

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

JEWISH WORLD REVIEW

Wonder Bread

by Rabbi David Aaron

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During the seven days of Passover we are required to eat only Matza- unleavened bread that looks somewhat like a cracker and is made of just water and flour. The Matza reminds us that we were slaves to the Egyptians who treated us as if we were subhuman and fed us brittle and tasteless unleavened bread. The Matza is therefore referred to as the "bread of affliction." However, Matza also reminds us of how we left Egypt in an astounding record time, faster than it takes dough to leaven into bread. How can Matza be both a sign of our painful affliction and our joyous freedom?

The Zohar, the Kabbalah classic, refers to Matza as the "Bread of Faith." In other words, when we eat the Matza, we are internalizing the message of faith that it embodies. That message is - know that even if you hit rock bottom and feel far and alienated from G-d, G-d is right there to help you and free you from your enslavements, addictions and obsessions. Even when you feel that it's been years that you are trapped in your personal Egypt and it would seem that it will take years to get out - just know, as the Psalmist put it, "The salvation of G-d is within the blink of an eye."

Although Matza is the very bread of affliction and exile, at a blink of my eye, it can become the bread of freedom and redemption. Revolutionary transformation is available to us all, as long as you believe it can happen. The paradoxical symbolism of the Matza teaches us that G-d Himself, at any moment, can do a miracle for you. Even if you reach the bottom, never despair, never give up. Therefore, Matza, the "Bread of Faith," is an antidote to despair and nurtures within in us faith and hope.

The Exodus from Egypt assures us that if the Jewish people could get out of Egypt, then we could get out of any situation. Certainly G-d could have orchestrated the Jewish people's liberation through some kind of worthy deed that they would do to earn them their freedom. However, He precisely arranged it to be without merit so as to instill forever within us the confidence that His love is unconditional. Therefore, no matter how low the Jewish people or any of us may fall, we should never despair.

The paradoxical symbolism of the Matza also teaches us that in the very bitterness of affliction and exile, lays the sweetness of freedom and redemption. The great Hasidic Master, Rabbi Nachman of Breslav taught, "Being far from G-d itself is for the purpose of coming close...the downfall can be transformed into a great ascent."

It all depends on the way you look at it. The Matza itself is basically tasteless. If you want, you can taste the freedom and redemption that lies at the core of affliction and exile.

Perhaps this is the meaning of G-d's response to Abraham when he requested a sign that the land of Israel would be an eternal inheritance for him and his descendents. G-d showed him the future history of exile. Abraham experienced a great darkness and fear. But G-d comforted him saying, "Know that your offspring will be strangers in a strange land. There they will be enslaved and afflicted for four hundred years. Also the nation that will afflict them I will judge and your children will leave with great assets." In other words, although your offspring will endure much suffering, they will survive and even profit from it. So don't worry, don't lose faith. Even the darkest hours are the very seeds of growth, transformation, renewal and redemption.

Rav Nachman of Breslav also taught, "Sometimes when you want to come close to G-d, you encounter new and even greater obstacles than before. However, don't let that discourage you. G-d is only challenging you so you will try even harder and thereby come even closer. It's really all for the best."

The Gerrer Rebbe, another great Hasidic Master, taught that on Passover we can achieve a huge leap forward in our spiritual evolution. In other words, in general, great feats take much time. However, on Passover, we can accomplish great moves at a "beyond-time" pace.

The Hebrew word for Egypt is Mizraim, which also translates as "narrowness." Indeed, Egypt represented the deification of the narrow confines and limitations of nature, time and space. To leave Egypt also meant to leave this narrow and confining attitude. It meant leaving the world of nature, science, logic and reason and enter into a new worldview - the world of faith and unconditional love.

There are many people who own mansions and yet there is never enough space in their lives for others. And even when they are free of any obligations of time,

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they never have time for others. These people live only in the world of time and space. However, in the world of love, time and space are not obstacles.

Passover is the birthday of the Jewish people. It is a time to remember that we are children of G-d, born with an innate G-dliness. Our relationship to G-d is similar to a parent and child relationship. From the child's perspective he and his parent are two separate beings. However, the parent sees herself and her child as one. Therefore, the parent loves the child with the same unconditional love that she has for herself. Sometimes parents give to their children not because their children deserve it but simply because they are their children - an extension of their own selves. However, with all the love a parent may shower on her child, it is up to the child to acknowledge and thereby enjoy the ecstasy of that connection.

The Torah refers to the Jewish people, so to speak, as the firstborn child of G-d. This is because the Jewish people are the first nation in history who believed that G-d is like a loving parent and they are His beloved children. And His love is unconditional and forever.

May everyone in the world realize that they too are beloved children of G-d. © 2006 Rabbi D. Aaron & Jewish World Review

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

The Mishkan was finished, and the 7-day training period was complete. On the eighth day, Aharon was commanded to bring the inaugural offerings of the Mishkan, some for himself (Vayikra 9:2) and some on behalf of the nation (9:3-4).

"And to the Children of Israel you (Aharon) should speak, saying: 'Take a male goat as a sin-offering, and a calf and a sheep within their first year-unblemished-as a burnt-offering. And a bull and a ram for a peace-offering to slaughter before G-d.'" Five animals in total. Yet, when the actual bringing of the offering is described (9:15-18), only three of these animals are mentioned by name (the goat, bull and ram). The calf and sheep aren't mentioned; the generic "the burnt-offering" (9:16) is used instead. Why were these animals left out? The Torah could have used generic terms by all three (saying that Aharon brought

the sin-offering, the burnt-offering and the peace-offering) or could have mentioned (again) all five of the animals at their respective offerings. However, it seems a bit awkward that the Torah would mention which animals were brought by two of the offerings while omitting which animals were brought by the third.

The substituted term, "the burnt offering" is misleading as well. The implication is that there was only one burnt-offering (i.e. a single animal), not two distinct animals (let alone from different species). It is only because we know from the commandment that this offering consisted of two animals that we understand that the Torah really means both offerings, despite saying "the" burnt-offering. Why would the Torah describe this offering in a way that implies there is only one "offering" when there are really two?

The commentators (based on our sages) say that the reason one of the animals brought as a burnt-offering was a calf was to atone for the sin of the "golden calf." One of the purposes of the Mishkan was to atone for this sin, and it is therefore appropriate that part of the nation's inaugural offering from the newly-consecrated Mishkan would be a calf.

Aharon also brought a calf as part of his offering, although rather than as a burnt-offering, his was a sin-offering. The commentators explain that the reason Aharon's was a sin-offering is because sin-offerings are brought for acts of sin, regardless of their intent. Although Aharon's intention in making the "golden calf" (or, more accurately, in asking the people clamoring for a replacement deity to give him their gold) was to stall for time, hoping that Moshe would return before any damage could be done. His plan didn't work, but he never intended to sin, even though a sinful act resulted. Therefore, he brought a calf as a sin-offering, to atone for the sin that was done, albeit inadvertently.

The nation, on the other hand, sinned willfully, and needed atonement for both their action and their thoughts. However, all those that had actually worshipped the "golden calf" had already died (see Rashi on Shemos 32:20), so a sin-offering was no longer appropriate. The only atonement still needed was for those that had *considered* worshipping the "golden calf," but had never *actually* worshipped it, as well as for those that had seen others sin without protesting it. Since burnt-offerings atone for sinful thoughts (even if there was no sin as a result), the nation brought a calf as a burnt-offering to atone for the aspects of the sin of the "golden calf" that still needed to be atoned for.

What about the sheep that was also brought as a burnt-offering? The Ralbag says that this sheep was meant to accomplish the same thing as the Passover-offering. The Egyptians worshipped sheep as a deity, and many of the Children of Israel had worshipped this Egyptian religion (or at least had given it credence). Before taking them out of Egypt, G-d wanted to remove

this "stain" of idol worship, and so had the entire nation slaughter a sheep and eat it, even advertising their intent to the Egyptians (by setting it aside four days prior), thus proving that sheep (or the power that represented them) was powerless against the One True G-d.

The Ba'al Haturim uses the root of the Hebrew word for sheep (kaf-bais-shin/sin) to explain why a sheep was brought along with the calf as the nation's burnt-offering; it can also mean to "subdue" or "conquer," i.e. to subdue/conquer the sin of the "golden calf." Just as the calf was brought to atone for that sin, the sheep was brought as part of the effort to conquer it.

The Ralbag's approach and that of the Ba'al Haturim would seem to have at least one thing in common: the need to still compensate for or subdue the problem that led to the sin of the "golden calf." If there was no longer any remnant of a tendency to worship idols, there would be no reason to bring a sheep to counteract belief in the power of sheep (as there was before the exodus from Egypt), and no reason to try to further "subdue" or "conquer" this action or thought. It would seem, then, that even after the Mishkan was completed, and the inaugural offerings brought, there was still a segment of the population that hadn't completely conquered their "yetzer harah" (evil inclination) for idol worship.

On the other hand, a sin-offering brought to atone for a sinful act and a burnt-offering brought to atone for a sinful thought cannot be effective if the sinner has not fully repented from the sin. If a calf was brought to atone for the sin of the "golden calf," complete repentance must have already been done by a segment of the population.

Perhaps this can explain why, despite two different animals being brought as the nation's burnt-offering, the Torah implies that only one offering was brought, leaving out which animals were offered. For those that had completely repented, a calf was brought as their burnt-offering, while for those who still needed to work more on conquering their desire to worship idols, a sheep was brought to aid them in their battle. No one person needed both burnt-offerings; either one was appropriate or the other one was, but not both.

"And Aharon brought *the* burnt-offering," i.e. the one for those that were ready for complete atonement and the one for those that still had a ways to go. © 2006 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The basic message of this parsha is the necessity to be able to separate and differentiate in life. The ability of the Jewish nation as a whole to live separately and yet be part of the general world is one of its outstanding achievements and hallmarks. It is the

very uniqueness and separatism of the Jews that has allowed us to be such a driving force in all human affairs. By not adopting the majority culture, by retaining its own G-d-given system of values and unique way of life, the Jewish people became the ultimate "guest" and "outsider" in human society.

This provided the Jews with a uniquely insightful view into the developing civilizations and cultures in the world. It is the basis of a famous Yiddish aphorism (Yiddish sayings are among the wisest and wryest observations of human behavior) that says: 'A guest for awhile sees for a mile'. The guest always sees things more clearly in the house of the host than does the host himself. Being the "guest," the different one, who realizes his special status and mission, is really the Jewish story throughout the ages. The Jews have often been likened to the canary in the coalmine that senses the presence of volatile gasses long before an explosion actually occurs. It is the very fact that we are separate and distinct that allows us to play this vital role in human development and the progress of civilization.

The Torah teaches us how to differentiate between the holy and the profane, the proper foods and those that should not be eaten, between the ritually pure and that which is considered impure. It is the observance of these laws and the later customs of Jewish life inserted to protect these laws that have guaranteed Jewish survival throughout the long ages of bitterness and unwarranted persecution. It is these laws and customs that have nurtured the Jewish hopes for a better world and a more just society, ideas that Judaism has successfully transmitted to the rest of the world. The Torah's admonition to remain separate should not be seen as a rejection of the rest of human society. Rather it is to be understood as the tool by which the Jewish people can contribute most to the betterment of humankind at all times and in all localities.

G-d told Abraham that all of mankind would be blessed through Isaac and his descendants. The same G-d highlighted to Abraham the necessity for retaining his uniqueness and transmitting that determination to his descendants throughout the generations. All of the ritual laws found in this week's parsha come to solidify our uniqueness and individuality. At the same time they point us towards our mission of being a holy people who are able to differentiate between right and wrong, truth and falseness, the holy and impure, and between eternal values and temporary expediences. Rather than scoff at these laws and rituals as being anachronistic, as unfortunately some Jews choose to do, we should appreciate the great and positive role that they play in keeping us distinct but always productive and creative in the betterment of human society. © 2006 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs,

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Sefirat HaOmer

by Rabbi Meir Goldwicht

The days between Pesach and Shavuot are called the days of sefirat haomer. During these days we count towards Matan Torah. Why, then, don't we call these days sefirah l'kabbalat haTorah rather than sefirat haomer?

Furthermore, R' Yochanan says in the midrash: Never let the mitzvah of the omer be light in your eyes. Even though the omer comes from barley, which is animal fodder, one might consider it a mitzvah of low significance and therefore deal with it leniently. But Avraham Avinu only received the land in the merit of the omer, as it says, "And to you I gave this land" [on condition] "You keep my covenant," referring to the brit of the omer. In other words, Chazal here teach us that the omer is not simply a mitzvah, but a brit. A mitzvah with the status of brit influences all of the other 612 mitzvot, as indicated by brit's gematria -- 612. What is so special about the mitzvah of the omer that bestows upon it the status of brit? Other mitzvot with this status-milah, Shabbat, learning Torah-influence our lives in major ways. But why does omer receive this status as well?

The answers to these questions lie in the definition of the word omer. In Hebrew, the root omer has three definitions: 1) omer, a measurement-in the Desert, B'nei Yisrael were commanded to eat an omer of manna, one tenth of an eifah; 2) me'amer, gathering together twigs and the like-one of the 39 melachot prohibited on Shabbat; and 3) l'hitamer, to misuse an object in one's possession-the Torah forbids one who takes an eishet yefat to'ar (the beautiful captive) in battle and decides not to marry her to keep her as a slave, saying, "lo titamer bah." These three definitions complement one another, providing a more accurate definition of omer.

During the forty years B'nei Yisrael traveled the Desert, the manna fell every day except Shabbat. Once they crossed the Jordan, the manna stopped and they no longer received their bread effortlessly, but became partners in its creation. Partnership with HaKadosh Baruch Hu is certainly advantageous, but contains a great risk as well. When a person toils and succeeds, he may mistakenly conclude that his own efforts caused his success, not any input from HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

The mitzvah of omer counteracts this misperception. The Torah commands us to sacrifice barley, animal fodder, so that we understand that even the lowliest of foods comes from HaKadosh Baruch Hu. In order to amplify this lesson, the Torah commands us

to count up to the omer for 49 days. When a person lives in such a way, he can gather (me'amer) as much as he wants with no danger of misusing it (l'hitamer); quite the contrary, he will mete it out in proper measurements (omer).

This may be the depth behind the phrase "lichrot brit, to cut a deal." There is no greater oxymoron: lichrot means to sever, while a brit is something that connects. The idea is that the two parties to the brit must cede a little bit in order to receive. HaKadosh Baruch Hu desires to cede something to us, and He wants to cede even more. The more we use what we have properly, the more He desires to give us. The brit of the omer is therefore the brit through which Avraham Avinu merited Eretz Yisrael. To inherit the Land is only possible if we truly feel that everything not only came from Him, but continues to come from Him: "When you come to the land that I give you," in the present tense.

May Hashem grant us the ability to truly feel that everything emanates from Him, and through this may He grant us ever more. © 2006 Rabbi M. Goldwicht and yutorah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

At first glance, Chad Gadya is a kind of light hearted song whose sole purpose is to provide an entertaining ending to the seder. Yet, in order to truly understand its meaning an analysis of the structure of the seder is required.

In general terms, the seder is divided into two parts. The first half which precedes the seder meal deals with the past-a retelling and reenactment of the Exodus from Egypt. The second half, which follows the seder meal, deals with the future-words of praise and song that complete redemption come soon.

It is because of this separation that we break the matzah at the onset of the seder. Matzah is the symbol of redemption. One half remains on the table as we recount the past event, and the second half-- not coincidentally the larger half representing the hope of the greater redemption which is yet to come-is set aside to be eaten at the end of the meal, the section that looks toward the future.

If you take a look at most haggadahs, the bulk of commentary focuses on the first half of the seder, and there is little discussion about the last half. But this section deserves just as much attention. It begins with the eating of the afikomen, that second half of matzah. This part of the seder is called tzafun. Tzafun literally means hidden, and is always associated with redemption whose time is unknown to us. The word tzafun sounds like tzafon which means north. It is said that the Messiah will come from the north.

Tzafun is followed by the Grace After Meal, the prayer of thanksgiving for food eaten during the main

course. This prayer, that we recite after each meal during the year, interestingly includes the prayer that G-d send to us Elijah the Prophet who announces the coming of the Messiah.

We emphasize Elijah's presence though at the seder immediately after the Grace, when we open the door for Elijah, symbolic of our yearning for the Messiah. For the Messiah to arrive, we cannot sit on our hands—we have to do our share and open the door.

What follows is the Hallel. Appropriately, the first two paragraphs of the Hallel, which deal with redemption from Egypt, are recited prior to the meal. The last paragraphs deal with the future, the hope that G-d will bless us (Ye-Varech Et Beit Yisrael) with redemption and hope. Thus, these paragraphs are recited after the seder meal.

And after reciting these words, we begin reciting the Greater Hallel. This Great Hallel contains prayers of hope that all of humankind will be redeemed. Included in this set of prayers is the famous Nishmat Kol Chai—may the soul of all living beings bless you O Lord.

With this we drink wine, celebrating the hope of future redemption just as we drank wine after telling the Passover story before the meal.

The seder has now officially come to an end as the statement - Chasal Siddur Pesach is read. But as in all powerful experiences, a feeling of exhilaration remains. In the case of the seder, this feeling is expressed through an ultimate encounter with G-d. The encounter, called Nirtzah, which means may G-d hear our words favorably, includes songs that allow our hearts and souls to soar heavenward.

One such song is Va-yehi Ba-chatzi Ha-laylah, literally and it was in the middle of the night. Night is the symbol of exile. The middle of the night represents the exile of the exile, the deepest darkness. As we sing these words, we're certain that somehow, no matter how dark, light will come. We continue with Adir Hu which speaks of the hope that G-d rebuild the Temple speedily. We move on with the famous Echad Mi Yodeihu in which we proclaim some fundamentals of faith including the Oneness of G-d, so crucially necessary for redemption.

And here we conclude with the Chad Gadya, a playful story which demonstrates how, in the long chain of natural events, G-d prevails. The goat is devoured by the cat and the cat is bitten by the dog and the dog is slain by the stick and the stick is consumed by fire, and the fire is extinguished by water which is drunk by the ox, which is slaughtered by the slaughterer whose life is taken by the angel of death. But in the end, it is G-d who overcomes that angel.

One wonders why is this deep message written in metaphor. It may be to teach that so much in Jewish history cannot be understood as it occurs, it can only be deciphered in hindsight. And it may be that the Chad

Gadya is written playfully and humorously to teach that to survive against the odds requires the ability to laugh. Our very existence is difficult to believe, and in that sense almost funny.

As we sit down to the seder this year, our hearts, minds and souls are with our people in Israel. We will be focusing not only on past redemption, but on the hope for future redemption. And we will sing Chad Gadya, that funny little song to remind us to laugh. The Chad Gadya, the song written in metaphors to remind us that even though we don't understand—one day we will. © 2006 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

At first glance, the entire procedure that was performed on the eighth day of the dedication of the Tabernacle was satisfactory. Moshe gave an exact list of which sacrifices to bring and what to do so that Bnei Yisrael would be privileged to observe a Divine revelation. "This is what G-d commanded you to do, and the glory of G-d will appear before you" [Vayikra 9:6]. And Aharon fulfilled all the instructions perfectly, step by step. At the end of the first stage—the offering of the Chatat sacrifice by Aharon—it is explicitly written that the procedure was performed "just as G-d commanded Moshe" [9:10]. Similarly, at the end of the last step—the offering of the Shelamim sacrifice of the nation—the Torah once again notes, "just as Moshe commanded" [9:21]. Everything appeared to be ready for the revelation. "And Aharon lifted up his hands towards the people and he blessed them, and he descended from preparing the Chatat, the Olah, and the Shelamim" [9:22].

However, nothing else happened. One can easily imagine the consternation that the people felt. What had gone wrong? Why didn't the Shechina appear? Wasn't everything done exactly as Moshe had specified? Then, Moshe came to Aharon's support: "Moshe and Aharon came to the Tent of Meeting, and they went out" [9:23]. What was the point of going into the Tabernacle? It is reasonable to assume that this was connected to what was described before, and that their objective was to "pray that the flame would descend" [Rashbam]. And then, indeed, everything was as it should be: "And they blessed the nation, and the glory of G-d was revealed to the entire nation. And a flame came from before G-d and it devoured, on the Altar, the Olah and the fat of the sacrifices, and the entire nation saw and gave praise, and they fell down on their faces." [9:23-24].

The only thing that was different about the second entry into the Tent of Meeting was the blessing.

The first time, Aharon blessed the nation by himself. This implies that the only fault in the actions performed by Aharon was the blessing, specifically that he performed this ritual on his own. This blessing in fact appears after the phrase, "just as Moshe commanded." Up to this point, we had not heard of any command for Aharon to bless the people, and no approval of the blessing is given by the words, "as Moshe commanded." Thus, it seems to have been Aharon's own initiative. On this day, when there is such great emphasis that everything must be done strictly according to the commands as given to Bnei Yisrael, any act that was not part of the original plan is a fault. By blessing the nation, Aharon took on himself the responsibility for the revelation of the Shechina. This is evidently the reason that the Shechina did not appear until Moshe joined him, so that they blessed Bnei Yisrael together. In this way, the mistake was corrected quickly, and the procedure could continue as planned.

As we know, this did not last very long. Aharon's two sons, Nadav and Avihu, took a much more radical step. They brought "a strange fire, which G-d had not commanded" [10:1], thereby changing Bnei Yisrael's joy to mourning. It seems that their act was viewed as especially serious since it came a very short time after it was shown that the revelation depended on strictly following G-d's commands, without detracting or adding anything on one's own initiative.

The Heroism of Silence

by Dr. Chaim Shalem, Center for Shoah Studies, Michlalah, Jerusalem

The Torah portion Shemini will be read this week, the occasion of Memorial Day for the Shoah and Heroism. This portion teaches us three phrases that are relevant to the Holocaust of the Jewish nation: "I will be sanctified by those close to me" [Vayikra 10:3]; "And Aharon was still" [ibid]; and "Your brothers, the entire house of Yisrael, will mourn for fire which G-d burned" [10:6]. The Almighty declares that "I will be sanctified by those close to me," Aharon accepts the judgment in silence, and Moshe establishes the principle that "everybody is obligated to share in the tragedies of the Torah scholars" [Moed Katan 28b]. Therefore, "the entire house of Yisrael" wept. Rabbi Eliezer Lipman Lichtenstein, the author of *Shem Olam*, discusses in his commentary the difference between silence-"shetika"-and being still-"dumia". He writes that "silence refers only to refraining from speaking, weeping, or sighing... while being still also implies a calmness of the heart and serenity of the soul."

Right before the beginning of Shabbat Chol Hamoed of Succot 5600 (1940) Rabbi Elimelech Ben-Tzion passed away. He was the only son of the Chassidic leader from the town of Piaschena. (After the war, the rabbi's notes for his sermons during this terrible time, which were discovered hidden in Warsaw,

were published in a book, "Eish Kodesh.") The rabbi restrained his mourning, and the Shabbat was celebrated with great joy, just as any other Shabbat during Chol Hamoed. After Shabbat, the dam of silence was broken, and the rabbi began to weep bitterly about his son. The funeral was held the next day. On Simchat Torah, at the end of the holiday, a small number of Chassidim who were broken and destitute participated with the rabbi in the dancing, in a way fulfilling the phrase quoted above, that "the entire house of Yisrael" joined in the mourning. The sadness was double: for the great and terrible destruction that was caused by the bombing of Warsaw, and for the death of the rabbi's son. The rabbi stood before the ark and began to sing a tune for "Eishet Chayil" [Mishlei 31:10] with great devotion, as it were following the verse, "I will be sanctified by those close to me." The courtyard of the Chassidim of Piaschena saw the fulfillment of the words of Iyov, "In silence, I will hear a voice" [4:16]. The rabbi demonstrated a new meaning for this verse: silence without weeping, but strength of character that allowed him to sing and to be happy with the Torah. This was the faith of a truly righteous man, "men of courage who observed His will" [Tehillim 103:20].

The courage of the rabbi could be seen in another act of his. After his son died, he said, "I have already been defeated in this war. Let us hope that with G-d's help the nation of Yisrael will win the war." This shows courage at its highest possible level. This may well be the first known case of such courage during the Shoah, in Tishrei of 1940.

The rabbi's life fulfilled the verses, "and a flame came forth from G-d and devoured them" [Vayikra 10:2], and "I will be sanctified by those close to me" (including not only his son but his son's wife, who was killed several days before her husband, when she came to visit him). But when the evil occurred, the rabbi fulfilled the verse, "He was still," even though his Chassidim wept for "the fire which G-d burned." The Rabbi of Piaschena was the true "Pioneering Rabbi" when it came to personal courage during the Shoah.

When the Winter is Transformed into Summer

by Rabbi Shlomo Schock

"And the stork (chassidah) -- Rabbi Yehuda said, Why is it called chassidah? The reason is that it acts kindly towards its friends." [Rashi, Vayikra 11:19]. As noted in a Chassidic interpretation, the emphasis is that it is kind only to its own colleagues, but anybody who is not from the same group is not considered worthy of receiving any help at all.

I once asked Rabbi Shlomo Karlebach to define a Chassid. He replied that most of the people divide the world into two classes: Chassidim and those who oppose them, Mitnagdim. But, he said, this is a grave error. There are Chassidim who are really Mitnagdim, and there are pseudo-Mitnagdim who are

really Chassidim. If you walk in the street and see a Jew, the question is what aura surrounds him. If you feel that you can turn to him with ease and expect a pleasant response even if he does not know who you are and where you came from, you can rest assured that he is a Chassid. However, if you feel rejected and that his heart is not open to receive you, you should know that he is a Mitnagid-he refuses to join you. He is not a Chassid, he has the traits of a "chassidah." He is only ready to open up to somebody who looks and thinks like he does.

We can achieve the ability to free ourselves from the ropes which bind us to the "chassidah" within us by learning a lesson from the change of season from winter to summer. This can be seen from the following summary I have made from a passage in Rabbi Karelbach's book, "Lev Hashamayim:" "Why do trees stop bearing fruit in the winter? It is because they give up. Nature has given up. It is cold outside, and the trees say: We are not capable. The sun shines now and then and tries to touch a tree, but the tree responds by saying, You are there way above and I am down below- leave me alone. And what is the summer? Suddenly, something happens, and the trees say, No! We will not despair! The moment they abandon their despair, the rejuvenation begins, and fruits begin to appear.

"In the winter, people do not speak to each other. They are locked into their own shells. On the surface everything appears to have died, but underneath, summer is waiting for an opportunity. In the summer, when life is renewed, people open up and begin to talk to each other."

In this season, nature makes an immense effort to teach us that it is possible to bloom and to bear fruit. The branches of our relationships should develop and become intertwined like the branches of two trees that are close to each other. After a full season of growth, the apples can approach even closer, and not only to other apples. The apples are ready to achieve a close approach to anybody who is nearby, even to trees that bear no fruit. In this way, our "chassidah" in the Torah portion will become transformed into one who is really kind, and we will be able to make an honest offer that anybody who is hungry can join us.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aaron, each of them took his censer, and put fire there, and laid incense on it, and offered strange fire before G-d, which He had not commanded them. And there came forth a fire from before G-d, and it devoured them, so that they died before G-d." (Lev. 10:1-2)

In this week's portion of Shmini we read of the week-long consecration of the Sanctuary. The nation is exalted, the leadership is inspired - but suddenly joy

turns to anguish when two sons of Aaron are consumed by a fire sent by G-d.

What possible sin could these two "princes" have committed to occasion such punishment?

The commentaries offer a number of possibilities as to the reason for these untimely deaths. Immediately after the recounting of the event, the Tora forbids Aaron and his sons to carry out their Sanctuary duties under the influence of alcohol.

If a person cannot "... distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean ..." (Lev. 10:10) he doesn't belong in the Ohel Moed (Tent of Meeting). Thus it's not surprising that one Midrash looks upon this injunction as a hint that Nadav and Avihu were inebriated when they brought the incense offering.

Another Midrash explains that Nadav and Avihu so envied Aaron and Moses that they couldn't wait for them to step down. This is the meaning behind the strange fire. They were too ambitious for their own good.

Rabbi Joseph Soloveichik, my rebbe and mentor, has often taught that to grasp how the Sages want us to understand a given Tora portion, we should turn to the Haftara (the prophetic portion) chosen for that week.

Three separate events take place in this week's Haftara, chapters 6 and 7 in Book II of Samuel. The first describes how 30,000 of the nation's chosen join King David on his journey to restore the Holy Ark to Jerusalem, turning the occasion into a parade. The Ark is transported in an oxcart that belongs to the brothers Uzah and Ahio. When the oxen stumble, Uzah reaches out to take hold of the Ark. G-d strikes Uzah dead.

The second takes place three months later, when David again attempts to bring back the Ark. When he arrives triumphant in the city of Zion, he dances with all his might, upsetting his wife, who chastises him: "How did the king of Israel get his honor today, who uncovered himself today in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovers himself?" (II Samuel 6:21)

The third incident records that David decides he wants to build a permanent dwelling for the Ark of G-d rather than allowing it to rest in a curtained enclosure. At first the prophet Nathan is encouraging, but a voice tells him that although David's throne will last forever, only his seed will build the Temple. In the account of the same event recorded elsewhere, the blood that David caused to flow is what keeps him from building a Temple dedicated to peace (I Chronicles 22:8).

All three incidents point to the same theme - that the emotional instincts of the individual have to take a backseat to the commandment of G-d. Uzah certainly did not intend disrespect when he took hold of

the Ark; he acted emotionally, despite the fact that touching the holiest object in existence was forbidden.

King David was overcome with joy, and so he danced wildly before the Ark. Michal understood that the king's honor is not his own but is rather the nation's, and that he should not have compromised his dignity in public. And as to who will build the Temple, King David must be ruled out because of all the blood he spilled. His wars may have been necessary, but every war brings excessive killing, the result of raw emotion and zeal.

What the Haftara reflects back on our portion is that performing a mitzva which G-d didn't command - no matter how inspired or spiritual - invites destruction. Ecstasy, instead of expanding spirituality, can lead to righteous zealotry, to the passionate pursuit of G-d's honor at the expense of tolerance and understanding.

Moreover, too much zeal in ritual can sometimes stop us from seeing the forest for the trees. We get so involved in the small details - important as they may be - that we lose sight of what our real goals ought to be. Nadav and Avihu added to the ritual demanded by G-d, and more is not necessarily better. This lesson is brought home to us by the Midrash on the very beginning of the Bible.

Adam warned Eve not to eat of the fruit nor to touch the tree - the second admonition having been added by Adam himself. The Midrash teaches that the snake pushed Eve against the tree, demonstrating that she could touch it without being hurt. It was thus likely that the other part of Adam's claim was also wrong. Adding to ritual therefore can sometimes have an unholy effect, causing fundamental laws to be denied.

Nadav and Avihu are rare Jews, sons of Aaron, nephews of Moses, privileged to be among the chosen few to have had a vision of G-d's glory at the Sealing of the Covenant. We cannot even begin to comprehend their spiritual heights. Nevertheless they die tragically.

They did what they wanted to do, but not necessarily what G-d wanted them to do.

When people on the level of Nadav and Avihu fail to distinguish between Divine will and human will, the punishment is instant death. The rest of us may not call down divine fire each time we mistake our own will for the will of G-d, but we should realize that confusing the two is playing with fire. © 1994 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

As we sit down on Pesach (Passover) night at the Seder, we make a transition that we wouldn't realize unless we think about it. All day we prepare the food, making sure we don't have Chametz (leavened bread), making sure we have all the Marror (bitter plants) and eggs ready. The unleavened bread is to remind us that we're still poor, the Marror to remind

us of the past exile, and the eggs dipped in salt to remind us that we're still in exile. Then, we start the Seder, and the first thing we say is how this is the "time of our freedom". We continue by telling the story of how we were freed, and we even act like we're kings by leaning when we sit! Are we slaves, or are we free kings?

R' Yerucham of Mir explains that the "time of our freedom" means that not only was it when we were freed from slavery many years ago, but it's the time when we can do the same TODAY! What does that mean? Aren't we free? And if we're not, how does Pesach 'free' us? That's where Pesach, Matzah and Marror come in. Those are the 3 things that remind us, especially when we're feeling like kings, that we were slaves, and that we're still in bitter surroundings. If you think about it, because we were saved from slavery by G-d, we are now indebted to Him, which means that we're still not, and never will be, really free! The point we have to take from all this is that although we're free to do as we wish, it's only worth something when we use that freedom to do something good, and be constructive with our lives. Pesach teaches us that "freedom" used just for the sake of being "free" is pretty "dumb"! © 2006 *Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.*

RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

Moshe said to Aharon, 'Come near to the altar and perform the service of your chatat/sin-offering and your olah/elevation offering and provide atonement for yourself and for the people; then perform the service of the people's offering and provide atonement for them, as Hashem has commanded.'" (9:7)

R' Avraham Zusia Portugal z"l (1898-1982; the "Skulener Rebbe") asks: We know that a chatat provides atonement, but Chazal teach that an olah is primarily a gift to Hashem, not a sin offering. Why, then, does the verse mention the olah between mentioning the chatat and the reference to atonement?

Moreover, the "people's offering" included several different sacrifices, including a shelamim, which certainly is not a sin offering. How then can the Torah say that performing the service of the people's offering will "provide atonement"?

R' Portugal explains: Chazal teach based on Moshe's call at the beginning of our verse ("Come near . . .") that Aharon felt unworthy to serve as the Kohen Gadol. Moshe told him, "Come near! For this you were chosen," i.e., because of this, your humility, you were chosen. The gemara (Sanhedrin 43b) also teaches that humility itself atones for sins just as the sacrifices do. It follows, then, that every sacrifice that Aharon brought, whether it was a chatat, an olah, or a shelamim, atoned for sin, and thus our verse can be understood as written. (Noam Eliezer) © 1999 *Rabbi S. Katz*