

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI ADAM LIEBERMAN

A Life Lesson

G-d tells the Jewish people how they can know whether or not an animal is kosher. G-d said that if an animal has split hooves and brings up its own cud, then it's kosher and can be eaten. However, if any animal has either hooves that aren't split or it doesn't bring up its cud, then the animal isn't kosher and cannot be eaten. Of all the animals in the world, G-d tells the Jews that there's one animal that has split hooves but doesn't chew its own cud. It is: "...the pig, for its hoof is split and its hoof is completely separated, but it does not chew its cud...." (Lev. 11:7)

G-d clearly spells out that in order for an animal to be kosher, it must have both split hooves and chew its own cud. When an animal has split hooves, it appears from the outside-and certainly to all who look at the animal- that it's kosher. But only by knowing what's going on inside can one know for certain if an animal is kosher or not. The pig-the universal symbol of a non-kosher animal-appears to all who look at it that it is in fact a kosher animal. But only by knowing what's happening inside the animal-that it doesn't chew its own cud-can one know that the pig is completely non-kosher. This teaches a very valuable lesson about us. A person could show all of the external signs and traits of being one kind of person, but inside, like the pig, is actually someone completely different.

One of the most important foundations someone needs to have in order for him to feel good about himself and have high self-esteem is to be consistent with who he is both externally and internally. Just like for an animal to be kosher it must have the proper signs on both its outside and inside, we must strive to do the same.

Sadly, people tend to act one way when the world is watching and another way altogether in private. Doing this can never make someone feel good about himself because he's a fake. If you show the world one "you", but are really someone much different, then you can never have a strong self-image or be truly happy.

However, there are times when you should act a little differently than who you normally are. For example, on a first date or job interview your manners might be better than they usually are. But if you present yourself as someone completely different than who you really are, then this is just like the pig. A great sight for

all who look at it, but inside is secretly the exact opposite. Acting better in certain surroundings is fine, but being a completely different person makes you a fraud.

So, which is the real person: the public one or the private one? The lesson that G-d is teaching us is that it's who the person is on the inside-when he or she is outside of public view-that largely determines the real "you." And when you refine the character of that person-the one the outside world rarely sees-then you'll never be living a life of deception. Try for one day to live your entire day as though everything you do-both in public and private-is being shown on a huge screen in Times Square for the whole world to see. And as the inside "you" begins to transform into the outside "you", you'll begin feeling so much happier because you won't be living a life of deceit but rather one of honesty, growth, and truth. © 2007 Rabbi A. Lieberman & aish.com

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The title of this week's parsha takes its name from the description of the events that took place on the eighth day after the dedication and opening of the services of the Mishkan in the desert. The term "eighth day" means more than just the count of the number of days that elapsed since the Mishkan came to life and to service. It signifies the moment that euphoria ends and reality sets in. It marks the beginning of facing problems and finding solutions for them. It also marks the hardships of life, its disappointments and tragedies.

The "seven days" of consecration are a joyful time; the seven days of sheva brachot for chatan and kallah, tiring as they may be, are nevertheless days of exhilaration and happiness. The "eighth day" is the beginning of the intrusion of life's events into our dream world. It is the "eighth day" therefore that is the true measure of a human being's mettle and accomplishments. The challenges of the "seven days" are usually more easily met and overcome by the added adrenalin that infuses us in times of joy. The test of the "eighth day" is one of a lifelong struggle to prevail over the pitfalls and vicissitudes of life and its constant problems. A new-born male Jewish infant is circumcised on the eighth day of his life, signifying the beginning of his struggle to be a good person and a believer in accordance with Jewish tradition, no matter what difficulties that life will raise against those efforts

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and beliefs. The great High Priest Aharon is leveled by terrible personal tragedy in this week's parsha. A sudden and mysterious heavenly fire kills his two eldest sons, apparently engaged in holy service in the Mishkan. Aharon is faced with the ultimate tragedy of life and its fragility. The "eighth day" descends upon him with a thunderous clap.

Even more than all of the other tests of life that he faced in leading the Jewish community yet in slavery in Egypt, or at the fateful moment of the creation of the Golden Calf, the events of the eighth day of the Mishkan's dedication are truly his "eighth day" - the ultimate test of life and faith and belief.

Aharon's reaction to this is silent acceptance of the realities that now face him. He does not rail against perceived injustice, as does Iyov. Nor does he withdraw from the fray of life and go into seclusion, as did many others when faced with similar tragic situations. Aharon becomes the paradigm for how humans are to deal with the "eighth day" - with life and its ups and downs.

Resilience and silent inner strength engendered by faith and acceptance of G-d's will are the weapons of living on in spite of all that the "eighth day" imposes upon one's life. These words are much easier to write and to read than to actually implement. Yet the Torah expects no less from us than it did from Aharon. Life and our contributions and meaningful behavior towards making it better and stronger are always played out on the background of the "eighth day." © 2007 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 HERSHEL SCHACHTER

When do we "Duchen"?

The Torah tells us that on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, the eighth day of inaugurating the Mishkan, Aharon Hakohen was charged with the offering of the special sacrifices. (As opposed to the first seven days, when the special sacrifices were offered by Moshe Rabbeinu.) At the conclusion of Aharon's offering of these korbonos tzibbur Aharon recited the priestly blessings (Vayikra 9:22). (Communal sacrifices, as opposed to korbonos yachid, which are

offered on behalf of an individual person.) The Talmud (Sotah 38a) points out that based on this statement it would appear that the halacha is that duchenin (the mitzvah of reciting birchas kohanim-the priestly blessings) can only be fulfilled at the conclusion of the offering of the korbonos tzibbur.

This Talmudic statement led Rav Yaakov Emden to comment that the fact that we still practice this mitzvah today, even though we have not offered any korbonos, is only *miderabonon*; *Min haTorah*, the mitzvah of duchenin must be connected with korbonos. The Mishna Brura (vol. 2 pg. 19 in footnote) disagrees vehemently with Rav Yaakov Emden, and proves from many sources that even today the mitzvah to duchen is still *min haTorah*. (See also Binyan Shlomo [teshuvos of Rav Shomo Vilner] siman 10.) The Mishna Brura does not, however, deal with the *possuk* cited above.

The solution to this problem was given by two brothers, who were both prominent *geonim* in the nineteenth century, in their respective *seforim*: Rav Yaakov Karliner in his *Teshuvos Mishkenos Yaakov* (Orach Chaim, siman 66) and Rav Yitzchok Bruchin in his *sefer*, *Keren Orah* (Sotah). The Talmudic statement (Berachos 26b) that *Tefilos* (prayers) are considered as if we had offered korbonos is a biblical principal. When an individual davens, it is considered as if he had offered a *korban yachid*. When the *chazzan* recites the *tefillah* out loud representing the entire *tzibbur*, it is considered as if a *korban tzibbur* had been brought. And indeed, it is at the conclusion of the *chazan's* *tefillah* that the *kohanim* fulfill their mitzvah to duchen. Their obligation to duchen at that point is *min haTorah*, since the conclusion of the *chazzan's* prayers is biblically equivalent to the conclusion of the offerings of the korbonos tzibbur!

When we duchen on *yomim tovim*, we all recite the *piyut* "v'se'erav": that Hashem should accept our prayers and consider it as if we had offered actual sacrifices. This *piyut* is inserted in the middle of the *chazzan's* recitation of the *beracha* of *retzei*, which is referred to in the Talmud (Megillah 18a) as "*avodah*", the literal translation of which is "the offering of sacrifices". The *piyut* just makes more explicit the simple meaning of that *beracha*, that our prayers should be considered as if we had actually offered sacrifices. Because it is the theme of this particular *beracha* that makes it possible to fulfill the mitzvah of duchenin, the rabbis required (Sotah 38b) that the *kohanim* must at least begin to go towards the duchen (the platform where they will recite the *birchas kohanim*) by the end of this *beracha*.

Rav Soloveitchik added on (in a *yahrzeit shiur*) that the *beracha* of *retzei* is not simply a repeat of the immediately preceding *beracha* of *shema koleinu*. In *shema koleinu* we ask Hashem to accept our *tefillos*. In *retzei* we add a request that Hashem should accept our prayers as if they were a sacrifice. The term "*ritzui*" is a

technical halachik term appearing most often in Tanach in connection with acceptance of sacrifices. In mishnaic Hebrew as well "hurtzah" means the sacrifice is "kosher" and is accepted; as opposed to "lo hurtzah" which means that the sacrifice is "not kosher", i.e. not acceptable (see Beikvei Hatzon, pg. 82). The gemara (Bearchos 22b) disqualifies one's prayer in a specific instance, and requires that he daven all over, based on the principle of "zevach reshaim to'eivai-the sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination" (Mishlei 21:27). The equation between the tefillah and the offering of the korban is taken very seriously; it was not intended as a mere metaphor. (In Shulchan Aruch [Orach Chaim, end of siman 76] the same halacha appears regarding kriyas shema: we sometimes disqualify one's recital of shema [due to the principle of zevach reshaim to'eivai], and require that shema be repeated. The students who attended the yahrtzeit shiur found it difficult to understand why this principle should be extended even to krias shema, according to the Rav Soloveitchik's understanding of the gemara.) © 2007 Rabbi H. Schachter and TorahWeb.org, all rights reserved

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

One of the most moving ritual experiences of the Jewish week is the havdallah (lit. separation) ceremony, when we intone the sweet -sad melody chanting, "Behold, the Lord of my salvation in Whom I trust and thus I do not fear," as we bid a sorrowful and faithful farewell to the warm comfort of the fleeting Shabbat amidst wine, spice and fire. It is as if the good feeling which emerges from within us as we divide the wine and the sweet smelling fragrance of the spices are necessary refreshment and re-invigoration of our spirits as we are sensing the leave-taking of the Sabbath Queen. And as we intone the blessing over the fire - our Sages teach us that fire was created by Adam on that first, primordial Saturday night - we customarily look at our fingernails. Why our fingernails?

The most rational explanation is that we can see in the reflection of the light on one side of our fingers and not on the other the actual power of light to provide enhanced vision. The early commentary (Rishon) Rabbi Menahem Meiri (citing the Gaonim) suggests that when Adam was first created, his entire body was covered by nails as a kind of protective coat; as a result of his having eaten of the forbidden fruit of knowledge of good and evil, this protective coat was removed - with only the finger-nails remaining as a reminder of his earlier more protected and invincible state. Since we are soon to intone the prayer for the speedy arrival of Elijah the Prophet, herald of redemption, we are in effect requesting a return to the more exalted and guarded human estate in Eden.

I would like to expand on this interpretation, and at the same time attempt to understand the

incomprehensible account of the tragic death of Nadav and Avihu, the two sons of Aaron, the High Priest. Our Biblical portion of Shemini opens, "And it happened on the eighth day..." with Rashi commenting, "the eighth day of the consecration ceremonies of the Sanctuary, the first day of the month of Nissan, the very day on which the Sanctuary was erected..." And it was on this very eighth day - in the midst of the exultant celebration following the descent of a Divinely - sent fire which consumed the offering on the altar as a sign of heavenly acceptance - that Nadav and Avihu were also consumed by a Divine fire! What occasioned such Divine wrath, and what is the significance of the eighth day, which gives the Biblical portion its very name?

The "eight day" is indeed fraught with significance. Let us return to the initial seven days of creation, when the Almighty created the heavens and the earth, and all of their hosts. On the sixth day He created the human being and placed him - Adam together with his wife Eve - in the Garden of Eden. The first couple sinned by plucking the fruit of Knowledge of good and evil from off the tree and eating it, by severing good and evil from its Divine source, thereby subjectivizing morality. The good and the evil, what is good and what is evil, became no longer rooted in G-d and Divine objective morality; good and evil became what the individual human being would think is good for him/her, and or evil for him/her. That is why our mystical literature refers to Adam's sin as his having "severed the plantings" (Kitzet banetiyot), removed the seed from its source. And so Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden.

Then came the first Sabbath Day, the period when each individual can find refuge and comfort under the wings of the Divine Presence, the day when the Almighty especially extends his arms to embrace the penitent. Indeed the Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah) teaches us that Adam recited the Psalm for the Sabbath Day for the first time, genuinely uplifted by the understanding that there truly existed a road back to Eden and that it was paved with stones of repentance and repair. And then came the first Saturday night, the beginning of the first eighth day "This was the first time that darkness began to descend upon the world.... And the Almighty prepared for Adam two flint stones; Adam rubbed them together and there emerged fire...." (Bereishit Rabbah 11,2). Hence the first eighth is parallel to the very first day: on the first day G-d created light (ohr) for the world, and on the eighth day Adam created light and warmth (eish) for the world.

But it is much deeper than that. On the seven days of creation, G-d created a world for the human being to live in; on the eighth day, Adam descended - through fire - how he could repair that world, improve that world, re-create that world as a true picture of the Divine. And if on the primordial seven days of creation, G-d made a world for humanity, on the eighth day of

the consecration of the Sanctuary the Israelites made a Sacred Space - an improved world - in - miniature - in which G-d could dwell together with humanity: "They shall make for a Sanctuary so that I may dwell in their midst." (Exodus Trumah).

Fire is the human response to G-d's light. But fire is a double-edged sword; it can strengthen and purify, or it can subvert and petrify; it can bring light and warmth, or it can bring cannon fire and nuclear destruction. The blessing over fire, which attributes fire to its ultimate Divine source, must remind us that we must serve G-d in accordance with His Divine laws, that we dare not remove our creativity from its Divine direction. To do so would be a repetition of Adam's original sin.

G-d sent down His Divine light and fire as a sign that He accepted our Sanctuary, the work of human hands - which carried out to perfection the Divine architectural directions. Then Nadav and Avihu came along with "a strange fire, which they had not been commanded to bring...." Yes, we must use our creativity in the service of G-d to perfect ourselves and our world - but only in accordance with His will, in accordance with the limits He has placed on Divine Service, so that we never fall into the trap of bringing the strange fires of Moloch (Deut 18:10) and the immoral wars of Jihad. Human hands created fire - but human hands must use that fire to recreate and not to destroy. And so we look at our fingers as we make the blessing over fire every Saturday night, the beginning of our weekly "eighth day." We are telling ourselves that everything - the entire future of our lives and our world - lies in our own hands! © 2007 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**J**udge everyone favorably" (Avos 1:6, Artscroll translation). Sounds very nice, but rather impractical. I mean, can we really judge *everyone* favorably? If someone is known to have a certain weakness, should we still give him the benefit of the doubt when circumstances indicate that he did something wrong? On the other hand, maybe we should have judged all prior situations more favorably, so that we never got to the point of suspecting any weakness in the first place. But how can we protect ourselves from those who would take advantage of us if we are constantly giving everyone the benefit of the doubt?

The Talmud (Shevuos 30a) tells us that the Biblical commandment to "judge your friend with righteousness" (Vayikra 19:15), although speaking to judges regarding how to treat litigants in court cases, is also telling every single Jew, whether a judge or not, to "judge your friend favorably." Not that we have to judge *everyone* favorably, only those that are our "friend," i.e.

fellow Torah observers. This would imply, however, that others (who are not "friends") do not need to be judged favorably. Which is it? Are we supposed to judge everyone favorably, or only our friends?

One of the approaches given by the commentators to resolve this discrepancy is that there is an obligation to judge a "friend" favorably, but only a (non-mandatory) recommendation to give others the benefit of the doubt. According to this, when the Mishna in Avos tells us to judge everyone favorably, it means that we are required to judge some favorably ("friends") and only advised to do so with everyone else (see Chofetz Chayim, Ba'er Mayim Chayim, introduction, positive commandments 3). This is borne out by the Talmud (Shabbos 127b), which tells us that those who give others the benefit of the doubt will be also be given the benefit of the doubt (by G-d).

Nevertheless, the commentators all agree that we are not supposed to give everyone the same benefit of the doubt. Rather, for those who are righteous, even if circumstances indicate that they sinned, we are supposed to assume that they have not (see Shabbos 127b for examples), and if it is clear that they have sinned, we are to assume that they have already repented by the next day (see Berachos 19a). Those who are known to be wicked get treated the exact opposite way; even when they do something that seems to be admirable, we are to assume that they had ulterior motives, or that it wasn't really a good deed. For someone whom we don't know (and therefore can't characterize as either righteous or wicked), or we know to be "in-between" (neither righteous nor wicked, occasionally succumbing to temptation), actions that can be explained in either a positive light or a negative light are supposed to be thought of positively. The mandate (or advice) to judge favorably would not apply to a circumstance that more likely than not indicates an indiscretion (although Rabbeinu Yonah says that if we know them, we should still consider the less-likely "positive" scenario to be a real possibility). Which leaves us with a seemingly obvious question: Why does the Mishna tell us to judge "everybody" favorably if we really aren't supposed to give every single person the benefit of the doubt? Also, the expression usually translated as "everyone," ("kol ha'adam") seems to have an extra "hay." Why does the Mishna add this extra letter, changing the literal translation to either "all the man" or "all of man" (as opposed to "kol adam," which would mean "every man")?

One possibility is that the Mishna is telling us to look at "the whole man" before judging him. Even if he occasionally falters, if we know that he is committed to keeping the Torah (and this isn't an area where he has previously faltered), we should give him the benefit of the doubt. Rather than focusing on the few negatives, by looking at the "whole person," we will be able to assume that this particular instance, which can be

interpreted in either a positive or negative light, was not a misdeed, but part of the "good person" that he really is. However, this would only apply to a person we already know, with the message being that despite his not being "fully righteous" we should judge him favorably. The commentators prime example of whom the Mishna is referring to is someone we are not familiar with at all, where there is no "greater picture" to take into consideration when judging this particular circumstance. So how could the Mishna imply that we should judge *everybody* favorably if it is primarily (or at least also) referring to a case where someone we don't really know does something that can equally interpreted as either good or bad?

I would therefore like to suggest that the Mishna's intent is that we should judge all of *mankind* favorably. He is not recommending that we judge every single person favorably (as this is not true), but that we maintain a positive outlook on humanity as a whole. If we have a cynical view of people in general, then seeing a stranger do something that might be negative would automatically be assumed to be so. If, however, we have a generally positive view of humanity, we will give this person, whom we don't even know, the benefit of the doubt. (It is also probably true that by having an overall favorable view of people, seeing someone we know do something that could be interpreted more than one way will be viewed positively as well.)

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Perachya, whose insight is being taught in our Mishna, is making recommendations to facilitate proper relationships with our fellow man. "Make for yourself a mentor" who can teach you every step of the way, "acquire for yourself a friend" so that you can assist each other, and "judge mankind favorably," so that you do not lose faith in humanity, thereby distancing yourself from others and preventing you from maintaining and building future relationships. Not that we must give everyone the benefit of the doubt every time, but that we should view people, as a whole, in a positive light. © 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion

A familiar question is why the Torah forbids us to eat certain types of animals, as described at length in this week's Torah portion (Vayikra, Chapter 11). On one hand, the words of the sages are well known: "No man should say, I am disgusted by wearing shaatnez (mixed types of cloth) or by eating the flesh of a pig... Rather, I would like to do it, but what can I do now that My Father in Heaven has forbid it to me?" [Sifra, Kedoshim 10]. This implies that the prohibitions are not based on a rational reason, and they should be viewed as an expression of a Divine decree. Thus, observing the prohibitions is a way of

accepting the yoke of G-d. On the other hand, early commentators did give reasons for these laws, and as time went on many people have expanded the original concepts in various ways. Some give reasons based on physical factors, such as the Rashbam in this week's Torah portion: "According to the simple reading of the passage and the replies we give to apostates, all the cattle, animals, birds, fish, and vermin that G-d has forbidden Bnei Yisrael to eat are repulsive, and they cause harm to the body. And that is the reason that they are called impure. And even prominent physicians affirm this, as is reiterated in the Talmud: 'Gentiles who eat vermin develop heat in their bodies' [Avoda Zara 31b]." [Rashbam, Vayikra 11:3]. Others put the emphasis on spiritual elements, such as the well known words of the Ramban: "Behold, the reason for the prohibition of the birds is because of the cruelty of their children, and for animals the reason might be that those who chew their cuds do not attack other animals, while those who do not chew their cud prey on others." [11:13].

A deeper look into Chapter 11 of the portion might lead us to conclude that the two main approaches outlined above are relevant for two different kinds of prohibition. With respect to most of the prohibitions, the Torah uses the term "sheketz"? abomination. This is true for fish, "They are abominable for you, do not eat their flesh and stay away from their dead bodies" [11:11]. It is also true for birds, "Keep these as abominations from among the birds" [11:13]. And it is also true for vermin, "All vermin that crawl on the earth are abominable, do not eat them" [11:41]. This term denotes something that is despicable and disgusting, stemming from a basic feeling that can be expected to occur in all mankind, for the reasons noted above, among others, all based on a reasonable human reaction. However, while this root? shin, kuf, tzadit? is often repeated in this chapter (eleven times!), it does not appear in the discussion of wild animals at the beginning of the passage. This implies that there is a different reason for the prohibition of eating the animals. They were not forbidden because they are disgusting but as a way of showing our respect for Divine commands? as quoted above from the Sifra: I would like to eat their flesh, but Our Father in Heaven commanded us not to do so.

This also explains the double ending of the passage. First is a reference to the forbidden disgusting foods. "Do not make your souls despicable with the vermin that crawls... for I am your G-d, and you shall sanctify yourselves, and you will be holy" [11:43-44]. Next is a reference to prohibitions whose purpose is to accept the Divine commands. "For I am G-d, who took you up out of Egypt, to be your G-d... To distinguish between the pure and the impure, and between the animal which can be eaten and the animal which may not be eaten" 11:45-47]. That is, the main point is the

act of separation, even if the animal itself does not have any despicable characteristics.

The Last World War

by Chazi Raz, Principal of Midreshet Ami'ad, Jerusalem

The Midrash brings a wondrous description of the meal of the righteous people in the distant future. At the time, the Almighty causes a great battle to take place between the Shor Habar and the Leviatan. The Shor, a great wild ox, tears the Leviatan with its horns, and the Leviatan in turn slaughters the ox by giving it a great blow with its fins, and both of them fall down defeated. From their flesh, the Almighty then prepares a feast for the righteous people in the world to come. All those who did not eat flesh that was not kosher in this world can participate in this feast.

What is the meaning of this great "War of the Animals?" Why is the final reward participation in a meal, in eating? And why is the ox slaughtered in this strange way? The Shor Habar in the parables of the Midrash represents powerful and strong physical forces (Yosef), while the Leviatan is a symbol of deep and mystic forces of the spirit (Yehuda).

In the distant future, near the time of redemption, a great battle will take place between the forces of holiness and those of nature. As Rabbi Kook explained, this will be a battle between the holy forces which appear to oppress nature and between nature, which seems to be strangled by the holiness. This tremendous battle can be seen in the social life in the generation of redemption. People of "nature" feel that the holy approach strangles every spark of life and pleasure, while the people of restricted "holiness" feel that nature is the stark enemy of all their desires. In the middle ground, the people of the generation of redemption feel a frustrating duality. Their hearts are pulled to both sides at once, and they cannot feel satisfaction with any partial and torn reality.

The solution to this problem lies in a meeting between sanctity and the exalted truth. And this is revealed in Eretz Yisrael. This holiness does not oppress nature and life, rather it gives them greater strength and reveals that in the depths of the demands on them lies an experience of purity and a demand for the highest level of sanctity. The collapse of the partial approaches will lead to a great meal, where it will be revealed that the act of eating can be holy and exalted, since it shows the desire of the Almighty to do good for His creatures.

The passage of the forbidden food reflects this concept, for the sages have taught us, "for everything that the Almighty has forbidden to us, He has also given us permission to eat a similar thing. Blood is forbidden, but we are allowed to eat liver..." [Chulin 109b]. The purpose of the prohibitions of the Torah is not to limit the force of life but rather to give them life and to add spice to them.

The mission of educators in our generation is to hear the cries of the youth- the pain of nature that is being pressed and is choking under partial holiness and the suffering of the sanctity that is struck by life? and to reveal the highest level of holiness, which enriches life and gives it strength. In this way, they will be able to guide the youth to achieve their complete and pure goal.

RABBI LABEL LAM

Dvar Torah

“**T**he sons of Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, each took his fire-pan, they put fire in them and placed incense upon it; and they brought before HASHEM an alien fire that He had not commanded them. A fire came forth from before HASHEM and consumed them, and they died before HASHEM.” (Vayikra 10: 1-2)

"Do not make your souls abominable by means of any of creeping thing; you shall not make yourselves impure through them lest you make yourselves impure though them." (Vayikra 11:43)

"Lest you make yourselves impure through them': If you make yourselves impure through them on earth so I too will make you impure in the World to Come, in the Heavenly Yeshiva." (Rashi)

There are two major themes discussed in Shemini. One has to do with the inauguration of the Tabernacle which tragically concluded with the death of the two sons of Aaron. The other has to do with forbidden foods. What do these seeming strangers have in common? Why are they packaged together?

"Antoninus said to Rabbi: The body and the soul have an alibi to free themselves from punishment on the Judgment Day. How so? The body can claim, 'The soul is the one that sinned. From the time it left me, I have been lying silent like a rock in the grave.' And the soul can say, 'It is the body that has sinned. From the day that I left it I have been flying in the air like a bird.' Rabbi answered, 'Allow me to offer a parable. To what can this be compared? To a king who had a beautiful orchard that contained luscious figs and he posted in it two guards, one lame and the other blind. Said the lame one to the blind one, 'I see luscious fruits in the orchard. Come, put me on your shoulders, and together we will pick the figs and eat them.' The lame one climbed on the blind one's back, and they picked the figs and ate them. A while later the king, the owner of the orchard found that his figs were gone.

"He said to the guards, 'What happened to my luscious figs?' Said the lame one, 'Do I have feet to take me to the fig trees?' Said the blind one, 'Do I have eyes to see where the figs are?' What did the owner do? He placed the lame one on the shoulders of the blind one, and judged them together. So too, on the Day of Judgment, the Holy One Blessed Be He, brings the soul and puts it back into the body and judges them

jointly. As it says (Tehillim 50:4) 'He will summon the heavens above and the earth, for the trial of His people.' 'He will summon the heavens above'-this refers to the soul, 'and the earth for a trial of His people'-this refers to the body." (Tractate Sanhedrin 91B)

A fundamental question arises from this parable of Rebbe, "Who am I?" Am I my soul? Apparently not! Am I my body? Certainly not! Here we must employ the old Venn-diagram with one circle above overlapping with a circle below. Above is the soul. Below is the body. Together, the overlapping combination of the two produces the actual "I"-the chooser.

Nadav and Avihu rushed in where angels fear to tread driven by an overpowering spiritual lure. It proved deadly. They did what they were not commanded to do and their souls departed as a result. This is a sort of "Frum Yetzer", a compelling spiritual zeal that could be destructive if left to its own devices. A soul needs a body. By the end of our reading this week, we are made to face the realities of living with a body, the lower end of the human spectrum with which we are more likely to be familiar.

Since we are composed of often opposing and many times even warring factions, only with the discipline of a Divine Law with sensitivity to both, can one hope to negotiate and create peace between those heavenly and earthy tendencies! We are cautioned, therefore, in the end not to forget about the delicate and refined nature of the souls we bear as we navigate the physical universe, battling the lowest of urges, and so only together, in a kind of holy collaboration, might we be whole. © 2007 Rabbi L. Lam & Project Genesis, Inc.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The Torah in this week's Parsha mandates that for animals to be kosher they must possess two characteristics-cloven hooves and chew the cud. (Leviticus 11:3) In contemporary times there is much ado about the impact of food on physical health. My doctors keep telling me for example, to keep the fat and cholesterol down. Is it possible that food could similarly impact on one's spiritual well-being? This in fact is the position of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in his explanation of kashrut (the dietary laws).

The characteristics of kosher animals point to their being more passive in nature. In Hirsch's words: "If we look at the signs for clean animals they appear plant-like. As they chew the cud, the food consumed passes through two stomachs, is driven up the gullet again and chewed for the second time. Thus, these animals spend a great deal of time in the absorption of food. The cloven hooves of the permitted animals also seem to have been created more for the mere purpose of standing than for being used as weapons or tools."

The same is true concerning fish. To be kosher, fish must have fins and scales. (Leviticus 11:9) Not coincidentally, fish that have these characteristics are by and large more peaceful in nature. The more aggressive fish fall into the category of the prohibited. Moreover, birds of prey are by and large enjoined. The rule holds fast. The more aggressive animals and fowl are prohibited. The more passive are permitted.

Of course, not everyone who consumes kosher food leads lives of inner peace. There are troubled people who eat kosher, just as there are fine people who do not eat kosher. Nonetheless, the ritual of kashrut may help us become more conscious of our responsibilities to live ethical lives.

The balance between outer action and inner feelings is especially discernible in the laws of forbidden and permitted animals. Note, that chewing the cud is an internal characteristic as it deals with the inner digestive system. In contrast, cloven hooves are an external characteristic. One merely has to look at an animal's foot to detect whether this criteria has been met. Perhaps, just perhaps this teaches that to be kosher one's behavior must not only be correct, but inwardly pure.

Whether these rationales are satisfactory or not, the prohibited foods teach us discipline. They remind us that in the end, G-d is the arbiter of right and wrong. Notwithstanding, the kashrut laws carry powerful ethical lessons-lessons that can help ennoble and sanctify our lives. © 2007 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.

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A Day Too Late

by Rabbi Nathan Lopes Cardozo

As has been explained by numerous commentators and philosophers, the biblical commandment to count 49 days (Leviticus 23:15) between Passover and Shavuot (Pentecost), is to encourage man not just to count these days but to use this time to take account of himself and to introspect. The Exodus from Egypt, which is the beginning of our forefathers' first encounter with liberty and its culmination with the giving of the Torah, the law of moral freedom, at Mount Sinai, should become ingrained in our personalities, inspiring a constant elevation of our very being. The purpose of the period between these two festivals is therefore to re-enact and relive these sublime moments so as to become elevated.

It is a major tragedy when Jews start to believe that these festivals are given just to remember what happened thousands of years ago. Instead, they should utilize these festivals to realize that the goal is not just to perform but above all to transform.

Nothing is more dangerous for man than to stay spiritually stale. It is for this reason than one is required to count the 49 days of the Omer. To prepare ourselves for the upcoming celebration on Shavuos of the giving of the Torah we are asked to climb a ladder of 49 spiritual rungs in which each day will add another dimension to our souls. Commentators are therefore surprised to notice that the actual counting of the Omer starts on the second day of Passover and not on the first (ibid.) If the purpose of the counting is indeed to reenact the whole historical period between Passover and Shavuos why not start on the same day that the Exodus took place which was also the first day in which Jews started their journey to moral freedom? Why only start counting on the second day when in fact this period of transformation started one day earlier?

Carefully examining the condition of the Jews on the day of the actual Exodus (the first day of Passover) we become aware of a strange phenomenon. It is the astonishing passivity of the Jews that stands out. There is no action whatsoever and no initiative. Jews were told to stay inside their homes, and simply wait for Moses to give the sign to start leaving Egypt. There are no planned confrontations with the Egyptians, no speeches of national revival, no demonstrations, but only silence, absolute quiet and a spirit of inert waiting. Only after Moses calls on the Jews to move is there motion, and the Jews humbly leave Egypt.

What becomes increasingly clear is that it is only G-d who acts on this day. There is no human initiative. It is solely G-d who takes them out, and it is He who leads the way. It is a moment where there cannot be any misunderstanding about who is calling the shots. It is the day of G-d's unfathomable strength. While man stays utterly passive, it is G-d "who steals the show" and gives evidence of His absolute sovereignty. The only thing man is asked to do is to follow like a slave follows his master. G-d's protection is impervious.

But once they have left the borders of Egypt, we see a radical change. Suddenly the Israelites wake up from their imposed passivity and realize that they had better start preparing for a long road through the desert. It is now that they need to show courage and patience. The earlier divine protection is no longer watertight. Only a few days on the road, the Israelites learn that Pharaoh and his army are approaching with the intent to take revenge. He wants the Jews back home and if necessary will use all the forces at his disposal to accomplish this goal. Why, the Israelites must have wondered, does G-d not make sure that Pharaoh stays home? Yesterday he did not make any noise; he didn't even attempt to stop them from leaving! They even ask Moses why they have to die in the desert (Exodus 14:11). It all looked so great on that first day of the Exodus! Everything was taken care of. G-d's

protection was complete and without deficiency. So why not continue this most comfortable situation?

Indeed, on the second day, it is no longer G-d who pulls all the strings. It is as if G-d has decided to move into the background, and man will have to become more active. Only after a lot of complaining and fervent prayers He is prepared to step in and provide them with a basic protection and decides to split the Sea of Reeds. Could G-d not have split the sea a little earlier to save the Jews unnecessary anguish?! Why not let things continue like the day before when everything was under control and nearly a messianic condition was prevailing?

The point is clear: It is man who has to carry his own responsibility. The option of sitting in one's armchair and passively relying on G-d and His benevolence does not exist. Man is brought into the world to take moral action, to grow spiritually and dignify himself through hardship and struggle. It is the desert that functions as the classroom where Jews learn to become a light to the nations and set a moral example. This is the purpose of life, and this is its condition.

But why, then, did He first create a day that resembled paradise only to plunge them the next day into worries and feelings of insecurity? Because without the knowledge and the experience that ultimately G-d is in total power, their obligation to be morally responsible would stand on quicksand. Why be moral when there is no unshakable foundation on which this morality depends? Man first has to learn that there is a purpose to his struggle for moral behavior, not just a utilitarian one, but, above all, an existential one. He first has to be convinced that there is more to life than meets the eye. First it has to become clear that G-d and only G-d is the ultimate source of everything. At such a moment, man has to stand in awe, overwhelmed by the grandeur of G-d's infinite power. Man needs to become completely powerless before he is able to take action and become responsible. Because of this, the real struggle for moral liberty started the day after the Exodus from Egypt. The first day was a given. It was the day of G-d and not of man. It was the day of passivity and complete surrender. Only the next day the spiritual labor of man started. It is consequently the first day of his spiritual elevation.

It is for this reason that throughout all the generations we first have to learn what G-d's power is all about and that is what we celebrate on the first day of Passover and specifically when reading the Hagada. Only after we are totally overpowered by G-d's absolute omnipotence and spend a day in contemplative awe, are we able to take moral action on the second day.

This, we believe, is the reason why the counting of the Omer only starts on the second day. The first day does not count. © 2007 Rabbi N.L. Cardozo & www.jewishworldreview.com