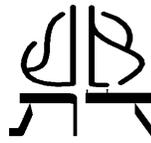


Toras



Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

This week's Torah portion tells us that one type of peace offering (Korban Shlamim) is known as the thanksgiving sacrifice (Korban Todah). (Leviticus 7:12)

Rashi notes that this type of sacrifice was given after experiencing a special miracle. He specifies one who has endured a sea voyage, a trip through the wilderness, a prison stay or a recovery from an illness.

To this day, those who survive difficult situations such as these are obliged to recite the thanksgiving benediction at the Torah (birkat ha-gomel). Jewish law extends the obligation to include those who are saved from any type of peril.

The Ramban's comments in the Book of Exodus (13:16) can shed light on the importance of the thanksgiving sacrifice. For him, God's intervention in the supernatural should give one a sense of God's involvement in the everyday. For example, from the splitting of the sea, an event in which God was so obviously manifest, one should come to recognize the input of God every day in containing the waters within the boundaries of the sea shore. In the words of Nehama Leibowitz, "the unusual deliverances and outstanding miracles are there merely to draw our attention to the miracle of existence."

The timing of the reading of the thanksgiving offering, the Shabbat before Passover, also teaches a significant lesson. After all, on Passover, we thank God for miraculously taking us out of Egypt. The Haggadah comes to its crescendo as we sing Dayenu—which means enough. Some think Dayenu deals with our telling God that we have had enough suffering. In reality, the song says the reverse. We say to God, had you only performed but a fraction of the larger miracle, it would have been enough. Dayenu is the quintessential statement of thanks to God.

The fact that the thanksgiving sacrifice is a type of peace offering is also clear. When giving to God, the human being achieves a level of inner peace. This is because love is not only a function of receiving, but also of giving. How I remember writing to the Rav, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, of blessed memory, upon his return to class after he lost his wife. After listening to his lecture (shiur), I was so taken that I wrote to him expressing my love and admiration. A few days later,

the Rav thanked me, but told me the note was unnecessary. I responded, "Rebbe I wrote the letter for you, but even more important, for myself. I had a need to tell you, 'I love you.'" The Rav nodded and told me that he understood.

If only we would learn the message of the thanksgiving offering—to say the simple words to those who mean the most to us, but whom we often take for granted—words like todah, thank you, to our closest of kin and, of course, to the ultimate source, God Himself.

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RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

When beginning to relate the story of the Exodus from Egypt, the Mishna (Pesachim 10:4) tells us to "start with disgrace and finish with praise." In the Talmud (116a), Shmuel says that the "disgrace" we start with is "we were slaves to Paro (Pharaoh) in Egypt." This would seem to be rather straightforward; we start with the shame of being slaves and end with becoming free. The Rashbatz (author of the Tashbatz), however, in his commentary on the Hagadah, takes a different approach.

"And the disgrace is what is said in the Midrash (Tehillim 10:3): '[G-d said] 'you (the brothers) sold Yosef to be a slave- [I swear] on your lives [that] every year they will read 'we were slaves to Paro.'" And the praise is that just as Yosef went out from prison to rule, so did we go out free. And so will happen in the days of Moshiach, as it says (Micha 7:15) 'as in the days of your going out from Egypt will I show you wonders.' And so too at the end of the Hagadah do we end with praise: 'therefore we are obligated to give thanks and to praise, etc.'"

Although he was forced to flee from Spain to Algiers in 1391- and lost all of his wealth in the process- it would be difficult to say that this caused the Rashbatz to feel that the "disgrace" of exile had not been lifted and could therefore not be Shmuel's intent. Why then did the Rashbatz explain the "disgrace" to be the sale of Yosef into slavery rather than the more obvious "disgrace" of the whole nation being enslaved?

There are other difficulties with the Rashbatz's approach as well. The sages don't limit the causes of the slavery in Egypt to just the one quoted in Midrash Tehillim: The Talmud (Shabbos 10b) says that because Ya'akov showed favoritism towards Yosef by giving him

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a special coat, eventually our ancestors went down to Egypt. In Nedarim (32a) there is a three-way dispute as to why Avraham was punished with his descendants being enslaved in Egypt for so many years; either because he used religious scholars as soldiers (in his war with the kings), because he allowed the king of Sodom keep the captives he had freed rather than trying to bring them closer to G-d, or because he showed a (slight) lack of faith by questioning how he would know that he would receive the land that G-d had promised him. (Interestingly, the latter opinion is that of Shmuel, who says that the "disgrace" we begin with at the Seder is the slavery.) If the "disgrace" refers to the cause of the slavery in Egypt- and not the actual slavery itself- why does the Rashbatz choose just the one "disgrace" over the others?

Additionally, his comparison of Yosef's climb from being in prison to royalty with our being slaves and then being freed seems incongruous. If Yosef had not been sold by the brothers to be a slave, he would not have been in Egypt in the first place to become Viceroy. On the other hand, if we had never been slaves, there would be no need to free us! From a freedom standpoint, we didn't "gain" from the experience; it just brought us to the same place we would have been had there been no slavery. How can the Rashbatz compare our becoming free to Yosef becoming royalty?

Of all the causes mentioned for the slavery, only one entails the mistreatment of others. More than treating someone with not enough respect (i.e. having scholars serve as soldiers), the brothers were cruel to Yosef, selling him as a slave in order to prevent him from getting the birthright (which Ya'akov had transferred to him from Reuvain). This disgraceful act affected the entire nation of the brothers' descendants. Moshe had wondered why G-d had allowed the Children of Israel to be enslaved, until he saw how they treated each other (see Rashi on Shemos 2:14). Even if they

were to get out of this exile, the infighting would just lead them to become subservient to a different power. Being freed from Egypt would have little meaning if it was just a temporary change to being slaves elsewhere.

But the nation (eventually) learned its lesson. As it says in Eliyahu Rabbah (21:4) regarding those that came out of Egypt, "They gathered together until they formed one group and made a covenant with each other to do acts of kindness for one another." Now that they wouldn't mistreat each other- just the opposite, they would go out of their way to help each other- they were worthy of being redeemed, and were not in danger of being re-exiled.

Perhaps this is why the Rashbatz chose this aspect as the "disgrace" we begin with, and why he compared it to Yosef's ascent to royalty; It was only through their experience of slavery that they understood the importance of treating each other properly- learning from the mistakes of their ancestors who had sold Yosef and from the other infighting that had kept them enslaved for so many years.

"He that performed miracles for our ancestors, and redeemed them from slavery to freedom, may he redeem us soon and gather our exiles from the four corners of the earth, all of Israel are companions, and let us say 'Amen' (from the blessing for the new month). When we all get along (are "chaveirim"), we can be worthy of redemption.

As we renew our commitment to our Creator, recalling all of the wondrous miracles that He did to take us out of Egypt, let us also renew our commitment to treating each other properly, so that this becomes the month of our ultimate redemption. ©2004 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI ARON TENDLER

Rabbi's Notebook

Additional laws of the Olah (Ascent offering) are detailed in this week's Parsha and were addressed specifically to Aharon and his sons. (6:2) "Command Aharon and his sons, saying: This is the law of the ascent offering?"

The word used by the Torah is "Tzav? command. Additional laws of the Chatas are detailed in this week's Parsha and were addressed specifically to Aharon and his sons. (6:17) "Speak to Aharon and his sons, saying: This is the law of the sin offering..."

The Korban Olah (Ascent offering), "arises from the individual's awareness that he is in need of making greater strides toward goodness and G-dliness? It is offered in the awareness that one has The Chatas (unintentional Sin offering), is the manner "through which a soul, having strayed from the sphere of G-d's will, now seeks to regain the nearness of G-d on which the purity of its active life depends and which it should never have left..." (Ibid 4:2)

Why were these two categories of offerings directed specifically to Aharon and his sons? All Korbanos were under their jurisdiction and purview and involved their direct ministrations. Why specify the Olah and the Chatas?

Aharon Hakohain (the Priest) was unique. The Mishnah in Avos (1:12) quotes Hillel. "Be among the disciples of Aharon, loving and pursuing peace, loving people, and bringing them closer to the Torah."

Rav Yoseph Yitzchak Kook ZT'L explained that the Mishnah does not say, "loving and pursuing peace, loving people, in order to bring them closer to the Torah." The Mishnah states that Aharon loved peace, pursued peace, and loved people which resulted in them being brought closer to G-d. There was no other agenda! Others were attracted to him because of who he was and how he behaved and were therefore inspired to become closer to G-d.

What kind of person was Aharon Hakohain? In contemporary terms we might say he was, accepting, non-judgmental, open minded, tolerant, accommodating, broadminded, understanding, charitable, forbearing, lenient, and compassionate. I believe that every one of those descriptions applied to the character of Aharon Hakohain; however, therein lay the contradiction and the lesson.

In order for Aharon to be the Kohain Gadol he had to be extraordinarily disciplined and obedient to G-d's commandments. What happened when G-d's law was in conflict with Aharon's exceptional sensitivity and compassion? What happened when Aharon found himself caught between the inflexible absolutes of G-d's judgment and his own penchant for being non-judgmental, accepting, forgiving, and loving?

Among the first Mitzvos addressed by the Rambam is "To emulate the ways of G-d." We believe that G-d is perfect and that all questions and conflicts about His actions are the product of our mortal limitations. That means that G-d is the quintessential example of mercy. "Just as He is merciful so too we must be merciful." Therefore, it was incumbent upon Aharon Hakohain to try and understand the ways of G-d; yet, if and when there was a conflict between his own approach and G-d's judgment, G-d's judgment would prevail.

This disciplined acceptance of the true meaning of compassion, mercy, love and forgiveness, will be emphasized in next week's Parsha when Aharon accepts the deaths of Nadav and Avihu. His silence, "and Aharon was silent," is the most eloquent expression of trust in G-d and His judgment.

Upon Aharon's death the Torah proclaimed, (Bamidbar 20:29) "they wept for Aharon thirty days all the House of Israel." When Moshe died the Torah stated, (Divarim 34:8) "and the Bnai Yisroel cried for Moshe in the Plains of Moav." The verse does not add the word, "all". The Talmud points out that everyone mourned Aharon while most everyone mourned Moshe.

Is it possible that Aharon was more compassionate than Moshe? Moshe, the most trusted in G-d's entire home, the only human to have spoken to G-d face to face?

The truth is that Moshe was greater than Aharon in every way; however, the nation could not relate to Moshe the way they could relate to Aharon. Both Moshe and Aharon listened to the word of G-d with absolute adherence and trust. Both were role models of servitude and subjugation. However, Moshe's being radiated an inner sanctity that set him above and apart from the rest of the nation. It made it very difficult for the masses to get near to him. Aharon, on the other hand, was from within the people. He had suffered with them in Egypt. He had been with them at the time of the Golden Calf. He too waited for Moshe to descend with the verdict of their future, not knowing whether G-d would continue to dwell in their midst or watch over them from afar. Aharon did the same as Moshe but was perceived as more available and understanding.

If the Torah had directed the laws of the Olah and the Chatas—the ascent offering and the sin offering—to Moshe, the nation would have associated the process of growth represented by the Olah and the process of correction represented by the Chatas with the distant perfection of the veiled Moshe. However, by directing the laws of the Chatas and the Olah to Aharon and his sons, the Torah showed the nation that the Torah was for everyone, especially the imperfect and fallible.

With the destruction of the Twin Towers on September 11, the world was exposed to absolute evil. The straightforwardness of absolutes simplifies our values and clarifies our decision-making. We all wanted to believe that the world had tasted from the Tree of The Knowledge of Good and Evil and that the future would be different. We fervently and excitedly wished to believe that the world would see the obvious evil of wanton destruction, the killing and maiming of innocent men, women, and children.

For a short moment there was a reprieve. For a short moment our clarity of purpose in battling terror exposed the inconceivable rational of contrast and balance, against a backdrop of reprehension, revulsion, and blatantly arrogant evil. But that is no longer. The death and destruction in Madrid and the UN's continued condemnation of Israel proves that the short reprieve and clarity following 9-11 when evil was seen as evil and victims as innocent and good has been buried under an avalanche of irrationality and self hatred.

Once again the world engages in the sophistication of evil. Nothing is evil, all are good, understanding must reign, wear your brother's shoes or kaffia and feel his pain, but never ever judge or conclude. Where have all the absolutes gone? In their stead we have pain, death, tears, and more tears.

Compassion, acceptance, non-judgment, open mindedness, tolerance, accommodations, broadmindedness, understanding, charity, forbearance,

and lenience, are all wonderful traits. They are the Midos of G-d Himself! However, where is the "Tzav (command)"? Where are the commandments? Where is the discipline that humbles the arrogant and protects all future generations?

Without the "Tzav" there cannot be compassion, understanding, or love. Without the command of the Divine that is inclusive of all possibilities and circumstances, we are left with the confusion and hatred of a lost world arrogantly mired in their own human biases, failings, and limitations.

Aharon Hakohain did not trust his own loving compassion. Aharon listened to the word of G-d and loved all people. His love was unqualified because whomever G-d loves he also loved; and no one can be more loving than G-d.

We stand on the threshold of redemption. We pray and hope for the cessation of all pain and tears. Yet, so many of us do not yet understand that we must be among the students of Aharon. He loved because G-d loved. He forgave because G-d forgave. He disciplined himself to be the most loving and compassionate while being the most devoted and trusting. As G-d said to Moshe at the Burning Bush, "and he will see you and be happy in his heart." In spite of Aharon being your older brother he will not be jealous. Just the opposite! He will rejoice and he will whole-heartedly serve you and Me. He will rejoice and he will listen! Aharon's joy was the beginning of the redemption from Mitzrayim and it will be the reason why we will be redeemed as well.

"Each of us is obligated to imagine as if he or she were released from Mitzrayim." May it be G-d's will that this year redemption not be left up to our imaginations.

This week is also known as Shabbos Hagadol—the great Shabbos. © 2004 Rabbi A. Tendler & torah.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah, read in conjunction with Shabbos Hagadol, depicts the Jewish scene moments before the advent of Mashiach. Malachi, the last prophet before our first exile, shares with us the prevalent conversations during the final moments of our final exile. The masses of our people will reflect upon the generation's unprecedented affluence and conclude that Torah observance is a wasted exercise. Their argument will be, "What material gain has ever come from observing His commandments or walking the downtrodden path for His sake? We constantly praise the agnostics and the wicked who met much success and yet, escaped the wrath of Above." (3:14, 15) The impressive financial success of so many unaffiliated Jews will suggest an indifference on the side of

Hashem, almost to the extent of condoning their inexcusable behavior.

What will be the response of the righteous? The prophet continues, "Then the G-d fearing people will speak amongst themselves and Hashem will hear, listen and preserve the comments of those who revere Him and respect His name." (3:16) During those dark moments G-d fearing people will be scarce. However, those who will endure and persevere, despite the fierce influences of exile, will remain steadfast in their faith. They will gather and strengthen one another sharing their true perspectives on life. They do not seek tangible benefits from life and certainly do not expect a reward in this finite world (see Malbim to 3:16) Their service is based on reverence and respect rather than reward or material gain. To them, the absence of fame or financial success will not present serious challenge to their commitment. Instead, they will patiently await the era of redemption wherein the glory of Hashem will become revealed to all.

Our Chazal in Yalkut Shimoni (591) explain this unwavering faith with the following parable. The queen was once confronted by a maidservant in the midst of a dark night. The latter argued that she was more attractive than the queen herself! The queen responded calmly, "Say all you wish now because tomorrow in the light of day the truth will be revealed." In the same vein righteous people, during our dark exile, find themselves at a serious disadvantage. In the absence of Hashem's clear revelations anything can be presented and said. Allusions can easily be construed that promise eternal bliss for those who walk the unethical and immoral path. It requires men of great character and commitment to rise above public opinion and speak the truth. Their response to this senseless talk is, "The truth is around the corner." "Soon Mashiach will arrive and the clear revelations of Hashem will tell the real story." Regarding these devout, the prophet says, "And for you who fear Hashem a gracious and healing sun will shine upon you." (3:20) Those who firmly awaited the light of redemption will merit its light, the brilliant radiance of Hashem. The light of day will finally arrive and those clear perspectives of the righteous will become self evident truths.

In truth, these very same discussions took place in Egypt and served as an essential factor in the preservation of our people. The Midrash Rabba (Shmos 5:18) reveals to us that the Jewish people observed Shabbos long before they were commanded. In defense of his people, Moshe Rabbeinu approached Pharaoh and insisted on a day of rest. After being granted his request, Moshe conveniently dedicated the seventh day of the week for this purpose. The Midrash adds that the Jewish people effectively utilized this day to study scrolls of redemption. In the midst of heavy persecution the Jews maintained their faith in Hashem. Although no trace of Hashem could be seen they remained devoted to Him. They didn't question Hashem's lack of

involvement and were not influenced by the darkness of their exile. Although their wicked taskmasters enjoyed a comfortable life this could not seduce the Jewish people into straying from Hashem. They, too, gathered together and encouraged each other with the truths of Hashem. They understood that daylight would eventually arrive and, in the radiance of Hashem, the truth would become self evident. In this merit they did experience those long awaited results. Eventually, Hashem did shine His light upon them as it says, "For the Jewish people there was light in their settlement." (Shmos 10:23) May we merit to experience this light speedily in our days. © 2004 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

A wise teacher once said that our manner of greeting on the Passover holiday requires a fundamental change. People generally wish each other "Purim Sameach" (a joyous Purim) and "Pesach Kasher," (a Kosher Passover). It ought be the opposite. Since we are required to drink wine and other inebriating beverages on Purim—"until we can no longer distinguish between praising Mordecai and cursing Haman"—it would be more logical to bless our friends with a Kasher Purim (despite the danger of the drink); and since we are required to clean so thoroughly (and sometimes even hysterically) in our removal of hametz (leavening) in preparation for the Festival, it would make more sense to bless our friends with a joyous Passover!

But why this frenetic cleaning? And even thought Rav Haim Soloveitchik of Brisk would attempt to relax his wife each year by telling her that dirt is not hametz according to the Talmud, she would respond wryly, "If I listened to you and your Talmud, we would all be eating hametz on Pesach, G-d forbid!" After all, even the slightest amount of leavening (hametz) left over by accident is enough to render an entire pot-full of food forbidden for Passover consumption—so it is logical to clean all the corners and empty all of the cupboards in every room where food may have entered.

Indeed, the very first Mishnah of the Tractate Pesachim begins, "on the eve of the fourteenth day of the Hebrew month Nissan (the evening before the night of the seder), it is necessary to search for the hametz by the light of a candle,"—clearly giving the message that Passover must be preceded by heavy-duty cleaning. But the gemara provides two fascinating verses which provide the basis of the hametz search by the light of a candle: "At that time (in the Messianic age of Redemption), I (G-d) will search out (the transgressions of) Jerusalem with candles" (Zephaniah 1), and "the candle of the Lord is the soul of man" (Proverbs 20). Clearly these verses are mandating an internal search as well as an external one, a dissolution

of the stain of the soul as well as a cleansing of the cabinets of the kitchen.

But what religiously symbolic message is hametz trying to convey, what negative action is hametz attempting to teach us to deny, what internal characteristic is the Passover law attempting to uproot? Matzot have precisely the same Hebrew letters as mitzvot (Divine commandment), but what is there in hametz leavening which makes it such a no-no?

I would suggest that in order to understand the symbolism, it is necessary to bear in mind the chemical process involved in the process of leavening. When any of the five grains—wheat, rye, oats, barley, spelt—are mixed with water, the grain will naturally rise and turn into the risen loaf of bread or roll which we so much enjoy. Matzah requires human intervention before the leavening takes place. An individual must continually "work" the grain-water mixture and not allow it to lie dormant for eighteen minutes; and before eighteen minutes has passed, the individual must place the mixture in the oven to be baked. In effect, the necessity of producing matzah—and the prohibition against hametz—teaches us that we must not leave the development of our personalities up to the biological influences of our genes and our natural proclivities. Every individual can and must work on him/her self in order to change, to grow into the person he/she would like to become. Never say, "It is my nature to be angry, or to be stingy, or to be fat."

We must interfere with nature in order to achieve the desired result.

Indeed, the gemara tells a fascinating story about a person addicted to sex: "They said of Elazar b. Duradiya that there was no prostitute he hadn't visited. He once heard that there was a prostitute in one of the coastal cities who took an entire purse of dinarim as her payment. He traversed seven rivers in order to have sex with her. At the time of the act, she flatulated. She said, 'just as the expelled wind will never return to its place, so Elazar B. Duradiya will never be accepted in repentance.'"

The story goes on to record that he begged the mountains of valleys, the heavens and the earth, the sun the moon and the stars—all the manifestations of nature—to pray for him, but to no avail. "He finally said, 'the matter is dependent only upon me,' and he wept until he gave up his soul. A voice descended from heaven, declaring, R. Elazar b. Duradiya is welcome to eternal life" (B. T. Avodah Zara 17a).

The Talmud is telling a classical story about an individual whose "nature" led him to sex addiction. The "mishap" during the sexual encounter drove home to him the disgustingness and the transitoriness of the life-style he was pursuing. He asks "nature" to come to his aid—but finally realizes that he must and can overcome his nature by himself! He learns the lesson of hametz and matzah.

There is one more message to our cleaning. Matzah is the grain and water without the added volume and "puff," the excess baggage, which comes from fermentation. All of us carry around "excess baggage,"—resentments, angry feelings—even against family members—which we must get rid of in order to enable us to establish proper relationships. Our external cleaning ought reflect an internal cleansing which will enable us to recognize the demons at our doorsteps but give us the strength to successfully vanquish them! After all, Elijah the herald of redemption will first and foremost enable families to live with each other in peace, when the hearts of the parents will be turned to the children and the heart of the children to the parents.

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Moshe installs his brother, Aharon, and his nephews, the sons of Aharon as the priests - the kohanim - of Israel. Though there is no truly elaborate installation ceremony for the kohanim, there is a weeklong period of preparation and purification that precedes their actual entry into their holy service. Why the delay? What does the weeklong period of preparation accomplish? And, we see that this period of preparation is a matter of pattern and not simply a one-time event. For the Talmud in Yoma teaches us that the High Priest - the Kohen Gadol - was "separated" for the week before Yom Kippur in order to prepare himself for the service in the Temple that he would perform on Yom Kippur. So separation and preparation are apparently hallmarks for entry into Godly service.

The service of the Lord is not something that one can enter haphazardly. It requires thought, dedication, knowledge and deep commitment. It is not an easy task. Just as one cannot wake up one morning and suddenly say, "Today I am going to be a brain surgeon," so too one cannot automatically walk in to the synagogue or the study hall and enter positions of leadership overnight. Only by preparation - which invariably means years of intensive Torah study, self-recognition and improvement of personal behavior and attitudes, and a true willingness to serve God and Israel - is one allowed the exalted privilege of being a kohain, metaphorically speaking. The Jewish world suffers today from too many self-appointed, ill-prepared, self-righteous and pompous pseudo-kohanim.

Aside from preparation to serve as a kohain, the aspect of separation is also present. Even though we all live in the general society and social environment that surrounds us, to be a steadfast Jew requires the ability to separate one's self from society, albeit, even slightly. It means not following every fad of 'correct' thought and social behavior, it means distancing one's self from the corrosive elements of impurity that abound in every human society and generation, of being able to

stand alone for what is right, moral and proven over the generations. The Jew may be in society but he or she must also be separate from society.

The Haskala formulated that one should be a Jew at home but just like everyone else in the street of general society. That false notion led to the disappearance of countless "home" Jews who were unable to make that separation once they had compromised their identity in the public arena of life. Without separation there can be no kohain.

The task of a kohain is not to be only a mere functionary in the Temple service. It is rather a challenge to be the guardian of wisdom and holiness, the one who maintains standards and counsels others in the way of the Torah and Jewish tradition. The kohain is held to a high standard. He may not defile himself or come in contact with what is impure. He must prepare himself constantly for his role in Jewish life and for the task assigned to him. Therefore, his preparation and separation are the first steps taken in embarking on the road to his ultimate task of daily service to God and man. © 2004 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF

Sfas Emes

The Sfas Emes begins this ma'amar with some thoughts that he had from his grandfather. The Chiddushei HaRim posed a basic question: Why is this Shabbos called "HaGadol" ("the Great")? To address this question, the Chiddushei HaRim (and the Sfas Emes) look at other cases in which Chazal used the word "gadol." The objective is to conclude from those other contexts what Chazal may have had in mind when they used the word "gadol."

One such case is the term "Anshei Kenesses HaGedola"—the men of the Great Assembly. This term refers to our Torah leaders in the early years of the Second Beis HaMikdash. The Gemara (Yoma, 69b) explains that the assembly was called "Gedola" because they restored HaShem's crown to its former glory. This answer, however, only deepens the puzzle. Because to say "restored" implies that the glory of HaShem's crown had somehow been diminished in an earlier time period. But how could that have happened? Have no fear. The Gemara and the Sfas Emes will explain.

Chazal note that Moshe Rabbeinu referred to HaShem (Devarim, 10:17) as "HaGadol, HaGibor, VehaNorah" ("the Great, the Mighty, and the Awesome"). But later generations could not in all honesty apply those words to HaShem. Thus, Yirmiyahu witnessed the Babylonians desecrating the Beis HaMikdash, and asked, "Where is His awesomeness?" And seeing no sign of HaShem as being awesome, he

deleted the word "Nora". Thus we see Yirmiyahu (32:18) referring to HaShem only as "HaGadol, HaGibor".

Similarly, when Daniel saw how the Babylonians oppressed their Jewish captives, he asked: "Where is His might?" And seeing no evidence of HaShem's "might," Daniel deleted the word "HaGibor" and referred to HaShem (Daniel, 9:4) only as "HaGadol (Vehanora)".

Then came Anshei Kenneses HaGedola and said: Adrabba! (On the contrary!) What you have witnessed is in fact powerful evidence of HaShem's might and awesomeness. For were it not for His great might, He could not stand by as His people are oppressed. And were it not for His awesomeness, the Jewish people could never have survived—let alone maintained its identity among the nations of the world as Ovdei HaShem. Thus, interpreting the evidence differently, Anshei Kenneses HaGedola recognized that HaShem is indeed mighty and awesome. Therefore, they reinserted the attributes of "HaGibor VeHanora" into our conception of HaShem. And to this day, we utter those words in the first beracha of Shemoneh Esrei. This was indeed "restoring HaShem's crown to its former glory"!

The Sfas Emes cites another context—Creation—in which Chazal employ the word "Gadol." Chazal comment: "'Gedula,'—zeh ma'aseh bereishis." ("The word Gedula—Greatness—refers to HaShem's having created the world.") The Sfas Emes explains. The world that HaShem created—i.e., nature—appears to be contrary to a perception that HaShem rules the world. But a closer look enables us to see that nature exists only because HaShem gives it existence. Thus, Creation—and nature—also testify to HaShem's greatness.

The Sfas Emes cites one more case where the word "Gadol" appears. That place is in parshas Lech Lecha, (Bereishis, 12:2), where HaShem promised Avraham Avinu: "Ve'eh'escha legoy gadol" ("I will make you a great nation.") The Rambam gives us the context of this promise. Avraham had been able to penetrate and see through the fiction of the many false gods worshiped in his milieu. Thus, he was able to perceive HaShem's Omnipresence in the world. However, Avraham Avinu wanted to see an entire nation that would provide testimony to HaShem's dominion. In that context, HaShem assured Avraham that He would make Avraham into a "great nation." Thus, once again we encounter the word "gadol."

To conclude, the Sfas Emes is saying that the word "gadol" (as in "Shabbos HaGadol") refers to the capacity to see through apparent reality—whether in history or nature—and thus to perceive HaShem's Omnipresence.

Our ancestors demonstrated this capacity many years ago, in Egypt. They did so when on, the day now known as Shabbos HaGadol, they dared to prepare for

slaughter the deity of their former masters. This action required personal bravery. It also required a key intellectual attribute: namely, the ability to pierce the Hester with which HaShem chooses to cloak the true real world, and thus to see reality as it truly is. Clearly, we need more of both of these qualities—both individual courage and intellectual integrity. May HaShem help us to develop these strengths in our everyday lives! © 2004 Rabbi N.C. Leff & torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

A well-known midrash states that the Shabbat before Pesach is called "Shabbat Hagadol" / "The Great Shabbat" because of the miracle that happened on the Shabbat preceding the Exodus. On that day, the Jews set aside lambs to be sacrificed for the Korban Pesach, and the Egyptians, who worshiped the lamb, did not challenge the Jews or even object.

Why is this miracle particularly worthy of a day commemorating it? asks R' Zalman Sorotzkin z"l (1881-1966; the "Lutzker Rav"). Surely, many more incredible miracles have taken place in our history!

The typical person, notes R' Sorotzkin, is much more moved by an open miracle, i.e. one which is difficult to explain in natural terms, than he is by a miracle which can be rationally explained. In fact, however, the opposite should be true. G-d's using nature to accomplish His ends should be much more impressive than a sudden change in the course of nature. When G-d uses nature to accomplish His goals, he demonstrates that when He created the world thousands of years ago, He foresaw the future and implanted in creation the tools that He would need in the future.

The miracle which happened on the first Shabbat Hagadol is so memorable because there, in the midst of the open miracles of the plagues, Hashem performed this low-key and "natural" miracle, a miracle which can easily be explained rationally. In all likelihood, this miracle actually went unnoticed by the masses. Chazal, however, recognized its greatness, and they therefore called this day "Shabbat Hagadol." (Quoted in Birkat Chaim p.103)

"If he shall offer it as a todah / thanksgiving offering..." (7:12)

The Gemara (Berachot 54a) teaches, "Four types of people are obligated to give thanks: one who traverses the sea, one who traverses a desert, one who was sick and is healed, and one who is released from prison." Why these four?

R' Shmuel Eliezer Eidels z"l ("Maharsha") explains that there are four types of problems that commonly impact on a person's spiritual growth: earning a living, enemies, sickness and wealth. The four types of people who must give thanks correspond

to these. Also, the four cups of wine at the seder correspond to these four types of problems. [Unfortunately, Maharsha's explanation is too lengthy and complex for this space.] (Chiddushei Aggadot)

Our Sages say: "The todah will never cease to be brought." R' Aryeh Levin z"l (died 1969) asks: Why is this a happy tiding? The korban todah is brought, after all, by one who has been saved from danger! If the todah will never cease to be brought, that means that people will never cease to find themselves in danger!

R' Levin answers: When Pharaoh refused to release Bnei Yisrael from Egypt and instead decreed that they work harder, Moshe asked Hashem (Shmot 5:22-23), "Why have You made things worse for this nation?"

Hashem answered him, "You will see!" He meant: You will see that from every tragedy comes something good; from exile and persecution comes redemption.

The Midrash says that when Yosef died, the Jews wanted to assimilate into Egypt. Hashem therefore made the Egyptians hate the Jews, causing the Jews to reunite and to support each other. This is an example of how good—the continued existence of the Jewish people—came from bad—the Egyptians' hatred.

So, too, Chazal say that the gift of Eretz Yisrael is acquired through suffering. The Torah (Devarim 8:5) tells us, however, that it is the type of "suffering" which a loving parent imposes on a child for the child's own well-being.

Thus, it is not a bad tiding that a korban todah will always be necessary. Good comes from what is seemingly bad. (Quoted in Ish Tzaddik Hayah p.303)

Why is it that Eretz Yisrael can be acquired only through suffering? Why, similarly, do Chazal say that the gift of Torah is acquired through suffering? What kind of gift is that?

R' Yehuda Alkali z"l (of Saraevo; 1798-1878) explains that the holiness of these gifts requires that man be purified before he receives them. The purpose of suffering is to break down man's material nature and purify him. (Darchei Noam: Introduction)

"Take Aharon and his sons with him... Hakhel/Gather the entire assembly to the entrance of the ohel mo'ed/Tent of Meeting." (8:2-3)

Rashi writes: "Take Aharon with persuasive words." R' Baruch Sorotzkin z"l (1917-1979; rosh yeshiva of Telz in Cleveland) explains as follows: Being Kohen Gadol means giving up all semblance of a "normal" life. This is a tremendous commitment to ask of a person, even a person of the caliber of Aharon. One has to be persuaded that being Kohen Gadol is the greatest fortune possible, notwithstanding the inconveniences involved. Therefore Moshe had to "take Aharon with persuasive words."

To ease Aharon's transition, he was appointed be'hakhel / in an assembly of the entire congregation. Very few mitzvot had to be done be'hakhel, but Aharon's appointment was done before all of the Jewish people so that he would see that they accepted him. A leader who is not accepted by a segment of the people cannot influence the people. (For similar reasons, Pirkei Avot teaches, "Make for yourself a teacher." Only if you accept the teacher upon yourself can he influence you.) (Ha'binah Ve'ha'berachah pp. 216 & 204)

From the Pesach Haggadah

"This year, we are here; next year may we be in Eretz Yisrael! This year, we are slaves, next year may we be free men!"

R' Yehoshua Heschel of Cracow z"l (known as "the rebbe, Reb Heschel"; died 1663) notes that the above statements appear to be redundant. He explains:

We have a tradition that the enslavement in Egypt ceased six months before the actual Exodus. Presumably, says Reb Heschel, the same will be true when the Complete Redemption arrives. Six months before mashiach arrives we will notice a marked improvement in the Jewish People's condition. [In the discussion below, we will refer to the Complete Redemption as "Step 2" and the lightening of the burden of exile that will take place six months beforehand as "Step 1."]

There is a dispute in the Gemara whether the Complete Redemption will take place in the month of Nisan (the opinion of the sage Rabbi Yehoshua) or the month of Tishrei (the opinion of the sage Rabbi Eliezer). Our passage from Haggadah refers to both of those views. [For greater clarity, we will explain the second sentence first.] According to Rabbi Eliezer, it is not likely that we will be in Eretz Yisrael next year, for if the Complete Redemption (Step 2) were destined to occur in this coming Tishrei, we would already have seen signs of Step 1 now, six months before. If we have not seen those signs, then the most we can hope for is that Step 1 will occur by next Pesach, and Step 2 will occur six months afterward, in the second Tishrei from now. Hence, "This year, we are slaves, next year may we be free men [i.e., by next Pesach, Step 1 will occur]."

According to Rabbi Yehoshua, the Complete Redemption (Step 2) could indeed happen by next Pesach. Perhaps Step 1 will indeed occur by next Tishrei, six months before Pesach. Therefore, "This year, we are here; next year may we be in Eretz Yisrael [i.e., even Step 2 may occur by next Pesach]." (Chanukat Ha'Torah) © 2004 Rabbi S. Katz & torah.org

