, it seems to me that this peaceful, pastoral element should remain a component of the festival experience even during more difficult periods. I do not subscribe to the dream of "normalization" that exists in certain schools of Zionist thought. We have no interest in the Jewish people or the State of Israel becoming just like the other nations. We wish to experience that which has characterized the Jewish people throughout its history, namely, growth and creativity despite the crises and difficult times.

The State of Israel came into being amidst the tempestuous reawakening and revitalization of the Jewish people, and this renewed energy has contributed to its continued existence. However, we yearn for stability and want to feel that our existence here is enduring.

The Torah tells us, "For God's portion is His people" (Devarim 32:9), and the Ramban emphasizes several times in his commentary on the Torah (Bereishit 17:1, 28:12; Vayikra 18:25; Bemidbar 23:23, Devarim 32:7) that this means we are under God's direct supervision. As such, we have no guarantees for ongoing stability if we do not continue to deserve it. Yet we do not strive for precariousness, and we learn from the aforementioned verses that we need not strive for it. Rather, we strive for an element of stability in our existence. Unfortunately, circumstances demand that we constantly fight to maintain this.

This stability and tranquility does not often come to fruition, and is rarely reflected in reality. How many generations experienced "And you shall lie down untroubled by anyone"? Nonetheless, we must not feel that our existence is entirely precarious, but should sense an aspect of permanence and rootedness in our land, in our state, in our daily lives.

The above considerations and feelings should accompany us in all our celebrations of special occasions, but they have special applicability to Yom Ha-atzma'ut, especially in our current situation. On the one hand, we should celebrate Yom Ha-atzma'ut in light of our current situation. On the other hand, we ought to develop a strong experiential connection to our history, along the lines of "In every generation one must see himself as if he has gone out..." In other words, we must grasp the difficulties and suffering we underwent along the winding road of our two thousand years of Exile, as well as the challenges faced here in Israel before the founding of the State. In light of this recognition, we can then appreciate the magnitude of the salvation both on a national level, and in terms of the personal salvation and revivification of millions of individuals, that came about through the establishment of the State.

But it is not physical salvation alone, the deliverance of those who were in peril, for which we are thankful. To apply the model of the exodus from Egypt, we are not speaking exclusively of the first two "phrases

of redemption" from Shemot 6 (verses 6-8), "And I shall set you free..." and "I will deliver you from their bondage." The State also has elements of spiritual salvation and rebuilding, the aspects of redemption epitomized by the latter phrases:

"I will redeem you... and I will take you to be My people, and I will be your God... And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Avraham, Yitzchak and Ya'akov."

In order to appreciate the significance of this salvation, we must comprehend what came before. This is especially difficult for those who were born after the founding of the State. It is hard to imagine what would be if there were no State of Israel, but it demands our attention.

Another point deserves consideration. The State of Israel is a unique country. However, part of what we desire is that there be stability and rootedness in our existence here. We wish that the arrival of each Yom Ha-atzma'ut not be cause for astonishment. We wish for a certain measure of normality, and the ability to celebrate Yom Ha-atzma'ut with confidence of our endurance. While the celebration of Yom Ha-atzma'ut ought to differ from the celebrations of other nations, but it would be nice to have some parallel, in this regard, to Bastille Day in France and to the Fourth of July in America. And this despite the present reality, which does not seem to allow for such thoughts.

What do our enemies say? "A state may have risen, but what is fifty years in the grand historical picture?" They compare our existence to that of the Crusader state, which lasted a few generations and then was uprooted. The entirety of our Jewish soul, of our Israeli soul, of our Torah soul, rebels against this notion. Even when "You lie down" and you are "troubled by someone," we assert that we are set, rooted, firm, in this land. We will not allow anyone to tell us that we are a relic from the past, or a transient movement in the broad historical picture.

Admittedly, viewing Yom Ha-atzma'ut through the perspective of different time periods may be difficult. It is more complex than focusing upon a single scenario. However, I believe that if we wish to appreciate the full significance of the event, both experientially and philosophically, we must take all of this into consideration.

I have spoken about some parallels between Yom Ha-atzma'ut and the holiday of Pesach. Regarding Pesach, Chazal emphasize an additional aspect. The blessing of "Asher ge'alanu," which is pronounced after telling the story of the Exodus from Egypt, opens with thanking God for redeeming us, and for redeeming our forefathers, from Egypt, and concludes by turning to the future, asking that God allow us to celebrate in the redemption. The Talmud Yerushalmi (Berakhot 1:5, as explained by Tosafot, Pesachim 104b, s.v.chutz), in explaining why the blessing contains "barukh" at both its beginning and its

end (while according to the rules of blessings we would expect only one in this case), asserts that this is because the blessing speaks of two different redemptions, one past and one future.

This teaches us that our celebration of the Exodus from Egypt is bound up, intrinsically, with our anticipation for the future redemption. Not only are there different time periods to consider, drawn from the past and inherent in the present, but we must also exhibit yearning and desire toward the future. This is part of the anticipation for the redemption; we are a dreaming and yearning people, with a vision of what will be in the future.

This brings us to another point. I spoke about how difficult it may be for those who have merited to grow up in a time when the State of Israel could be taken for granted, to "See himself as if he had gone out..." It requires more effort, part intellectual and part imaginative, than for someone who comes from abroad. The Gemara (Ketubot 75a) cites a verse, "And of Zion it shall be said, this man and that man [meaning everyone] were born there" (Tehillim 87:5). Noting the repetition of the word "ish," "man," the Gemara explains, "Echad ha-nolad bah, ve-echad ha-metzapeh lir'otah," that the appellation of "born there" applies both to those who were actually born there and to those who yearned to see it. Each of them has a connection to Zion.

In the continuation of the Gemara there, Abbaye says that if one needs to choose between these two, between those in Israel and those who hope to get there, priority is to be given to those born there. He states that one person born in Israel is worth two born in Babylonia. The Gemara then cites the view of Rava, who makes the reverse claim: one person who comes from Babylonia to Israel is worth two who were born there.

What is the nature of this priority? In what way is a person who has come from abroad to be preferred over one who was born in Israel? The answer seems to be clear. Someone who began his life in Israel, was raised on its holiness and with a deep connection to it, views its existence as entirely normal and takes it for granted. Someone who grew up with a different reality, however, yearns to come, dreams of living his life here, and sees Israel more as a vision than as a reality. In one sense, the Gemara says, one who grew up in Israel is preferable, for he is suffused with its existence. On the other hand, the Gemara adds, one who grew up outside Israel and comes to it, has the ability to integrate the yearning and the reality. Though he is not rooted in Israel, he carries with him the yearning and desire for the land.

When we approach this Gemara, we should not view these approaches as mutually exclusive. Each of us should see it as a challenge to integrate these two elements in his consciousness. Even those who were born here should strive for the better aspects of both.

On one hand, those of you who merited to be born here, should be deeply rooted in your existence here. Do not lose sight of the natural and normal existence you have had here, remaining firm and rooted in that existence in Israel. On the other hand, you should feel wonder and yearning in your relationship with this land, and not only because we still lack so much. Even if we lacked nothing, the feeling should still be there.

Those who were born in Israel should appreciate the naturalness and rootedness with which they were raised, recognizing that it is far beyond the reality of previous generations. They also should live with the wonder and the recognition of God's great kindness that is inherent in this existence. At the same time, we should all hope and pray for better days. [*This sicha was delivered at the Yeshiva's Mesibat Yom Ha-atzma'ut, 5762 (2002).*]

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Daf HaShavua

*by Rabbi Alan Lewis,
Wanstead & Woodford Synagogue*

"And G-d spoke to Moses saying: Speak to the children of Israel, saying: a woman who conceives and gives birth to a male child, she will be tamei (impure) for a 7 day period—And on the eighth day (the child's) foreskin shall be circumcised. If she gives birth to a female child she will be tamei (impure) for 2 weeks" (Vayikra 12:1-5).

The obvious question that begs to be asked from these verses is why should there be a difference in the period of impurity of a woman when she gives birth to a boy, as opposed to when she gives birth to a girl? Why is it only 7 days on the birth of a boy and 14 days on the birth of a girl?

A number of the commentaries bring different reasons for this apparent difference. The Ramban says that there is a biological difference between the blood of the birth of a boy to a girl which results in there having to be a difference in the period of impurity between male and female babies.

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch brings a philosophical approach to resolving this difficulty. From the moment a woman conceives to the time when the child is weaned, she is somewhat at the mercy, although divinely inspired, to the whims of nature. Throughout her pregnancy she is not in a position to choose how her pregnancy should proceed. From the growth and welfare of the foetus to how she actually feels during pregnancy it is all orchestrated by Hashem through the powers of nature. Certainly, when it comes to the time of birth a mother is very much dependant on Hashem who, through His instrument of nature, decides when, how and where a child will be born. Even after birth has taken place, a mother's thoughts, emotions and body are totally directed towards her child. It is due to the way Hashem created the nature of this world that for these nine months of gestation and its aftermath a

woman lacks, to a certain extent, freedom of choice. She can't really have any true, major input on her life until birth has occurred. The Torah is telling us that the first major input she has upon her life in the realm of free choice is after 7 days from giving birth to a boy. For it is then that she can willingly bring her child to be circumcised and enter the covenant of Avraham Avinu. It is at this point that we are told that her period of tumah (impurity) ends. For tumah comes about through one's inability to exert one's freedom of choice over the world. Only on the eighth day, after giving birth to a son, can a woman begin to exert power of choice once again upon the world, and it is for this reason that her period of tumah comes to an end.

The Maharal explains that the number 7 symbolises the harmony of nature in creation while the number 8 represents one's ability to go beyond the constrictive realms of nature. It is therefore for this reason that the mitzvah of brit milah is done on the 8th day and why the male child's mother has entered her period of purity on that 8th day. As with so many of our mitzvot we see how a Jew has that unique capacity to release himself from the confines of nature and reach higher levels of sanctity and spirituality through the power of choice that the Torah gives us. © 2004 Produced by the Rabbinical Council of the United Synagogue - London (O) Editor Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, emailed by Rafael Salasnik

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The two Torah portions of Tazria-Metzorah deal with a malady similar to what we know as leprosy - but it is apparent from the text (and especially from the interpretation of our Sages) that the source of the disease is a spiritual rather than a physical imperfection. I believe that the two haftorah portions (the shorter prophetic readings after the Torah portion are concluded) - or more correctly the unread prophetic passage which serves as the necessary segue connecting the two haftorah portions - provide a fascinating insight into what that spiritual imperfection might be; moreover, both prophetic readings teach all subsequent generations what Israeli leadership requires in order for our nation to succeed.

The haftorah (prophetic portion) for Tazria is taken from the second book of Kings; it deals with the miraculous way in which Elisha, prophet of the Lord, succeeded in curing the leprosy of Naaman, powerful general of the armies of Aram. However, the incident surrounding Naaman's cure is the subject of the fifth chapter; the haftorah begins strangely enough with the concluding three verses of the previous chapter, which tell how Elisha is able to alleviate the hunger of one hundred people with a comparatively small amount of food. This odd introduction seems to have nothing to do with the subsequent story of Naaman or the disease

which links the incident in the book of Kings to our Torah reading.

As the story unfolds, we learn that Naaman was "general of the armies of the King of Aram, a great man before his master... a courageous soldier and - a leper" (5:1). A captive Israeli maiden suggests to Naaman's wife that her husband seek a cure from Elisha, the prophet man-of-G-d of Israel. After an initial request, "Elisha sends to him (Naaman) a messenger, who says 'Go and bathe (immerse yourself) seven times in the Jordan River; your flesh will then return you and shall be purified'" (4:11)

After the words of the prophet are proven to be efficacious, a most grateful Naaman exclaims: "Behold, now I know that there is no G-d anywhere in the world except in Israel; and now (Naaman requests of Elisha) please accept a gift from your servant" (5:15). Elisha the man of G-d, refuses, upon an oath to G-d, to accept anything; Naaman is so moved by what has transpired that he asks for a small parcel of land in which he can build an altar and offer sacrifices to the one true G-d of Israel and the world. And so concludes the haftorah for the Torah reading of Tazria.

The following haftorah for Metzorah continues with chapter seven of the second Book of Kings (note that chapter 6 is deleted from the public prophetic readings), and opens with a tale of four lepers outside the gate of the city. There is apparently a bitter war going on between Israel and Aram - as well as rampant hunger in Israel so acute that mothers are eating their own children. As a result of Elisha's intervention, the famine ends; the four lepers also bear the happy tidings that the Aramean encampment has miraculously been evacuated, the Aramean Army has defected, and Israel emerges victorious. This prophetic reading concludes by describing the death of the chief courtier of the King of Israel; he is trampled by the hordes of Israelites rushing to pillage the Aramean encampment. Apparently he was punished for having cynically questioned Elisha's prophecy concerning the end of the famine and the success of Israel.

A number of startling questions emerge as we read these haftorahas (prophetic portions). The first reading concluded with a grateful Aramean general convinced that the G-d of Israel is the only true G-d of the world. What has caused him, only one chapter later in the second Book of Kings, to wage war against the very people who were responsible for the cure of his leprosy? And of what relevance to the subject of leprosy are the opening story of Elisha's feeding of the poor and the concluding story of the trampling to death of the Israel courtier?

I believe that we will discover the clue to our understanding by reading the end of the fifth as well as the sixth chapter of the second Book of Kings (deleted from the public haftorah readings, which include only the beginnings of chapters five and seven), and by

taking note of Rashi's identification of the four lepers of good tidings as Gehazi and his three sons (7:3).

Who was Gehazi? The second book of Kings records (in the passage not publicly read) that after Elisha refused to accept any gift from Naaman for having effectuated his cure, Gehazi "the lad (go-fer) of Elisha man-of-G)d" ran after the Aramean General; claiming to have been sent by his master Elisha, he requests a Kikar of silver and two changes of clothes for two prophets-in-training (Elisha's kollel, as it were). Naaman readily complies, generously giving two Kikars of silver in addition to the outfits of clothes. When Elisha discovers what his factotum has done, he punishes him: "The leprosy of Naaman shall cling to you and to your children forever" (Kings II 5:27). The next thing we learn is that Israel is suffering a grievous famine and is under siege by the armies of Aram. Apparently Naaman - as well as G-d - have turned against Israel. What caused the sudden disaffection? Clearly it was the greed of Gehazi for two Kikars of silver, Elisha's storming sanctification of G-d's Name has been turned into a devastating desecration of G-d's Name! Naaman had certainly been impressed with Elisha's ability to cure him - but he had known of similar acts bordering on sorcery which emanated from the pagan world. What had really impressed the General of the armies of Aram was that Elisha was a true man-of-G-d, an individual who did what he did purely for the sake of heaven with no ulterior motive for personal gain. At that point Naaman decided that he only desired to give sacrifices to the G-d of Israel. But when Gehazi entered the scene with his greedy desire for some silver and clothing, Naaman understandably became disillusioned. He now sees Elisha as just another sorcerer - and if so, he is even ready to wage another war against his former enemy.

The second message of these Prophetic Readings is the necessity of the people of Israel - and especially the leaders of Israel - to believe in the future of the covenantal nation, to have faith that Israel will ultimately be saved by G-d. The courtier of the King cynically questioned Israel's deliverance, and he therefore deserved to die.

Perhaps both of these messages are inextricably bound together. Only when we have completely selfless leaders - who give of themselves purely for the sake of Heaven and Nation without the expectation of even a seintilla of personal gain - do we have the right to expect that G-d will intercede on their (and our) behalf. Such a leader was Elisha, prophetic man-of-G-d, in the opening verses of the haftorah of Tazria. Such a leader proves Elisha to be when he punishes Gehazi for his venal act of greed with the disease of leprosy - apparently a fitting punishment for the sin of inordinate materialistic desire. The courtier should have realized that when Israel is guided by selfless leaders who rise above the blandishments of

bribery and material compensation, G-d will always enable His nation not only to survive but truly to prevail.

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MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

The Torah portion of Tazriya begins with the laws pertaining to a woman who has given birth, but one verse seems out of place in that it is related to the baby himself. "If a woman becomes pregnant and gives birth to a boy, she shall be impure for seven days, corresponding to the days of her impure flow. And on the eighth day, his unclean flesh shall be circumcised. For thirty-three days, she will sit with the blood of purity..." [Vayikra 12:2-4]. Why is circumcision mentioned in this context, how is it related to the ritual impurity of the mother? Sforno offers an explanation: "On the eighth day—by that time, the unclean blood on which the baby existed while in his mother's womb has been used up, and the baby is pure and can enter the holy covenant." Only on the eighth day does the baby become completely severed from his mother, and then he can be sanctified by circumcision.

A similar concept exists with respect to sacrifices. The Torah allows a sacrifice to be brought only eight days after the animal has been born. The wording of the command is similar to what is written in this week's portion with respect to circumcision. "If an ox, a sheep, or a goat is born, let it remain with its mother for seven days, and from the eighth day on it will be accepted as a sacrifice to G-d" [22:27]. The Midrash makes this comparison explicitly. "For man, it is written, 'on the eighth day, his unclean flesh shall be circumcised.' With respect to cattle, it is written, 'from the eighth day on it will be accepted as a sacrifice.'" [Vayikra Rabba 27]. Perhaps this comparison can also lead us to a deeper understanding of the mitzva of circumcision, Brit Mila. Note that the two laws have in common not only the eighth day after birth but also the importance of blood.

Thus, the act of circumcision can be viewed as a type of sacrifice that a man offers from his son's body or his own. "This act is more powerful than a sacrifice, since the sacrifice involves money while circumcision involves an organ which is linked to all the other organs in the body... It is therefore considered as self sacrifice, as if he had offered his own self... Everybody who offers his son to be circumcised can be compared to the High Priest bringing his Mincha sacrifice on the Altar."

[Rabeinu Bechayai, Bereishit 17]. One might still wonder which specific sacrifice is the equivalent of the Brit. Can we really assume that the disgusting "orla" that is removed in the ritual of circumcision is the equivalent of a holy sacrifice?

Evidently the relevant sacrifice is the man himself. One of the basic conditions for bringing a

sacrifice is that the animal must be "tamim," that is whole, without blemish. The first passage about circumcision opens with a similar demand: "I am G-d, go before me and be complete. And I will make a covenant between me and you... This is the covenant that you shall observe between my and you, and between your offspring: every male shall be circumcised." [Bereishit 17:1,10]. Thus, circumcision is a process that is the opposite of a sacrifice. With respect to a regular sacrifice, the object being offered, which must be whole and complete, becomes holy when it is brought to the Altar. In a Brit, on the other hand, the defective body of man becomes "whole" as a result of his action of "sacrifice."

Based on this approach, it is easy to understand various details of the laws of a Brit. For example, note that circumcision takes precedence over laws of Shabbat. One of the reasons given for this is a logical inference. "Shabbat is set aside for the holy rituals (that is, the rituals are very important, in that the sacrifices whose times are set by halacha take precedence over Shabbat—Rashi). It is therefore clear that a circumcision will also take precedence over Shabbat." [Shabbat 132b]. The attempt to derive laws of circumcision as an inference from the laws of sacrifices is very easy to understand when the Brit itself is considered as a special sacrifice in its own right.

OHR SOMAYACH INTERNATIONAL

Why Isn't This Night More Different?

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

In the 1960s, a new form of advertising was discovered and made illegal almost immediately. Madison Avenue realized that flashing one single frame of an advertisement into a movie playing at 24 frames per second left a subliminal message imprinted in the mind of the viewer, a message of which he was totally unaware. Because of its extremely subtlety, the message managed to sneak under the defenses of the consumer and plant itself into his subconscious. And without knowing it, the next time he was shopping, he had this overpowering attraction to buy FidoFeed over his usual brand of dogfood.

If the purpose of the Seder is to recreate the Exodus from Egypt, why isn't the Seder more realistic? We eat a little matza, some not-very-bitter herbs. We recline like princes. We tell over a story. Some have the custom to place a piece of matza on their shoulder and walk around the table, symbolizing the dough that baked flat without leaven on the backs of our forefathers as they left Egypt. Why isn't this night more different than all other nights? Why don't we do things which are more vivid, more realistic?

Why doesn't each town put on a Pesach extravaganza with fireworks and amazing special

effects like a rock band on tour? Or at home, why don't we make the Seder much more realistic? For example, half the guests could come dressed as Jewish slaves and the other half as Egyptian taskmasters. The evening would commence with the "slaves" building a large wall with bricks and mortar. Periodically, the "Egyptian taskmasters" could come along and give them an encouraging thwack with a broom. In the interests of fairness, halfway through the evening the roles would be reversed. And just before midnight, everyone would sit down together (on cushions) and have a nice Pesach meal. Wouldn't we feel much more that we had "left Egypt" after that?

And yet, the Torah, which sees to the very depths of the psyche, mandated very subtle observances to create the reality of coming out of Egypt.

Why?

Over the passed twenty-five years, the American defense budget has spent billions of dollars on a bomber which can fly to its target at very low heights, beneath the level of detection of enemy radar. The construction of the bomber is non-metallic. It is invisible to radar. It was dubbed the "stealth bomber."

The hidden persuasion of an advertisement consisting of a single frame in a film running at 25 frames a second is more powerful than a campaign of celebrity endorsements, billboards and prime-time barrage. Why? Because we can shield ourselves only from that of which we are aware.

The nature of physicality is that it wants to reject spirituality. To sneak spirituality past our physical radar, we must conceal the spiritual like a stealth bomber: A piece of matza, some bitter herbs, telling over a 3,300 year-old story. These are things that look very anodyne and unassuming from the outside. Inside however, they contain tremendous power.

By means of the seemingly subtle experiences of the Seder, the subliminal spiritual message of Pesach sneaks under the defenses of the coarser aspects of our physical make-up and lodges itself in the depths of our souls.

That's why this night isn't more different than all other nights. © 2003 Rabbi Y.A. Sinclair and Ohr Somayach International



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