

# Taxes



# Ache

**The torah publication that even people who kvetch about paying taxes can appreciate appreciate!**

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

**W**ho was Achashveirosh? For generations, scholars and historians have discussed and debated the identity of the Persian king that married Esther, allowed Haman to issue a decree to wipe out the Jewish people, and eventually allowed a counter-decree that enabled the Jews to defend themselves and kill their enemies instead. I am neither a historian nor a scholar (although sometimes I play one on the radio), but being that at this time of year "Purim Torah" is appropriate, I figured it would be okay to share some of my thoughts on the matter. (Some might say I write "Purim Torah" all year long anyway.)

The whole premise of identifying which Persian king was Achashveirosh presupposes that we have a list of Persian kings to choose from that coincides with the Persian kings listed in Biblical and Rabbinical sources. However, there are only four names of Persian kings listed in the traditional literature. Since one of the Persian kings is Achashveirosh, (Koresh, Daryavesh and Artachshasta being the other three names) it would seem rather straightforward which king is being referred to in the Purim story. Since it is universally accepted that the name Koresh=Cyrus and Daryavesh=Darius, and almost universally accepted that Achashveirosh=Xerxes and Artachshasta=Artaxerxes, we should easily be able to identify Achashveirosh as Xerxes. If only it were that simple! There were several kings with each of those names, so matching the Biblical name with the name assigned by Greek historians cannot be enough.

The first clue we should probably look for in order to pinpoint which king was Achashveirosh is the timing of the Purim story. Our sages (Megilah 11b) tell us that one of the reasons Achashveirosh threw the big party that opens the story was that he had miscalculated the end of the 70 year period of the exile after the destruction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. If we count 70 years from its destruction and see who was the King of Persia, we should have found our man, right? Here's where it starts

getting more complicated, as the year of the first Temple's destruction is not universally accepted. Mitchell First has written a wonderful book that discusses the issues surrounding the number of Persian kings that ruled between the Babylonians and the Greeks, the amount of years they ruled, and the year of the Temple's destruction, titled "Jewish History in Conflict." Many of these issues directly affect identifying the king in the Purim story (he discusses this as well), so there is no point in trying to figure out which of the kings listed by secular historians was Achashveirosh unless you are willing to work within their framework of history. That doesn't mean you have to necessarily accept their framework, and certainly not everything about it, but if your starting point in reconciling history is matching the names of the kings in the traditional and secular literature, you have to be willing to think it through on both terms. For those who see no point in trying to match the Achashveirosh of the Purim story with a particular Persian king, there is no problem with simply stating that Achashveirosh came between Koresh and Daryavesh, who was also known as Artachshasta. However, those who are curious about a possible connection between Achashveirosh and a king in secular Persian history, please read on, bearing in mind that we are starting from a traditional standpoint.

The two basic timeframes given for the destruction of the first Temple are 586 BCE and 420 BCE. Seventy years after the destruction would therefore be either 516 BCE or 350 BCE. Darius I ruled in 516 BCE (from 522-486), while Artaxerxes III ruled in 350 BCE (from 358-338). However, since Achashveirosh was off by more than 10 years, as his party to "celebrate" the end of the 70 years was in his third year as king (Esther 1:3) while the decree was to be carried out in his 13th year (see 3:7), it could have been the kings that preceded them, Cambyses II (529-522) or Artaxerxes II (404-359). Although we are working within the framework of secular history, there is no reason to assume that their years are precise; it would be safe to say that even if they are in the ballpark, they are off by a few years. This would mean including Cyrus II as a possibility, as he ruled from 559-530.

TAXES ACHE IS A RATHER TAXING PURIM PUBLICATION TO PULL TOGETHER, HOWEVER WE BRAVE THROUGH IT SINCE IT'S OUR RESPONSIBILITY AS CITIZENS TO PUT UP AND SHUT UP. OR AT LEAST TO PUT UP. OR WHATVER.

*(if you work for the IRS, I completely disavow any knowledge of the goofball who put this newsletter together. He has no connection at all with Yitz Weiss the CPA and is sorry if he offended you. Really. No joke. Please don't audit me)*



People ask me, "Yitz, where do you come up with these lame themes for the Purim newsletter?" Actually, no one asks me that, I just said that to start off this paragraph in a nice way. The truth is no one really cares where these ideas come from. They just want to read the articles and get on with their lives. Perhaps a grunt or a snort is the best reaction I could hope for after slaving away and burning all these incredible creative juices to produce this masterpiece (sniff). But where was I? Ah, yes. Believe it or not, these themes are ORIGINAL! Yes, it's true. Feel free to offer suggestions, but we'll probably just laugh derisively and feed the suggestions to the cross-cut shredder in the corner.  
HAHAHA!

You may have noticed that none of the kings named "Xerxes" were included in that short list, as Xerxes I didn't start his rule until 485, more than 100 years after the destruction, and Xerxes II ruled for less than two months in 424. Nevertheless, there are several that suggest that Xerxes I was Achashveirosh, mostly because of the name. Prominent among them is Daat Mikrah, which in its introduction to Esther agrees that he ruled after the 2nd Temple was already built, and associates the "animosity written against those that lived in Judah and Jerusalem at the beginning of Achashveirosh's reign" (Ezra 4:6) with the need to repair the walls around Jerusalem rather than with taking away the previously granted permission to rebuild the Temple that is traditionally associated with him. Because I am attempting to be as consistent as possible with the traditional literature, I have a hard time accepting the Daat Mikrah's substitution. There are other issues with this suggestion as well. As the Daat Mikrah points out, if Xerxes I was Achashveirosh, Mordechai and Esther would be extremely old (Mordechai was among those exiled from Jerusalem before its destruction, see Esther 2:6). Additionally, Xerxes I's rule over Egypt was tenuous at best, not the complete control "from India to Ethiopia" indicated by the Talmud (Megilah 11a). As a matter of fact, since the king in the Purim story "ruled from India

to Ethiopia," meaning that Egypt had to be part of the kingdom, we can rule out Cyrus II as well, since Egypt was first captured by his son, Cambyses II, as well as ruling out both Artaxerxes II and III, since the 31st Egyptian Dynasty didn't begin until 343 BCE, 7 years after the Temple would have been rebuilt.

There is another, more blatant, reason why Xerxes (and Artaxerxes and Cambyses) can't be the Persian king in the Purim story. Each and every one of them succeeded their father to the throne, while Achashveirosh was not of royal descent (Megilah 11a) and married Vashti, whose father had been king, in order to legitimize his ascent to the throne. As a matter of fact, every king of the Achaemenian Dynasty succeeded his father (often by killing other siblings) except for one, Darius I. Not only did Darius I rule within the time frame of 70 years after the destruction, but he became king when he murdered Cambyses' brother (or the person Darius claimed was an imposter pretending to be Cambyses' brother) and married Cambyses' sister (Cyrus II's daughter). (It should be noted that there is more than one opinion as to which king was Vashti's father; see Targum on Esther 1:1.)

Darius I took over the Persian Empire a few years after Cambyses II had conquered Egypt, and exercised strong control over it and the rest of his empire (which stretched from India to Ethiopia), until he tried to conquer Greece (about 490 BCE). He moved the capitol of the empire to Susa (Shushan, see Esther 1:2), and among his major accomplishments was setting up a system to collect taxes from all of the provinces under his rule, which would explain why the Megilah ends by telling it (10:1). His many accomplishments would certainly justify the description of "his mighty and powerful activities" referenced as being "recorded in the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia" (10:2). The only aspect that would seem to be an apparent inconsistency would be his name, Darius (and not Xerxes)

Although had his name been Xerxes there would be, in my mind, no question that he was the Achashveirosh of the Purim story, the other factors far outweigh his being known as Darius. Besides, other kings had more than one name (for example, see Ezra 6:14, where Rashi says Artachshasta is Daryavesh and Ibn Ezra says that Artachshasta is Achashveirosh). There were several kings named Xerxes (and instances where a son took the father's name, i.e. Artaxerxes II and III), and the name Xerxes was around before Darius I (see Rashi and Ibn Ezra on Daniel 9:1). For all we know, after Esther had a positive impact on "Xerxes" he changed his name to Daryavesh, the name he became known as to historians. (It should be noted that not every traditional source has Esther and Achashveirosh having a son named Daryavesh; see Torah Shelaimah 5:8, quoting the Zohar, that Esther was never intimate with Achashveirosh,

rather, a demon took her form and went instead of her. Considering that students are considered like children, this could explain why the "new and improved" Xerxes, nee Darius, is considered her "son.")

I would therefore suggest that the king referred to in the Purim story is the Persian king who took the throne by force about 60 years after the destruction of the first Temple, married Cyrus II's daughter (possibly promising that their first son together would be named successor to the throne in order to convince her to marry him), moved the capitol to Shushan, strengthened the empire built by his predecessors, and found a way to effectively collect taxes from the very ends of his far flung kingdom, i.e. the king known as Darius I. © 2008 Rabbi D. Kramer

*A kindergarten teacher stood in front of her class and explained that they would be discussing what everyone's parent did for a living. As they went around the room, one child said, "My mom's a doctor." One said, "My dad's a fireman." Finally they got to one child who said, "My dad's a hit-man for the mafia."*

*The teacher was understandably upset and tried to sidestep the questions from all the other kids ("what's a hit-man?"). That evening she called the father to discuss what happened. "Listen," she began, "I'm not telling you how to live your life, but don't you think it a bit unusual for a kindergarten kid to get up in front of his class and tell everyone his dad is a hit-man for the mafia?"*

*The father responded, "Well the truth is I work for the IRS. But some things you just don't want to tell your kids." ☺*

attitudes of Judaism are replaced with a carnival-like atmosphere of parades, drinking and masks. The Talmud even commands us to get so drunk "... that we cannot tell the difference between cursing Haman and blessing Mordechai." (B.T Megilla 7B).

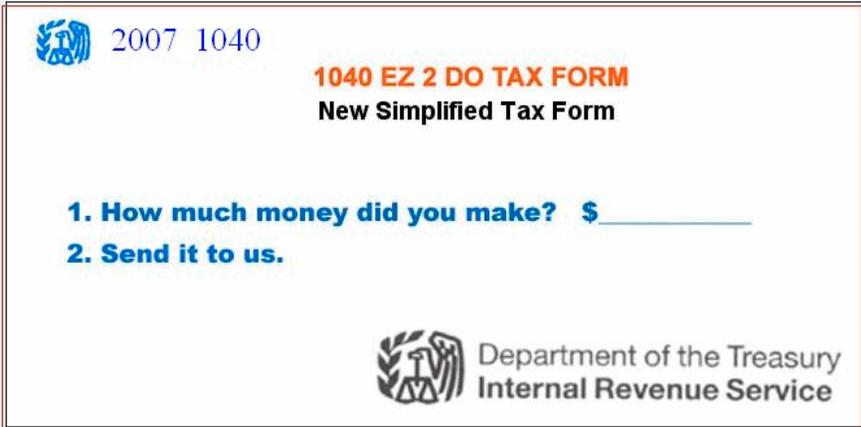
But who is the real hero of Purim? Is it the great Jewish beauty who wins the king's heart, and finds herself becoming the voice of the Jews as she pleads before the one man who has the power to save or destroy her people? Or is the hero the king himself who, despite being surrounded by evil men - most notably Haman - is able to rise above the prejudices toward Jews, who are scattered and dispersed across the land, keeping their own laws? When he withdraws the edict, the king demonstrates the kind of wise sovereignty select monarchs have had toward their Jewish subjects throughout the ages.

Or is Mordechai the hero - humble, saintly, self-effacing - whom Divine Providence put in the right place at the right time, allowing him to overhear the mutinous plot of two of Achashverosh' ministers, thereby saving the king's life? Or perhaps he's the hero because he never forgets he is a Jew, refusing to bow down to Haman no matter what the consequences are. To better understand who the real hero might be, we should pay close attention to the paradoxical dictum to get so drunk "that we cannot tell the difference between cursing Haman or blessing Mordechai."

Shushan, the capital of Achashverosh' kingdom, may have very well been like New York City or any other great melting pot. This historical period of the Book of Esther is dated 485-465 BCE. Yet, in 538 BCE, Cyrus had already granted the Jews permission to return to Israel and rebuild the Temple. Most Jews didn't return. Economically and socially, the Jews in Shushan had it good, the overwhelming majority opting against the poverty and military insecurity of Israel. The Book of Esther may very well be the first work to describe what happens to a Jewish community in the Diaspora, a pattern which will repeat itself for the next 2,500 years.

The Jews were the cream of Shushan society. PJY's (Persian Jewish Yuppies) were busy breaking into the media, law and medicine, spending their free nights at parties, no end to the champagne and wine accompanying seven-course feasts. Indeed, the Scroll of Esther opens with the king's invitation to the Jewish community, with no mention of kosher caterers. Even intermarriage seems so deeply entrenched that when the niece of the leading religious Jew of the city marries the king, the text only says that "... she was taken?" (Esther 2:8) There is no indication she put up a fight, shaved her head in an attempt to make herself ugly during the year of primping in the king's harem.

Perhaps G-d's name does not appear because in Shushan these Jews were cut off from G-d. They simply had made no room for Him. Nonetheless, his-story tells us that the Creator had other plans for His



**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

**T**here's more to Purim than meets the eye - or tongue. One of the year's most festive days, Purim not only captures the universal seriousness of good triumphing over evil, but for one day a year, the relatively strict

people. In effect, G-d was saying: "Either you will remember that you're Jews on your own, or I'll have to remind you."

Haman isn't the first figure who wants to destroy the Jewish people. In the beginning of the Book of Esther, the Midrash tells us that the Jews had crept so far they had penetrated to the 49 depths of impurity. "...And the children of Israel were fruitful, increased like crawling creatures, multiplied, waxed exceedingly mighty and the land was filled with them?" (Exodus 1:7) The Midrash picks up on the comparison of the Jews to impure reptiles (vayishretzu), concluding that in saturating the land of Egypt, they indulged in every forbidden practice, completing their assimilation.

And then what happens? "There arose a new king over Egypt?" (Exodus 1:8) The party is over. Edicts begin, death is in the air and pogroms occur. Male children go off to the army at the age of eight. When Jews forget that they are Jews, a Gentile will remind them. His name is Pharaoh, his name is Haman, his name is Stalin, his name is Hitler.

Mordechai, in sackcloth and ashes, appears before the palace gates where it is forbidden to wear such mourning clothes, and the message is heard wherever Jews live. A great mourning cry rises. Mordechai bids Esther to plead for her Jewishness. Esther (whose name means "hidden") can no longer hide her Jewishness. When she steps out of the closet, declaring to the king that Haman's edict is directed against her people, she risks everything. At that moment, she becomes, very possibly, the first baalat teshuva.

On Purim, we are commanded to drink so much because we are in a quandary. Without Haman, the tide of assimilation might not have stopped. And if, in a twisted way, we owe our continued existence to this classic anti-Semite, then understanding this paradox of the survival of the Jewish people requires that we drink so much that we cannot tell the difference between blessing one and cursing the other. Look at what I'm celebrating. Thanks to Haman, we're still alive. If we think about what that means, we have to drink because sober...it is a shocking idea. I can't grasp it, much less celebrate it. But this is the legacy of exile: The anti-hero, this personification of evil, forces us to remember that we are Jews. That's why one day a year we fathom the unfathomable - the cursed blessing of Haman, the anti-Semite. © 2008 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

*A girl was visiting her blond friend who had acquired two new dogs and asked her what their names were. The blonde responded by saying that one was named Rolex and one was named Timex.*

*Her friend said, "Whoever heard of someone naming their dogs like that?!" "HeiOOOO," answered the blonde, "they're watch dogs!" ☺*

## RABBI BEREL WEIN Wein Online

**A**fter all of the tumultuous events of the book of Shmot - the Exodus, the revelation at Sinai and the granting of the Torah, the event of the Golden Calf and of the construction of the Mishkan/Tabernacle - the Lord calls out, so to speak, to Moshe from the inner recesses of the Mishkan/Tabernacle.

What is the significance of this call? And why does it need to be made at all? Moshe had already ascended the mountain of Sinai and been taught the Torah and its laws previous to this call. And, as Rashi points out to us, this call was personal to Moshe for it was not addressed to the rest of Israel as was the revelation at Sinai itself.

Moshe would then have to transmit the call - the teachings and instructions that were now entrusted to him by God - to the Jewish people and explain and teach them these laws and nuances of the Godly message.

Vayikra teaches us that henceforth Torah would be taught by humans to humans and that the Torah was "no longer in Heaven." That is the significance of God's call to Moshe and to Moshe alone.

The Talmud teaches us that even the holy prophets of Israel were forbidden to construct new systems of halacha. The transmission of Torah, though certainly requiring heavenly aid and inspiration, was now a purely human endeavor.

Moshe heard the Heavenly voice directly in receiving the Torah's laws and instructions but the Jewish people only heard the human voice of Moshe teaching them God's Torah.

In the final chapter of Pirkei Avot (which is not a part of the mishna of Avot itself) called Perek Kinyan Torah - the chapter concerning the acquisition of Torah knowledge - one of the methods of acquiring such Torah knowledge and direction is emunat chachamim - belief in the teachings of the wise Torah scholars of Israel.

Though there are differing interpretations as to the latitude of this concept and whether it applies even to all matters of personal and national life generally, all agree that as far as Torah teaching is concerned it is an applicable and necessary value and belief. The basis for this value is what has been described above in the previous



teaching is concerned it is an applicable and necessary value and belief. The basis for this value is what has been described above in the previous

paragraph - ultimate belief of the Jewish people in the divinity of Torah as transmitted to them by Moshe.

The Torah at Sinai was given once. That scene would never be repeated again. Thus the burden of the transmission and teaching of Torah now rested with human beings - with the Torah scholars of every age and era. And one of the tests of Jewish life would be the trust and faith that the people as a whole would entrust to the teachings and direction of those scholars - emunat chachamim if you will.

This human relationship of generational trust and teaching is the hallmark of halacha throughout the history of Israel. Moshe still speaks to us even if we are unable to hear the heavenly voice emanating from the Mishkan/Tabernacle itself. This is the basis of Jewish continuity and vitality till today. © 2008 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory](http://www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory).

*What's the difference between a bad golfer and a bad skydiver?  
The bad golfer goes WHACK! "Darn!"  
The bad skydiver goes "Darn!" WHACK! ☺*

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

## **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**T**his week's portion continues the theme of the sacrificial service. There are many suggestions as to the reasoning behind this enigmatic, yet important element of our tradition. Ramban understands the Mishkan (tabernacle) as a kind of portable Mt. Sinai. Mt. Sinai was a physical mountain through which the Jewish people were able to feel God's presence more powerfully. This was also the purpose of the Mishkan, where God's presence was integrated into human souls.

There are many similarities between Mt. Sinai and the Mishkan. As Am Yisrael (the people of Israel) surrounded Mt. Sinai, the place from where the voice of God was heard, so too, did Israel encamp around the Mishkan from where the presence of God was especially felt. In this sense, the Mishkan was a constant ratification of the covenant at Mt. Sinai between God and the Jewish people that was validated at Mt. Sinai. The covenant is reaffirmed through the tabernacle.

With this concept of the Mishkan in mind, the sacrifices can be understood. The two major covenants in the Torah - the covenant of the pieces and the covenant at Sinai are accompanied by sacrifice. (Genesis 15:9,10; Exodus 24:5) Indeed, as God appears at Mt. Sinai, the covenant reaches its crescendo when the Jewish people eat and drink. (Exodus 24:11)

The presence of a sacrifice in these covenantal experiences can be looked upon as a celebration of this glorious moment of meeting between God and his people. Much like a seuda (a lavish meal) celebrates our relationship with God on Shabbat or Yom Tov, so too the korban (sacrifice) celebrates the covenant. The covenant is eternalized through rituals associated with the sacrificial service.

In his book "The Temple," Rabbi Joshua Berman notes that salt was always used on the korban and is called brit melach. (Leviticus 2:13) As salt gives sharpness and longer life to food, so too is the covenant blessed with eternity. In Rabbi Berman's words, the salt marks "the eternal nature of the covenant... [it is] a statement about the lasting duration of the covenantal bond."

Flour (mincha) and wine (nesachim), which are also often associated with sacrifices, teach the message of the importance of tradition coupled with freshness. The best wine is the wine that is old, wine that is rooted in the past. Flour, on the other hand is edible if it is new, if it is fresh. Continuity in the sacrificial service depends upon the bridging of the past with the present forging a new and profound future.

While we do not celebrate the covenant with sacrifices today, we must constantly see to it that the covenant seems new and fresh. While maintaining the tradition of the past, it should always be a creative, stirring, and exciting shir chadash (new song) - otherwise the love with God becomes stale.

The korbanot offered in the Mishkan, together with its fine ingredients are glorious reminders of our endless love of the Ruler of Rulers. It is the ultimate State Dinner. But this time, the honoree is truly worthy - it is, after all, God Himself. © 2008 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

*A man and his wife awoke at 3am to a loud pounding on the door. The man got up, opened the door and found a drunken stranger standing in the pouring rain asking for a push. "Not a chance!" said the husband, "it's 3am!"*

*He slammed the door and went back to bed.*

*"Who was that?" asked his wife.*

*"Just some drunk looking for a push."*

*"Did you help him?"*

*"Of course not! It's the middle of the night and pouring rain outside!"*

*"Well you have a short memory," she said. "Don't you remember a few months ago when you broke down in the rain and a stranger came out to help you?"*

*The remorseful husband went back down, opened the front door and called out into the darkness, "Are you still there? Do you still need a push?"*

*"Yes," the drunk replied.*

*"Well where are you?" the husband asked.*

*"Over here on the swing!" ☺*



**RABBI NAFTALI REICH**

## Legacy

**W**hat do released prisoners, recovering patients, seafarers and caravan travelers all have in common? These people have all been in perilous situations, their very lives endangered, and having come through safely, they are required to express their gratitude to Hashem by bringing a thanksgiving sacrifice to the Temple in Jerusalem. The procedure for the thanksgiving offering, the korban todah, is described in this week's portion.

The Midrash provides us with a rather surprising bit of information about the thanksgiving offering. In the End of Days, when the Presence of the Creator will fill the world with holiness and people will live in eternal bliss and serenity, all sacrifices will be discontinued-except for the thanksgiving sacrifice. This immediately leads us to ask: How can this be? If, as the prophets repeatedly assure us, people will be safe and secure, protected from all physical harm and danger, from sickness and imprisonment, how will it be possible for a thanksgiving sacrifice to be brought? The conditions that necessitate such an offering will simply not exist!

Let us think for a moment about a phrase most polite people use very often and very casually. What exactly do we mean when we say "thank you" to someone who has done us a good turn? What have we actually given him by thanking him? And why is he gratified? The answers lie in a deeper understanding of gratitude and thanksgiving. In essence, an expression of gratitude is an acknowledgment. By saying "thank you," we declare that we recognize what the other person has done for us, that we value it and that we do not take him for granted. This is all he needs in return for what he has done-recognition, no more, no less. But a sincere expression of gratitude can only result from a genuine appreciation of the value of what we have received. Without this appreciation, the words "thank you" are but an empty, meaningless formality.

If this holds true in our relationships with other human beings, how much more so in our relationship with our Creator. We are endlessly beholden to Him for all the good He does for us, and as a result, we should be endlessly grateful. Unfortunately, however, we live in a benighted world of illusions and delusions, and we often fail to recognize the innumerable gifts and bounty that flow to us from Hashem's generous hand. And even when we pay lip service to it, how deeply do we actually feel it? How real is it to us? The only things we face with stark reality are life-threatening situations. In the face of danger, our affectations and pretensions quickly dissipate, and we realize how dependent we are on our Creator for our safety. As the old adage goes, "There are no atheists in a foxhole." It is only

when we are ultimately delivered from danger that we are capable of expressing genuine gratitude.

In the End of Days, however, the Presence of the Creator will illuminate the entire world and dispel all the foolish delusions which so becloud our vision and befuddle our minds. Then we will see Hashem's hand with perfect clarity, and our acknowledgments of His guidance and benevolence will carry the ring of true conviction. At that point, we will no longer have to face life-threatening situation to inspire genuine gratitude in our hearts. We will thank Him endlessly for every minute detail of our lives and bring thanksgiving sacrifices to give expression to the transcendent feelings of gratitude that will permeate our souls.

A great sage once ordered a cup of coffee in an elegant restaurant. When the bill came, he saw he had been charged an exorbitant sum. "So much for a cup of coffee?" he asked the waiter.

"Oh no, sir," the waiter replied. "The coffee cost only a few cents.

"But the paintings and tapestries on the walls, the crystal chandeliers, the Persian carpets, the luxurious gardens, the marble fountain, these cost a lot of money, and every patron must pay his share."

"Aha!" said the sage. "You have taught me an important lesson. When I recite a blessing over a glass of water, I must thank the Creator for the ground on which I stand, the air I breathe, the blue sky over my head, the beauty and scent of the flowers, the twittering of birds, the company of other people. Thank you."

In our own lives, we all too often take for granted all the blessings we enjoy, and we forget to express our gratitude to our Creator, the Source of all this bounty. Indeed, when we experience hardship, we are inclined to confront Hashem, saying, Oh, why do we deserve this? But when we experience good fortune, are we as inclined to thank Him? Common courtesy, of course, requires that we acknowledge Hashem's bounty, but if we offer words of gratitude to Hashem in all situations, we will also discover a deeper dimension to our appreciation and enjoyment of the blessings of life. © 2008 Rabbi N. Reich and torah.org

*What did the math book say to the other books?  
I've got problems... ☺*



**RABBI ZEV LEFF**

## Outlooks & Insights

**“**If he shall offer it for a thanksgiving offering, then shall he offer unleavened loaves mixed with oil, unleavened wafers smeared with oil, and loaves of scalded fine flour mixed with oil..." (Leviticus 7:12)

The Korban Todah, thanksgiving offering, is basically a "peace offering" (Shelamim). But unlike any other peace offering it is brought with

four different types of flour offerings, ten of each type. Three are types of Matzah, and the fourth is chametz. In addition, the normal time span within which the peace offering had to be eaten—two days and one night—is reduced to one day and one night for the Todah. To understand the significance of these deviations from the normal laws, we must first analyze the dynamics of thanksgiving.

The Talmud (Berachos 7b) relates that from the day God created the world, no one thanked Him until Leah thanked Him for the birth of her fourth son Yehudah. At first glance, this defies understanding. Didn't Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel have countless reasons and opportunities to thank God? And why didn't Leah herself thank God for her first three children?

The Midrash (Bereishis Rabba 71:4) sheds light on this enigma: "Rabbi Berachiah said in the name of Rabbi Levi, 'This can be compared to a Kohen who was given a large amount of terumah by one individual and did not thank him. He was then given a small measure of unconsecrated grain, and he thanked the donor.

'Said the first individual to the Kohen: 'I gave you a large amount, and you did not thank me; he gave you a very small amount and you thanked him. [Why?]

'The Kohen replied: 'You gave me what rightfully belonged to me, so I saw no reason to thank you. He gave me what belonged to him and upon which I had no claim. Therefore I thanked him.'"

So, too, our matriarchs knew that Jacob would have 12 sons, and each one of the four matriarchs expected three [sons]. Therefore, when Leah had her fourth son, she thanked God, for she had received more than her portion.

Thanksgiving is a recognition of receiving something undeserved and feeling indebted to repay the giver with gratitude. The more one feels that the bounty received was indeed earned or deserved, the less necessary the show of gratitude. A laborer does not owe his boss a thank-you for paying him his previously agreed-upon wages, but for an unexpected bonus a thank-you is appropriate.

From the time the world was created, no one ever felt that the bounty given to them by God was totally undeserved. Even the greatest people thought that what was given to them was part of God's plan for the world, and therefore not completely undeserved. But God's plan could have been equally fulfilled if the fourth son born to Leah had been born to any of her sisters. Thus Leah felt his birth was totally unearned, and required the full measure of gratitude.

The Midrash (Berashis Rabba 71:5) links Leah's thanks to the admission of Yehudah that he was responsible for Tamar's pregnancy. In Hebrew, the same verb, *l'hodot*, means "to confess" and "to thank." An

admission that what one has received from God was totally undeserved is the foundation of thanksgiving.

Usually we offer thanksgiving to God for a salvation from a misfortune or calamity. But if we truly believe that everything that occurs in this world is the result of Divine Providence, then it is hard to understand why we should thank God for saving us from misfortune, since He Himself caused that misfortune! Would we thank somebody for paying our medical bills if we fell into a concealed trap he had left in a public thoroughfare?

The answer is that we have chosen the wrong analogy. Consider an orthopedic surgeon who notices someone walking in a manner that is symptomatic of a rare, crippling bone disease. The condition can only be cured if the bones are broken and reset before the disease progresses to the point of no return. Realizing that the patient's gait reveals little time left before his condition is irreversible, the surgeon takes an iron pole and swiftly breaks both of his legs—and then proceeds to set them and nurture the patient back to health. In this instance the surgeon deserves thanks both for breaking and setting the legs.

So, too, when we cause ourselves spiritual illnesses because of our shortcomings, God brings misfortune and calamity to atone and correct the situation. Thus, our gratitude for the salvation can only be significant if it includes a confession that the misfortune and calamity was also deserved. Full, uninhibited thanksgiving requires both confession of the justice of the misfortune and admission that the salvation was undeserved.

There is one final aspect of thanksgiving to be considered.

Rabbi Levi taught: Leah grasped the idea of thanksgiving and all her descendants followed suit. Yehudah confessed, and David [said], "Praise God for He is good and His kindness endures forever."

When one recognizes his own guilt in bringing spiritual illness upon himself and God's kindness in saving him from misfortune, his feelings of gratitude must be expressed publicly, as David's were. That expression of gratitude then becomes a lesson to others in recognizing God's goodness and intimate involvement in the events of this world.

We say in the Amidah: "We will thank You, God... and we will recount Your praises." It is not sufficient to thank God quietly; one must recount his debt of gratitude to others: "I will sacrifice to You a thanksgiving offering, and I will call out and proclaim to others the name of God." (Psalms 116:17)

Abarbanel explains that the eating time for a Korban Todah is reduced to one day and a night precisely to necessitate having others share in its consumption. In this fashion, one's gratitude and raise of God are made public. The four types of breads of the Korban Todah represent four aspects of true thanksgiving. The chametz represents the *yetzer hara*, the

confession that even the misfortune and calamity were for our benefit and were brought about by our sins.

The Matzah that is boiled first in water so that it will absorb and hold in the oil is symbolic of the ability to contain oneself and admit that the county one received is unearned and undeserved.

The Matzah made of flour saturated with oil is symbolic of the feelings of gratitude that permeate one's entire being. And finally, the Matzah fried in oil from without symbolizes the responsibility to publicize and share with others the enlightenment one receives from experiencing God's Divine Providence.

Today, in place of the Korban Todah, we recite Birchas HaGomel. It too, reflects all four aspects of thanksgiving: Hagomel l'chayavim tovt ("God grants good to those who are guilty and undeserving") signifies an acceptance of our guilt for the misfortune and admission that the subsequent salvation was undeserved. Gamalnu kal tov ("Who benefited us with total good") is an expression of total thanksgiving for God's undeserved beneficence.

This blessing must be said publicly in the presence of a minyan and evoke in those hearing it the response: "He who benefited you with total good, may He benefit you with total good forever." © 2008 Rabbi Z. Leff and aish.org

*Did you hear about the butcher who accidentally sat on his meat slicer?*

*He got behind in his orders! ☺*

*(aww come on, that was a good one!)*

### RABBI ADAM LIEBERMAN

## A Life Lesson

**T**his week's Torah portion spells out more of the laws regarding the sacrifices the Jewish people brought. And God said that: "... flesh that touches any contaminated thing may not be eaten, it shall be burned in fire..." (Leviticus 7:19) Why would flesh that was pure suddenly become contaminated by merely "touching" something else that was contaminated?

This actually teaches a valuable and powerful lesson: we are profoundly influenced by our surroundings. We do become a product of our environment.

Being around any type of behavior that we don't want to fully engage in ourselves is never a good idea. The fact is, when you're around people you don't want to become more like, their behavior-whether you decide to presently do it or not-will eventually rub off on you. You can't just declare that "I will never become like them." Good or bad, your environment will affect you. The sages have said this since the beginning of time.

This is true even if people aren't involved. If someone has a problem controlling his drinking, then it's clearly unwise for him to keep alcohol in his possession. Merely seeing the alcohol or knowing that's it's easily accessible could tempt an otherwise strong and determined person. In many cases, you just have to completely distance yourself from any behavior you don't want to engage in.

Whether we like it or not, we're influenced by the company we keep. And given enough time, we can eventually become more and more like those who surround us. So choose your environment wisely. Because no matter how much willpower and conviction we have to stay "true to who you are," we're all human and for better or worse, we'll change every day whether we like it or not. © 2008 Rabbi Z. Leff and aish.org

*The rabbi grabbed someone on his way out of shul on Rosh Hashannah and said to him, "My friend, you need to join the army of Hashem!"*

*The man thought for a second and then responded,*

*"Rabbi, I already AM in the army of Hashem."*

*"If that's true," continued the rabbi, "why do I only see you in shul twice a year?"*

*The man leaned close and whispered, "I'm in the secret service!" ☺*

*(I don't care who you are, that's funny right there...)*

### RABBI CHAIM FLOM

## Short Vorts

**“**I had that "techie" come and spend 4 hours here taking care of my computer."

"I hope you paid him for it, or at least offered to pay."

"No, he wasn't busy anyhow."

When the Torah says "Command Aaron..." Rashi says this denotes an "urging" to fulfill the Mitzva. Then Rashi says, "Especially where there is a loss of money involved." What is the "loss of money"? Some commentaries explain that since the Kohen (priest) involved would spend many hours on this, and possibly not get any financial payment, it is called a loss of money.

When evaluating other people's work, we must try looking through their eyes and not ours!! © 2008 Rabbi C. Flom and torah.org

**Hog**



**Samayach!**

Happy Purim!