

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI BARUCH LEFF**

### Kol Yaakov

**F**or many weeks now, we have been reading in Exodus of the Tabernacle's construction. And what a beautiful Tabernacle it was. We have studied its majestic beauty and wondrous architecture in great detail.

Yet, much to our surprise and initial dismay, we learn this week as we begin Leviticus, that the main function of this Tabernacle was to spill blood and to sacrifice animals. Our modern minds have great difficulty with this seeming primitive practice. How are we to relate to blood and sacrifices without dismissing it? After all, it is quite a significant portion of G-d's Torah, His Instructions for Living. We can't simply write it off as something that is no longer relevant to us because all of Torah is eternal. What's behind the emphasis on blood?

In addition to the Torah's general fascination with the blood of the sacrifices in this week's Torah portion, we also see its central importance to a close relationship with G-d. The very first Rashi comments on "VaYikra-And He called": "Calling (Moshe by name) preceded every statement or command (that G-d said to Moshe). The use of 'vayikra-calling' shows affection."

The obvious question is: If indeed G-d called Moshe by name every time He spoke to him throughout the Torah, why is it only mentioned in the beginning of Leviticus?

The compelling answer must be that whatever is about to be discussed in Leviticus is most appropriate for this concept of affection. That is why calling Moshe by name, a sign of endearment, is only discussed here because somehow the subject of blood and sacrifices is most endearing to G-d.

So we must not only explain why the Torah is preoccupied with blood, but also why the service of blood is most endearing to G-d. This will also elucidate an age-old custom to begin a child's Torah education with Leviticus. Somehow we sense that the concept of sacrifices and blood is such an integral part of Judaism that we build the foundation of our children's education upon it. Why?

(It is important to point out that whenever we attempt to offer a "reason" for a commandment, we are never actually giving THE reason. Since G-d is infinite, He has infinite reasons for His commandments. Rather,

offering reasons for commandments is merely a method through which we can derive practical benefits from the mitzvah. The Hebrew word for reason is "ta'am" which also means taste. We get a "taste" for the mitzvah by offering reasons, realizing at the same time that our reasons are not reasons in the true sense of the word. A commandment from G-d is applicable at all times and for all generations. Therefore if a "reason" offered for a mitzvah no longer applies, the mitzvah applies nonetheless due to G-d's infinite reasons for observing it, which will always apply.)

It's all about having a realistic view of who we are as human beings. Some religions and spiritual philosophies preach that in order to become holy you must transcend the physical world. The human body with its base desires is just a distraction from pure and intelligent, sophisticated growth. Therefore, it is not important to involve oneself in regulating physical activity. Rather, you should spend effort honing your thoughts, emotions, and feelings. Deal with the mind and not with the body.

These philosophies poke fun at the Torah with its emphasis on the minutia of what foods you can and can't eat, and when you can or can't turn on lights, etc. They say that the Torah is a "kitchen religion" and not appropriate for an educated, moral individual.

History has shown, however, that such an "intellect-only" approach does not produce morality. In fact, by repressing the body and not allowing the body to become sanctified through spiritual regulation, those who claim to be moral can end up performing ultimate evil. Ian Kershaw's book, "Hitler 1889-1936 Hubris" describes how much Hitler, may his memory be erased, loved the symphonies of Wagner as a spiritual, sophisticated and cultured person. Kershaw also shows a picture of Hitler carefully feeding deer as a moral and concerned animal lover. Yet, this so-called moral sophisticate perpetrated genocide of mammoth proportions.

This is what the blood in the Temple represents. We might be under the impression that when coming close to G-d in His Temple we should only think lofty, spiritual, and other-worldly thoughts while ignoring the physical body. Therefore, the Torah deals in blood. We must recognize that the blood, the physical body and life force, also must be used as part of one's spirituality. The soul is not trapped in the evil body. We don't castigate the body or its drives. The

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Torah tells us that the body is a necessary component in coming close to G-d and gives us directives, through the commandments, as to how to utilize the body's spirituality.

G-d does not say that we should never engage in sexual activity. Rather, He informs us of the holy and proper basis of such activity called marriage. (The very word for marriage, kiddushin, means holiness.) G-d does not tell us that we can never indulge in eating meat, that we must be a vegetarian in order to be holy, as some philosophies do. Rather, He regulates our "meat intake" with the types of meat we should eat. And so on and so forth for all of Torah. We do not run away from our bodies. We sanctify them.

These ideas also explain why we believe in the reward of the resurrection of the soul with the body. After death, the soul ascends heavenward while the body is buried in earth. At the end of time, we believe that body and soul will be reunited to receive eternal reward. This clearly demonstrates that we value the body as part of our spirituality; otherwise G-d wouldn't send the soul to return to a prison in the body as an eternal reward.

As the Talmud (Sanhedrin 91b) describes, the relationship of body and soul can be compared to a relationship between a blind man and a lame man who are partners in crime. An orchard owner hired them to watch his orchard but forbade them from eating any fruit. Shortly thereafter, the watchmen couldn't resist. The blind man put the lame man on his shoulders and together they were able to take some fruit. The owner returned furious that they had taken his fruit.

The blind man said, "It couldn't have been me. I can't see!"

The lame man said, "It couldn't have been me. I can't walk!"

Whereupon the smart orchard owner placed the lame man on the blind man's shoulders and punished them together.

A soul cannot sin alone. A body cannot be kind alone. Reward and punishment can only apply to an entity that is the entire person, the body and soul together. Only the body and soul together has free will and is an image of G-d.

We ignore the spirituality of the body at our own peril. If we repress the body and not actualize its

holiness, we may distort what true morality is and end up like other so-called "holy," cultured men.

So our focus on blood in Leviticus is not savage or primitive. It's simply the way to get in touch with who we truly are as physical, holy, bodily human beings. © 2007 Rabbi B. Leff & aish.com

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

**A**lthough the word "korbon" is usually translated as an "offering," the literal translation (with the root "Kuf-Raish-Bais") would be more like "something that brings things closer." An individual brings a "korbon" to the Creator in order to get closer to Him, whether it is a voluntary offering or a sin offering. In the latter instance, the "korbon" is designed to repair the relationship, bringing one closer to G-d after having moved away from Him. It is therefore appropriate that after describing the various sin-offerings, the Torah says, "and the Kohain (priest) [by bringing the offering on behalf of the sinner] will atone for him, and he will be forgiven" (Vayikra 4:31 as well as after the other sin-offerings).

Despite this statement of atonement/forgiveness being stated ten times in our Parasha, only once (the 8th instance) is the type of offering brought to attain this forgiveness included. Three sins require an "asham" sin offering rather than a "chatus," one who inadvertently uses Temple property for personal use ("ma'eela"), one who is unsure whether a sin was actually committed, and one who takes something that doesn't belong to them and lies about it under oath. In the first case, after telling us that a ram is brought as the sin offering and that the perpetrator must pay the damages to the Temple property (plus a fifth), the Torah concludes by telling us, "and the Kohain will atone for him with the ram of the ashram, and he will be forgiven" (5:16). Why did the Torah repeat the type of offering ("the ram of the ashram") here, when it doesn't do so in any of the other 9 times when atonement/forgiveness is achieved?

The Talmud (Bava Kama 111a) addresses the issue, learning out from these "extra" words that you need to both bring the offering (the "ram") and pay for the damage (the "ashram") in order to receive atonement (but not the extra "fifth"). Additionally, even though most Temple property once it has been used personally no longer has the status that would make another using it also bring an offering (i.e. "ma'eela" can only occur once on the same item), using Temple property that is actually used in the service (such as the "ram") is subject to "ma'eela" over and over again (Ma'eela 19b). Nevertheless, by looking at several other anomalies regarding the description of the "ashram" offerings, we may be able to suggest an additional explanation for why the Torah mentioned the

offering in the atonement/forgiveness (using peshat rather than derash).

Besides repaying the damage plus a fifth when using Temple property, one who takes what doesn't belong to him and then denies it under oath must also pay back what was stolen plus an additional fifth, along with bring a ram as an offering. However, whereas in the former case the Torah first describes the offering (5:15) before the payment (5:16), in the latter case the Torah first describes the repayment (5:24) before telling us about the offering (5:25). It would seem that this change in order is directly related to who the "victim" was. When property was improperly taken from someone else, the Torah tells us that we must first repay what was taken before we can attempt to achieve atonement for the sin through the offering. When it was G-d's property that was violated, on the other hand, the offering is the key to repairing the relationship with the owner (G-d), so is mentioned first (even if the actual payment must precede the offering).

This can be extended to explain nuances in the description of the atonement. After the lying thief pays the victim back and brings the offering, the Torah says, "and the Kohain will atone for him before G-d, and he will be forgiven" (5:26). The extra "before G-d" can be said to refer to the fact that the Kohain can only help repair the relationship with G-d (through the offering). The relationship with the human victim must be worked on independently of the offering. Similarly, when the offering brought to achieve atonement for not even knowing whether a sin was committed is described, the Torah adds that "the Kohain will atone for him for his inadvertent error that he committed and did not know of, and he will be forgiven" (5:18). These additional words indicate that the "asham" offering only atones for his not knowing whether or not he sinned. If he ever verifies that he actually did commit the (inadvertent) sin, he must bring another sin offering (a "chatus"). It would follow, then, the extra "with the ram of the ashram" by "ma'eela" would also relate to the nature of the atonement.

If one purposely uses Temple property for personal use, besides paying for any damage, he gets 39 lashes (Rambam, Hilchos Ma'eela 1:3). It is only if the personal use was done inadvertently that the "korbon ashram" is brought. The seriousness of the inadvertent use stems from the fact that the person was so lackadaisical around Temple property. Instead of being cognizant of it's presence and making sure to be extra careful around it, the fact that he could use it inadvertently shows a lack of respect and awe of its holiness. It is this issue that needs to be atoned for, not (just) the damage caused to the property itself.

Lest one overlook the real problem here (the mistreatment of Temple property by not being mindful of it, rather than its mistreatment through the personal usage), the Torah goes a step further than just

mentioning the "korbon" before the payment for the damages. When telling us that we can achieve forgiveness, it tells us that the main component of the atonement is not the monetary compensation, but the "ram of the ashram." Through it, the damage caused in the relationship with G-d can be repaired, bringing with it the necessary trepidation that can prevent any further inadvertent misuse. © 2007 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### MACHON ZOMET

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak, Yeshivat Har Etzion

The second chapter of this week's Torah portion discusses the Mincha sacrifice, which is derived from a plant, and describes various categories: fine flour, baked in an oven, fried in a pan, and cooked in a deep pot. Several verses appear which serve as a summary of the subject of the Mincha: "Every Mincha which you offer to G-d shall not be chametz... and to all your Mincha sacrifices you shall add salt..." [Vayikra 2:11-13]. But this is then followed by the description of a new type of sacrifice: "And if you bring a Mincha of Bikurim to G-d, you shall offer it from ripe grain, roasted in a flame, from plump kernels" [2:14]. It is not hard to see why this type of Mincha is added on to the passage about the Mincha in general, since it is different from all the rest, which consist of finely ground flour. As noted in the verse, the Mincha of Bikurim? the first fruit-is not flour but kernels, as individual seeds and not ground into flour. What is the meaning of this special Mincha, why is it different from all the others?

The sages and most of the commentators explain that this added verse refers to the Omer sacrifice, which is described later on as part of the laws of the holidays. "When you come to the land which I give to you and you reap the harvest, you shall bring an Omer, the first of your harvest, to the Kohen. And he will lift up the Omer before G-d, according to your wishes. Let the Kohen lift it up on the day after Shabbat." [23:10-11]. However, identifying the Mincha of Bikurim as the Omer presents several difficulties. First of all, the Omer sacrifice is an obligation, while the above verse about the Mincha of Bikurim implies that it is referring to a voluntary contribution: "And if you bring a Mincha of Bikurim to G-d..." It is not easy to accept Rashi's explanation that the word "if" in this case really means an obligation. In addition, the description of the Mincha of Bikurim includes a physical sacrifice, burned on the Altar, while the only action explicitly mentioned in the passage of the Omer is to lift it up as part of a ritual!

Thus, the straightforward interpretation would seem to be that of Ibn Ezra, who writes that the Mincha of Bikurim is not the Omer, which is a public sacrifice. Evidently this refers to a different type of sacrifice, given on a voluntary basis by an individual, a sacrifice of the first fruits. Aside from the public obligations, such

as the Omer and the Two Breads brought on Shavuot, each individual is also required to make contributions from his produce. This is especially true with respect to the first agricultural products: a man must bring the first fruits to the Temple (Devarim 26:1-11), he must contribute "chalah," from the "first of your dough" [Bamidbar 15:21], and he is required to give the Kohen the first grains, olive oil, grape juice, and the first wool from his sheep (Devarim 19:4). These obligations correspond to the need for a man to recognize the fact that it is G-d who gives him the opportunity to become wealthy. But in addition to the obligations, one can also give a voluntary contribution, as a way of expressing his feeling of thanks to G-d. This can be done by giving a Mincha of Bikurim. In this case, the Torah has created a special path, a Mincha that is closer than usual to the natural form of the grain. It is not ground into fine flour, as a way of symbolizing the essence of this sacrifice, as a method of giving thanks for man's ability to enjoy the fruits of his own labors.

#### **RABBI DOVID SIEGEL**

### **Haftarah**

**T**his week's haftarah displays Hashem's unbelievable compassion for the Jewish people.

The prophet Yeshaya begins by characterizing the Jewish people as the nation created to sing the praises of Hashem. Yeshaya continues and says in the name of Hashem, (43:22) "And you didn't even include Me for you were too tired for My service." The Yalkut Shimoni (as loc) explains this passage to refer to our inappropriate attitude towards the service of Hashem.

Chazal (our Sages) say that one exerts enormous energies throughout the day in pursuit of self advancement and yet he is unwilling to exert even minimal energy for the sake of Hashem. One returns home after a long tiresome day at work and neglects attending davening with the "valid" excuse that he's too tired. Hashem says that I wasn't even included in your plans. Energies were available for everything besides My service, the purpose for which you were created.

The prophet continues to reprimand the Jewish people, and says, "You did not bring Me your sheep for burnt offerings and you didn't honor Me with your sacrifices. I didn't overwork you with a meal offering and didn't exhaust you with frankincense spice." Chazal (ibid) elaborated on this passage and explained that all Hashem ever demanded from the Jewish people on a daily basis was the Tamid sacrifice consisting of two sheep. In fact, even the easiest of all offerings, the meal offering was not an obligation but rather a special opportunity to serve Hashem if one so desired. And yet the Jewish people refused to participate in these services. The Radak (ad loc) notes that in the days of King Achaz there were altars in every corner of Yerushalayim for the purpose of idolatry. But the Bais Hamikdash doors were intentionally closed and

Hashem was totally excluded from the Jewish services. The Jews were just too tired to serve Hashem although energy was available for every other form of service.

The prophet suddenly shifts gears and begins to address the Jewish people with love and affection. He says, (42:1) "And listen now, My servant Yaakov whom I chose as Yisroel...for as I pour water on the thirsty and flowing waters on the dry land so will I pour My spirit on your children and My blessing on your offspring." Radak (ad loc) explains that the prophet is now speaking to the Jewish people in Babylonia. They had already suffered severe pains of exile and rejection by Hashem and had now reconsidered their previous ways. They thirsted to drink from the long lost waters of prophecy which had ended many years before. Hashem told them that they would once again merit the word of Hashem. Although they had turned their back to Hashem and totally rejected His service Hashem did not forsake His people. The Jewish people would always remain His chosen nation and Hashem would patiently await their return. Our eternal relationship with Hashem can never be severed or even affected and when the proper moment will arrive Hashem will reestablish direct contact with His beloved people. Even words of prophecy coming directly from Hashem will become a daily experience. Hashem's love for His people extends all bounds. Even after all we have done against Hashem He remains right there waiting for us.

Yeshaya concludes and says (44:22) "As the wind blows away the clouds so will I erase your rebellious acts and unintentional sins, return to me for I have redeemed you." The Malbim (ad loc) shares with us a beautiful insight and explains that as far as Hashem is concerned our redemption already happened. From His perspective everything has been set in motion; all that remains is for us to repent and return. May we merit in this month, the month of redemption, the fulfillment of these beautiful visions.

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#### **RABBI ADAM LIEBERMAN**

### **A Life Lesson**

**I**n this week's Torah Portion, G-d tells Moses the procedures the Jewish people must follow if they commit sin. And if: "... the entire assembly of Israel shall err... the elders... shall lean their hands upon the head of the bull before G-d..." (Lev. 4:13-15)

If the Jewish nation as a whole commits a sin, the atonement for their actions falls primarily on their leaders. Why is it that the leaders have to make amends for a sin that they never committed? The reason is that oftentimes people in a position of authority believe that one set of ethics applies to them, while there's another set of rules for those that they're leading. But G-d tells us that if leaders feel this way, they miss the mark of what it means to be a leader.

In the real world, those in any "organization" will always follow the example of those who are in charge. Children pick up all the habits-good and bad-of their parents, employees pick up the behavior of their bosses, and the Jewish people followed the example of those who led them. And when the Jewish people erred, G-d knew that their behavior was a direct result of the actions being done by those who were leading them. If the people sinned, it was in large part due to the environment that was created by the elders that allowed the sin to foster.

In our own lives, we all play some sort of leadership role. And the behavior of those we lead will always be a direct result of our own behavior. If a child answers the telephone and is told by his parent who is standing right next to him to tell the caller he isn't home, the child then internalizes this behavior. So when the parent tells this child the following week that he or she should never tell a lie, the child now faces a serious internal conflict. On one hand, he wants to listen to his parent. But, on the other hand he also wants to emulate the actions of his parent whom he respects. Does he listen to what he says, or do as he does?

G-d tells us that people will usually follow actions they see over the words they hear-and this is why the elders had to bring an atonement when the Jewish people committed a sin. G-d tells us that the reason the people sinned was that the breeding ground for the negative behavior already existed.

People will follow what you do over what you say. If you want to instill a certain type of behavior in others, then create the environment for it to happen. Not by declarations, but by embracing and living the desired behavior yourself. © 2007 Rabbi A. Lieberman & aish.com

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER**

### **Weekly Dvar**

**T**he very first Passuk in Sefer Vayikra (Leviticus) describes G-d calling Moshe to tell him about all the different offerings that needed to be brought, and how they should be done. The last letter in the word "Vayikra" (which means "called") was written smaller than the rest (the Alef). Why is this letter shrunk? Furthermore, why is the whole book called Vayikra, "And He called"?

Most commentaries explain that Moshe didn't want to make a big deal out of the fact that G-d called him and no one else, and therefore wanted to use the same word without the last letter, which would still have the same meaning, but wouldn't be as affectionate a greeting. This shows us the great sensitivity and humility that Moshe had. Rabeinu Yonah offers us an insight into humility and human nature, by explaining that some people who feel that they are lacking in a quality or in knowledge often compensate for it by lowering others, thereby making themselves seem like

they're better by comparison. Moshe was the greatest prophet, but he was also the humblest because he was confident in himself and in his abilities, and didn't need to lower others, even indirectly.

But there's an even more blatant message Moshe is sending us: The one letter he chose to shrink was the "Alef", which is the first letter in the Hebrew alphabet...The very FIRST thing we have to realize is that even though Moshe was a great person, he sought to downplay it by shrinking that letter. But there's yet ANOTHER hidden hint for us in this word: The letter that's shrunk, Alef, actually has a meaning as a word! It means "to teach"! The message being taught to us is clear... The first and most important lesson in life is to recognize our egos, and work on not letting it control us. Whenever we get angry, it's because our ego is telling us that we deserve something! The second lesson is that instead of lowering others to make us LOOK better, we should raise our own standards, and BECOME better! And finally, the last lesson is to take these lessons and teach and share them with someone else. © 2007 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**H**aving completed the portions describing the building of the Mishkan (tabernacle), the Torah now presents the order of sacrifices that were offered there. Although they are certainly more esoteric than other parts of the Torah, the portions dealing with Temple sacrifice have much to teach.

Consider the opening thought of this week's portion. It speaks in an introductory fashion about an individual offering a sacrifice to the Lord. The term used for individual is Adam, (Leviticus 1:2) a strange word, as the Torah most often in such circumstances uses the term ish or isha (man or woman). Several thoughts come to mind as to the reason for this unusual choice of words.

Adam, unlike all others, was fashioned by G-d Himself. The name evokes the imagery of this first human being who was intimately connected to the Lord. The use of Adam here appears in order to express the hope that, through the sacrificial service, the individual comes close to Hashem.

Rashi suggests another solution. Just as the first Adam was able to take advantage of all the world had to offer without concern that it belonged to others (for he was alone in the world), so must every person who brings a sacrifice be certain that the offering to G-d be solely his or hers. It must not be stolen for in the process of serving G-d one must never violate interpersonal ethics.

Another thought comes to mind. Adam evokes the imagery of Adam who was pure in the garden of Eden. In time, Adam, together with Eve, violated G-d's command. When an individual brings a sacrifice,

he/she is attempting to return to the pristine state of Eden, a fixed Eden without sin - an Eden of complete innocence. Thus, when bringing the sacrifice, the individual is called Adam as the korban is about the quest to right a wrong and to achieve the state of "Paradise Regained."

Still another thought. While it is true that the sacrificial service outlined in our portions deals specifically with the Jewish people, the use of the term Adam speaks to the universal dimension of the Temple. Adam was the parent of all humankind. From him, all human beings emerged. The term Adam by its very definition embraces the whole world. Perhaps the Torah uses the term Adam to remind us that ultimately the Temple in which sacrifices are brought, is a place where all humankind will one day come to worship the Lord. (beit tefillah le-khol ha-amim).

It would be erroneous to think that the term Adam only applies to a man. According to the Midrash, Adam was both male and female. Chava (Eve) comes into being through a bifurcation of Adam into separate male and female entities. Indeed, the term Adam used here sends the message that the korban (sacrifice) applies equally to men and women - both can approach and come close to G-d.

We are taught that every little word in the Torah is there to teach us something significant. The use of the word Adam confirms this idea as it teaches us so much about how G-d wants us to act toward one another and to view the world. © 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.

#### **RABBI ABBA WAGENSBERG**

### **Between the Lines**

**T**his week's Torah portion begins with G-d speaking to Moses (Leviticus 1:1). Rashi points out that G-d addresses Moses with the word "vayikra," whereas in Parshat Balak (Numbers 23:4) G-d speaks to the gentile prophet, Bilam, with the word "vayikar." Although these two words are almost identical, the word "vayikra" comes from the root word "to call," whereas the word "vayikar" comes from the root word "to happen." What does this difference in terminology signify?

The commentator Shem MiShmuel explains that G-d did not call to Bilam with affection; rather, He simply chanced upon him and happened to speak to him. But the word "vayikar" also has a deeper significance in the story of Bilam. According to the Shem MiShmuel, Bilam's experience communicating with the Divine was just something that happened-just another event in his life. Speaking with G-d did not change Bilam or move him to grow in any way; it simply happened to take place.

Bilam wanted the best of both worlds. He wanted to be close to G-d, but, at the same time, he was not willing to change any aspect of his lifestyle. Although Bilam claims that he wishes to die the death of the righteous (Numbers 23:10), it is clear from his conduct that he has no intention of compromising his behavior in order to reach this goal. Yet the point of Torah is to make a difference and spur us to growth. Surface knowledge that doesn't make a difference in our lives is almost worthless. The true value of Torah is revealed when we allow it to penetrate, and when we use that wisdom to change our lives.

According to our tradition, the word vayikra is written in a Torah scroll with a small letter aleph. Although the text is ambiguous regarding who exactly called to Moses, this letter makes it quite clear. Aleph is spelled the same way as the word aluf, which means "chief." Furthermore, the letter aleph itself is composed of one long line and two short lines, which resemble a vav and two yuds. The numerical value of these component letters is 26 -- the same numerical value as G-d's four-letter Name. Thus, the aleph teaches us that the Chief (aluf) of the World (i.e. G-d, numerically 26) is ultimately One: the numerical value of the letter aleph.

When we use Torah to grow, we have the opportunity to elevate ourselves and become G-d-like. It was G-d who called to Moses, calling to him with love: "Come here! Come close! Grow toward Me!"

May we all merit to hear our calling in life, and may our knowledge penetrate below the surface and make a difference in how we live our lives. © 2007 Rabbi A. Wagensberg & aish.com

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

### **Shabbat Shalom**

**A** story is told about a young Israeli teen-ager who had only recently become an observant Jew of the Bratzlav persuasion - and was full of questions. He came from an unobservant American family who had emigrated to Israel only five years before, and his mother still prepared a stuffed-turkey dinner replete with pumpkin pie and cranberry sauce in honor of the American Thanksgiving holiday. The enthusiastic baal tshuvah approached his Meah Shearim trained, ten-generation Jerusalemite Rebbe: "I'm sorry," he stammered "and perhaps my question is out of place, but am I required to recite the ya'ale ve'yavo prayer on thanksgiving if I am celebrating it with my family?" The Rebbe looked surprised. "What is thanksgiving?" he asked his new-found hassid. The young man then approached a very knowledgeable history teacher, whose classes in the secular high school he was attending were the highlight of his day. "I'm sorry, but might you know if one must say the ya'ale veyavo prayers on Thanksgiving?" The amused instructor, who had come to expect virtually anything from this enthusiastic and irrepressible student, was

taken aback. "What's ya'ale ve'yavo?," he asked. The student was frustrated but not deterred. A government minister lived in his town, and just happened to be arriving home from Knesset. Our student breathlessly ran up to him, almost poking his body-guard in the eye, "I'm sorry," he began, "but perhaps someone as important as you might know. Do observant Jews say ya'ale ve'yavo on Thanksgiving?" The Israeli minister looked confused. "What's 'I'm sorry'?" he asked.

For those of us who are living in Israel the story is too close to home to be amusing. We have been struck by what feels like an avalanche of scandal and corruption in the highest of places affecting those holding the most exalted of offices - and no one so much as says "I'm sorry." And as usual, the timeless and timely Biblical portions of the week cry out with a message to which everyone must pay heed - especially our "leaders."

During these last weeks we have read special Biblical and prophetic portions urging every Israelite to engage in self analysis and personal purification in anticipation of the month of Nissan, the period of our birth as a nation. Our Bible insists that if Jewish national independence is to arrive and survive, we must first be worthy of that independence - ethically and morally. And the Almighty told Moses to instruct the Israelites that if anyone is guilty of transgression, "he/she must confess the sin which they committed" (Numbers 4:5-7). The great religio-legalist philosopher Maimonides makes this commandment the hallmark of his Laws of Repentance (1,1), codifying that the command to repent must begin with confession of guilt, (spoken directly and personally to the individual or individuals one has wronged), remorse, and commitment to change. If admission of guilt were not so difficult, it would not count as the very definition of repentance.

Even more remarkable is what emerges from this week's portion of Vayikra. In Biblical times the individual would bring special sin offerings if he transgressed - but a sin offering without individual heart-felt repentance was not only meaningless but was considered by G-d an abomination, as was considered ritual punctiliousness without moral rectitude (Isaiah 1). And after the Bible sets the stage by informing us that human beings will - of necessity, built in to the complex animal-angel nature of the human personality-sin (Lev. 4:1,2), who is the very first sinner to be singled out? The High-Priest himself, the most exalted religious personality in Israel, the guardian of the Holy Temple.

Apparently, our Bible does not recognize one scintilla of "papal infallibility;" the Bible even emphasizes that "if the High Priest will sin, it is a transgression upon the whole nation," a sacrilegious blotch on our national escutcheon (4:3, Rashi as loc.). And on the great white fast of the Day of Forgiveness,

the first individual to confess his guilt and request purification is the High Priest. Indeed, the first word to escape the mouth of our most sacred and exalted human being on the most sacred and exalted day of the year is "Anna", please, oh, woe, a cry of personal and human anguish (as explained by my revered teacher, R. Joseph Dov Soloveitchik).

The next in line for sinning and admission of guilt is the Sanhedrin, the Highest Court in the land, the Keepers of the Divine law. When the lawmakers sin in judgment, all of Israel automatically sins, because they-the-judges- are entrusted with seeing that justice is done throughout society. The elders of the congregation as well as the High Priest must share in the guilt of the Sanhedrin, because they should have prevented the travesty of an unfit judiciary (Lev. 4:13,15,16)

And the third who is singled out, who must confess and atone, is the Prince (Nasi), the Ruler, the President, the Prime Minister. And amazingly, whereas the Bible uses the word "if" (Hebrew im) regarding the transgression of the High Priest and the Sanhedrin, it uses the word "when" (Hebrew asher) regarding the Nasi, the President, the Prime Minister. Why is the number-one wielder of power most likely to fall prey to sin? It is because he comes to believe he is above-the-law, that what is good for him is automatically good for the State? Is it because he must rely on popular support, so he may fall prey to giving the people not what they need but what they want, to acting not in accordance with what is right but in accordance with the latest opinion poll (Meshekh Hakhma, ad loc)? The Bible doesn't quite tell us, but it does say that he is most vulnerable.

King Saul didn't wait for Samuel the Judge to begin the public sacrifice, and lost the kingdom (Samuel 1, 13). King David committed adultery and sent Bathsheba's husband to the front lines of battle to die, and remained the progenitor of the Davidic Dynasty. (Samuel II, 12). Why? Because Saul attempted to justify himself and blame the nation, whereas King David admitted his guilt and wept before the prophet and G-d. Rashi (Lev. 4:22) links the Hebrew "asher" ("when" the nasi sins) to the Hebrew "ashrei", fortunate: "fortunate is the generation whose nasi puts his heart and mind towards seeking forgiveness for his sins." Those in high office who cannot seek such forgiveness certainly ought not remain in high office! © 2007 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

**RABBI ZEV LEFF**

## Outlooks & Insights

“**A**nd G-d called to Moses...” (Leviticus 1:1)

Rosh in his commentary to the Torah explains that the aleph in the word vayikra, with which the third book of Torah begins, is reduced in

size to reflect the humility of Moses. Remaining to be understood is why this hint to Moses' humility is placed specifically at the beginning of the book of Leviticus.

Leviticus opens with the numerous and complex laws concerning the Temple sacrifices. With the destruction of the Temple, prayer-avodah (service) of the heart-replaced the avodah of the sacrifices. Yet in the Talmud (Berachos 32b) we are informed that from the time the Temple was destroyed, the gates of prayer were also locked. But the gates of tears were not locked. Rashi explains that the gates of tears refers to another type of prayer-prayer with tears.

Thus we learn that there are two distinct types of prayer-prayer with tears and prayer without tears. Let us examine these two types.

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin (in Nefesh HaChaim) describes how G-d created the world with an intricate system of spiritual powers, through which G-d's bounty and influence is brought into the physical world. This system is activated by Torah learning, Mitzvot and prayer. G-d put us into this physical world so that we could earn the ultimate spiritual reward which He desires to bestow upon us-an intimate relationship with Him. We do not simply earn this reward. Rather we create that relationship through our actions in this world. By learning Torah, doing Mitzvot and praying, we furnish the energy to activate the framework through which G-d relates to this world.

It is in this context that the Talmud says (Berachos 7a) that "G-d prays." Rashbah explains that G-d's desire is to bestow His Divine benevolence upon us. But He has decreed that we must initiate this relationship. It is as if He prays for us to do our part so that He can fulfill His true desires. When we pray to "give power to G-d," it is this to which we refer. By fulfilling the conditions He has set, we give, as it were, the power to G-d to shower His bounty upon us.

Berachah ("blessing"), the Rashbah continues, refers to something which increases, enhances and intensifies. (A breichah, for instance, is a stream in which the flow of water is constantly increasing and intensifying). Our berachah is a means to open up the conduits of G-d's good to the world by entering into a relationship with Him. When one makes a blessing before he eats, he activates those spiritual realms through which G-d provides food and opens wider the conduits of G-d's bounty. He thereby replenishes that which he is eating. On the other hand, one who does not make a blessing is like a thief, for he does not compensate for what he removes from the world (Talmud-Berachos 35a).

Rabbi Yosef Leib Bloch (in Shiurei Da'as on the offerings) shows how the sacrifices served to unite and elevate all mundane powers toward the service of G-d, and thereby activated the system G-d created to bring the world to fulfillment of His purpose. Maharal adds that the greatest power to activate the spiritual realms

emanated from the Temple, and with its destruction those specific gates were locked. (One can still penetrate even locked gates but only with great effort and difficulty.)

There is, however, another type of prayer that was not affected by the destruction of the Temple-the passive prayer of tears and submission. In this context, berachah has a totally different connotation. The Jew stands before G-d and bends his knee and says: "Baruch-You, G-d, are the source of all blessing and without You I don't even have a leg to stand on. I bend my knees in recognition of this. Atah-It is you, G-d, and not I, who can provide for my very existence and for my most basic needs."

At the beginning of the Amidah, which replaced the Temple offerings, the Jew bows his body in total subjugation and submission as he proclaims these words. But once he recognizes this fact and submits himself into G-d's hands and calls upon His name-then he can stand erect knowing that G-d is his support. This is the prayer of tears, a passive, yet very potent power.

All of prayer expresses this idea: "Heal us G-d and we will be healed" is not only an entreaty but also a statement of dependence and submission. Even when the offerings were still brought and were offered with the intention of affecting the celestial realms and opening the conduits of G-d's blessing, this attitude of complete submission was still part of the offering. Both Nachmanides and Sefer HaChinuch explain that one must identify with the animal being slaughtered as an act of self-negation and submission to G-d.

Rabbi Simchah Bunim of P'shis'cha said that even though the gates of tears remain open, nevertheless gates are necessary to prevent improper tears from entering. The prayer of tears must be composed of tears of hope, trust and faith that G-d will help-not tears of depression, dejection or despair.

The book of Leviticus, which details the Temple offerings, begins with a hint to Moses' humility because all avodah-whether avodah of the heart or that of the offerings-requires self-negation and submission. It requires, even in its active form, a realization that ultimately all emanates from G-d and all that we do is, in the final analysis, only an expression of submission to G-d's will.

For this, one needs humility. Hence, the small aleph-both a sign of humility and the letter which represents G-d's oneness and unity. It is with this word: Vayikra, with its small aleph, that G-d calls to man to serve Him both actively and passively, to bring the world to its completion. © 2007 Rabbi Z. Leff & aish.com

