

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**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 G-d - to the Jewish people and explain and teach them these laws and nuances of the G-dly 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 G-d'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 G-d'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

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 Yochai Lipshitz HYD, 18, of Yerushalayim;  
 Neria Cohen HYD, 15, of Yerushalayim;  
 Yonosan Yitzchak Eldar HYD, 16, of Shilo;  
 Yonadav Chaim Hirschfeld HYD, 19, of Kochav  
 Hashachar;  
 Roie Roth HYD, 18, of Elkana;  
 Segev Peniel Avichayil HYD, 15, of Neve Daniel;  
 Avraham Dovid Moses HYD, 16, of Efrat; and  
 Doron Tronoch HYD, 26, of Ashdod

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 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).

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

### Shabbat Forshpeis

**F**undamental to the idea of the korban, which we begin reading about this week, is the power to change oneself. After all, the term korban comes from the word karov, meaning coming closer to G-d. Yet change is not easily accomplished. On its most basic level, the process involves a belief that one has the capacity to transform.

This capacity is implicit in the Purim story. Note how Queen Esther undergoes a fundamental metamorphosis in chapter four of the Megillah. When told that Mordechai was in sackcloth, she wonders why. (Esther 4:4-5) At that point, Esther does not even know that the Jewish people had been threatened. She had become so insulated in the palace of the King that she did not feel the plight of her fellow Jew. Furthermore, when asked by Mordechai to intercede on behalf of the

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Jewish people, she refuses, claiming that the rules of the palace did not allow her to come before the King. (Esther 4:7-11)

Yet, when Mordechai rebukes her, declaring that she too would not be able to escape the evil decree, perhaps the most powerful moment of the Megillah takes place. Esther courageously declares that she would come before the King, even if it means that she would perish. (Esther 4:13-16)

Esther's Hebrew name was Hadassah. Once she becomes Queen, she adopts the Persian name Esther. This name, which means "hidden," reminds us that at the outset of her rulership, she abides by Mordechai's request to hide her Jewish identity. (Esther 2:20) But, as the narrative in chapter four reveals, she returns to her roots. At a key moment she is ready to speak out powerfully on behalf of her people. Esther provides an important example of how change is possible.

Rabbi David Silber notes that one of the smallest words found in the Megillah, *dat*, is used often and teaches an important lesson about Purim. *Dat* means law. In Persia, the law was immutable, it could never change. And so, when Vashti refused to come before the King, Ahashverosh asks, "according to the law (*dat*) what shall be done to Queen Vashti. (Megillah 1:15) And when it is decided that a new Queen be selected, the Megillah once again uses the term *dat*-the law of selection. (Megillah 2:8) And when Haman accuses the Jews of not keeping the King's laws, again the word *dat* is used. (Megillah 3:8) Indeed, the decree that the Jews be killed is also referred to as *dat*. (Megillah 3:14-15)

Even when told of Haman's plan to destroy the Jews, Ahashverosh declares that he cannot change the prior decree that the Jews be killed. (Megillah 8:8) The law must remain. All Ahashverosh could do is allow the introduction of a new *dat*, a new law that stands in contradiction to, but cannot take the place of the first. (Megillah 8:13) Rabbi Silber points out that not coincidentally, when Esther agreed to come before Ahashverosh, she declares, "I will go to the king contrary to the law (*lo khe-dat*)." (Esther 4:16) Esther had been so transformed that she is prepared to defy the immutable law of Persia.

The confluence of this week's portion and the Megillah reminds all of us of capacity to forge a new

destiny even in the face of seemingly impossible obstacles. © 2008 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 SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

“If the entire congregation of Israel commits an inadvertent violation as a result of (a mistaken legal decision of the Highest Court) ...and they thereby violate one of the prohibitory commandments of G-d, they shall incur guilt" (Lev.4:13).

If the Jewish state could be revived virtually from the ashes of destruction after 2000 years, then why hasn't the Sanhedrin, the great Jewish court of the 1st and 2nd Commonwealths, been revived?

During the centuries of its existence, this august body, comprised of 71 elders and sages who ruled on every aspect of life, brought unity to the land because their decisions were binding on the entire nation. On the surface, reviving the Sanhedrin seems impossible because its members must be recipients of the classic Jewish ordination that traces itself back to Moses himself, and even to the Almighty, as it were, who ordained Moses, then Moses ordained Joshua, Joshua the elders, the elders the prophets, the prophets the Men of the Great Assembly. But this special ordination came to an end in the 3rd century of the common era. And since intrinsic to the idea of the Sanhedrin is a living tradition of ordination, when ordination died out, so, it would seem, did the Sanhedrin, and the possibility of its revival.

But a verse in this week's portion creates alternative possibilities. In his commentary to the Mishna, Maimonides writes, "...if all the Jewish Sages and their disciples would agree on the choice of one person among those who dwell in Israel as their head [but this must be done in the land of Israel], and (that head) establishes a house of learning, he would be considered as having received the original ordination and he could then ordain anyone he desires." Maimonides adds that the Sanhedrin would return to its original function as it is written in Isaiah (1:26), "I will restore thy judges as at first and thy Sages as in the beginning." Such a selection would mean an election, a list of candidates, ballots. And who does the choosing? The sages and their disciples-everyone with a relationship to Torah sages, to Jewish law. In an alternate source, however, Maimonides extends the privilege of voting to all adult residents of Israel! (Interpretations of the Mishnah, Chapter 4 of tractate B'Khorot, on the words "one who slaughters a first born animal and shows its blemish...).

This idea reappears in Maimonides' Mishna Torah, Laws of Sanhedrin, Ch. 4, Law, 11, except here he concludes with the phrase: "...this matter requires decision."

In 1563, a significant attempt was made by a leading sage of Safed, Rabbi Yaakov BeRab to revive classic ordination using the Mainionidean formula, and in an election in Safed, Rabbi BeRab was declared officially ordained. He proceeded to ordain his most important student, Rabbi Yosef Karo, the author of the Shulchan Aruch, along with several others of his disciples.

In the meantime, the rabbis in Jerusalem, led by Rabbi Levi ibn Habib, strongly opposed the Safed decision. When the question was put before the Ridbaz, Rabbi David Ben Zimra, the chief rabbi of Egypt, he ruled in favor of the Jerusalem rabbis because not only had the election been restricted to one city of Israel, Safed and not Jerusalem, but also because the closing phrase, "...this matter requires decision" opened up the possibility that Maimonides may have changed his mind, was in effect leaving the issue un-adjudicated.

Rabbi Yaakov BeRab, on the other hand, understood that the phrase in question, "requires decision," referred to whether one sage was sufficient to ordain others, or three sages were required for ordination. But he was absolutely convinced that Maimonides had no doubt whatsoever about the method and the inevitability of reviving classic ordination. Three centuries later, the first minister of religion in the new government of the Jewish state, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Maimon, renewed this controversy when he tried to convince the political and religious establishments that along with the creation of the state there should also be a creation of a Sanhedrin.

In his work, *The Renewal of the Sanhedrin in Our Renewed State*, he cites the existence of a copy of Maimonides' commentary to the Mishna published along with emendations and additions written by Maimonides himself after he wrote the Mishna Torah, where he specifically writes that ordination and the Sanhedrin will be renewed before the coming of the Messiah, which implies that it must be achieved through human efforts. A photocopy of these words, in Maimonides' own handwriting, is provided in the book by Rav Maimon.

What is the basis for his most democratic suggestion? I believe it stems from a verse which we find in this week's portion of Vayikra, quoted above, which deals with the issue of the sins of the entire congregation.

Commentators ask how can an "entire congregation" sin, and Rashi identifies the "congregation of Israel" with the Sanhedrin. In other words, when it says "...if the entire congregation of Israel errs..." it really means that if "the Sanhedrin errs."

The Jewish people are a nation defined by commandments, precepts and laws. Therefore the institution that protects and defines the law is at the heart of the nation's existence. In fact, how the Jewish people behave, what they do, can become the law. ("A custom of Israel is Torah.")

Knowing all this, it should not come as a surprise that Maimonides wanted to revive the ordination, and found a method utterly democratic in its design. The "people" equals the Sanhedrin, the "people" can choose one leading Jew who will then have the right to pass on his ordination to others, to re-create the Sanhedrin! And for Maimonides, it is the population living in the land of Israel which represents the historical congregation of Israel (B.T. Horayot 3b).

And apparently Maimonides is saying that before the next stage of Jewish history unfolds, the nation will have to decide as to who shall be given the authority to recreate the ordination, as to who will be the commander-in-chief of the rabbis. Will it happen in our lifetime? © 2008 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

### MACHON ZOMET

## Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

**T**he first case that the Torah notes with respect to the "Increasing and Decreasing" sacrifice (which changes depending on the wealth of the sinner) is the following: "And if a soul sins and hears the sound of a curse, if the person is a witness or knows something but he does not testify about it, he will bear his sin" [Vayikra 5:1]. What is the meaning of the phrase, to "hear the sound of a curse"? The commentators, based on the approach of the sages, explain that this is a case where a man is asked by his friend to testify for him, but that the potential witness takes a false oath denying that he knows anything about the case. He is then obligated to bring a sacrifice, for "an oath about testimony." However, in simple terms the description to "hear the sound of a curse" does not seem to fit this case at all, for two reasons. First, why should this be described in terms of "hearing," ignoring the fact that another person demands that the witness take an oath? In addition, why is this discussed in terms of "a curse" and not an oath, as is mentioned explicitly several verses later (5:4)?

In view of the above questions, it seems that this phrase should be understood somewhat differently. Evidently the key to understanding the passage can be seen in the affair of the idol made by Micha, which begins with the words of Micha to his mother: "With respect to the one thousand and one hundred pieces of silver which were taken from you, about which you cursed and told me, here is the silver-I am the one who took it" [Shoftim 17:2]. Thus we see that when a large sum of silver was stolen from Micha's mother she responded by putting a curse on the thief and on anybody who knew who had stolen the silver (compare to: "And the entire curse which is written in this book will fall on him" [Devarim 29:19]). Micha's mother spoke to him, even though she did not know that he was the thief (or at the very most suspected him of the theft). The fact that somebody reacts to events with a curse causes all those who hear it to relate to his or her cry.

And this explains the basis for the sacrifice in this week's portion, obligating all those who hear such a curse to relate to it, even if it was not specifically addressed to them. This also explains the use of the word "kol"? a sound? which is related to a rumor ("And the sound was passed through the camp" [Shemot 36:6]). Even one who does not directly hear the curse but has been told about it is obligated to respond.

This will also help us to understand Shlomo's prayer at the dedication of the Temple. "If one man sins against his colleague and takes an oath to curse him, let the oath come to this house before Your altar in this Temple. You shall hear in the heaven and act, and You shall judge your servants, to convict the evil one and set his way back on his head, and to exonerate the righteous one, to give him what he deserves in his righteousness." [Melachim I 8:31-32]. Here again a man who has been harmed has responded with a curse, but nobody listened. Shlomo therefore requests that the curse should be brought before G-d in the Temple, so that the Almighty will convict the evil person and provide justice for the righteous one.

Perhaps the difference between the simple interpretation and the more complex one given by the sages stems from their desire to avoid having many people start to use a curse on their own initiative. They have therefore established that only a formal oath taken in a court will obligate all those who hear it.

#### **RABBI NAFTALI REICH**

### **Legacy**

It was certainly much easier to expiate a transgression two thousand years ago than it is today. In ancient times, the transgressor would bring a sacrificial offering to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. He would confess his sins, repent and offer up the sacrifice as a symbol of his desire to rededicate himself to his Creator. The sanctity of the place and the sublime spirituality of the process would cleanse his soul and purify his spirit, and he would go home spiritually rejuvenated.

The Torah, while describing the process of the sacrificial service at great length and in exhaustive detail, introduces the topic with a curious statement. "When a man (adam) from among you brings a sacrifice..." The Torah usually refers to a man with the Hebrew word ish, yet here the Torah chooses the unusual word adam, which brings to mind Adam, the first man. What is the point of being reminded of Adam when we bring a sacrifice to atone for a sin?

Furthermore, why does the Torah speak of a man "from among you" that brings a sacrifice? What is added by this seemingly superfluous phrase? Isn't every man "from among you"?

The commentators explain that the purpose of a sacrifice is not only to express contrition for the sin but also to repair the damage that sin caused in the world.

A person does not live in a vacuum, an island unto himself. Every sinful act creates a void of the Creator's presence in the spiritual ecosystem, causing the retraction, so to speak, of the Divine Presence and the proliferation of negative energy. A sinful act causes the spiritual level of the world to fall, just as a mitzvah causes it to rise. Therefore, a person committing a sin affects not only himself but also his surroundings, his family, his friends, his community and to a certain extent the entire world.

Adam was the first man in the world, and in his mind, his decision to eat the forbidden fruit was a private decision. He thought it affected no one but him. But he was wrong. His one sinful act had tremendous ramifications for all future generations. It introduced death to the human experience.

This is the lesson we learn from Adam. There are no private decisions. Every act we commit has far-reaching implications for the spiritual condition of our environment. This is what a person should have in mind when he brings a sacrifice to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. He must realize that, like Adam, he mistakenly considered his sinful act victimless, affecting only himself. But he was really "from among you." His sinful act affected others as well, and it is the purpose of the sacrifice to repair the damage he has wrought.

A young man booked passage on a pleasure cruise ship. He took a cabin on the lowest deck, because those were the least expensive. After a few days, he locked himself in his room and ordered his meals delivered to his door.

The waiter who brought the meal noticed that the passageway was damp, and as he approached the young man's door, he saw water pulsing out from under his door. He bent down to smell it, and to his horror, he discovered that it was seawater. In a panic, he banged on the young man's door, but there was no response.

He ran to get the captain, and in a few minutes, the captain arrived with two crew members carrying axes. They broke down the door and found the young man drilling holes in the side of the ship.

"What are you doing?" screamed the captain. "Do you want to kill all of us? Do you want to sink this ship?"

"What are you talking about?" the young man retorted. "This is my private cabin. I paid for it, and I have the right to do anything I want in it."

In our own lives, we are all living in cabins on the great cruise ship of life. We may sometimes think we are independent individuals, answering only to ourselves. But as the popular saying goes, we are indeed all connected. The things we say or do, a harsh word, a thoughtless act, a spiritual transgression can harm the people around us. On the other hand, a warm smile, an act of kindness, a word of encouragement can touch, move and inspire. Our acts may cause a ripple effect whose extent cannot be measured. And even if we manage to keep certain behaviors in total isolation,

they still leave a mark in the spiritual world. We may think we are "Adam," but let us always remember that we are really "from among us." © 2008 Rabbi A. Wagensberg & aish.com

**DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK**

## What's Bothering Rashi

“**A**nd it was in the days of Achashveirosh, he is Achashveirosh, who ruled from Hodu unto Kush, 127 states.” (Esther 1:1) "He is Achashveirosh"-Rashi: "He is, [the same] in his evilness from his beginning until his end."

Rashi tells us that King Achashveirosh was evil from the beginning of his reign until the end of his reign. What would you ask here? A Question: What in this verse prompted Rashi to comment? What is bothering him? An Answer: The phrase "he is Achashveirosh" is redundant. The verse would make the same sense without these two words. Rashi is implicitly asking: What do these words add to our understanding? How does his comment answer this question?

An Answer: The word "He is" conveys an existential reality, an essence. It tells us something about the essence of this man. The word "hu" ("he" in Hebrew) is related to the word "hoveh"- "being." So the words "he is Achashveirosh" tell us that Achashveirosh "is," was, and will be, what he essentially is. He is what he is. And that is "evil." The basis for the drash is now clear, it is the apparently unnecessary word "he is," but we can still ask a question. A Question: Granted that these words tell us that Achashveirosh is, was, and will be what he is essentially. But why do we conclude that this essence is "evil"? You must be familiar with "Nach" ("The Prophets") to answer this. Are you?

An Answer: In the Book of Ezra (4:6) we find the following verse: "And in the reign of Achashveirosh, at the beginning of his reign, they wrote hatred against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem."

Some sixty years after the destruction of the first Temple by Babylon, Darius, the king of Persia, granted the Jews permission to rebuild their Temple in Jerusalem. But soon afterwards, during Achashveirosh's reign, who took power after Darius, there were hostile rumors promulgated against the Jews. The king accepted these rumors which claimed that the Jews planned a rebellion. As a consequence, the king rescinded the order to rebuild the Temple. This is what our verse refers to.

This verifies that Achashveirosh was evil towards the Jews from the beginning of his reign. That he was evil towards them at the end of his reign, is clear from the Megillah, when he supported Haman's plan to destroy the Jews.

One could make the point that Achashveirosh was really inconsistent in his attitude and not so much evil. He was capricious in everything he did as well as in his attitude toward the Jews. Because we must

acknowledge that he was also helpful to the Jews. His evilness takes on a different tenor than straightforward aggression. In Achashveirosh's case it consisted of his having no inner compass, no personal ethic. The Sages sized up Achashveirosh brilliantly when they said of him "He killed his wife (Vashti) because of his friend (Haman) and killed his friend (Haman) because of this wife (Esther)." The fact that he could so easily be manipulated is indicative of man with no inner moral compass, no internalized sense of right and wrong. He was easily influenced to stop the building of the Temple, and later he was just as easily influenced to continue with its construction; first he gave Haman the OK to destroy the Jews, then he agreed with Esther to save the Jews and destroy Haman, This vacillation, this capacity for capriciousness, was itself the root of his evilness. A ruler without a clear vision of right and wrong is vulnerable to the manipulative designs of his advisors and as such is a danger to his subjects.

It has been pointed out that there is a gematriac connection between the words (in Hebrew, of course - since I cannot write the Hebrew on this program, please look up the words in the Megillah). "In the days of Achashveirosh, he is Achashveirosh."

And Rashi's words: "He [remained] in his evilness from his beginning to his end." Both phrases add up to 1716! (Rav Elazar of Worms) © 2008 Dr. A. Bonchek and aish.com

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

**T**his week we read Parashas Zachor in order to fulfill the Biblical commandment to "remember what Amalek did to us" (Devarim 25:17), and in about a week we will read Megilas Esther, the story of Amalek's descendant, Haman, trying to wipe us all out (Esther 3:13) until G-d intervened and, through Mordechai and Esther, miraculously saved us.

One of the more poignant moments of the Megilah occurs when Mordechai explains to Esther why she must risk approaching the king even though she was not summoned by him - an act usually punished by death - in order to plead on behalf of her people. "For if you remain silent at this time, a reprieve and salvation will arise for the Jews from another source, and you and your father's house (i.e. your family) will be destroyed; and who knows whether it was for precisely this opportunity that you reached the status of royalty" (4:14). Last year ([www.aishdas.org/ta/5767/tetzaveh.pdf](http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5767/tetzaveh.pdf)), I suggested that Mordechai and Esther had thought that G-d had put her in the palace in order to facilitate getting permission from the king to rebuild the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. After seeing Haman's plot unfold, Mordechai tells her that it may have been for a different reason - to save the Jews from Haman's evil decree. By taking a closer look at a different issue this verse raises,

we may be able to add another aspect to Mordechai's message to Esther about why she became the queen.

The point Mordechai was trying to make to Esther is that she must risk her life by going to the king even though he hasn't called her for a while. If the Jews will inevitably be saved anyway, why should she risk her life? Let G-d do His thing without putting her life on the line unnecessarily! If anything, the fact that G-d will save the Jews even if she doesn't go to the king would be a reason for her not to go, not a reason why she should! If they might be saved only if she goes, then we can understand why she should take her chances. But if the Jews will be saved anyway, what purpose does risking her life serve?

Another question that can be asked is why, if the Jews will be saved from Haman's decree, would Esther and her family perish. Again, if Esther risking her life will help save the entire nation, then she and her family, who are part of that nation, will also be spared. And if her not going to the king increases the chances of Haman being successful, then not going will cause her family to perish with everyone else. But if the rest of the nation is going to be saved anyway, and her not going to the king only changes how that salvation comes about, why would her family be destroyed if the rest of the nation would be okay? Wouldn't everybody be saved, including Esther and her family?

This last question is discussed by many of the commentators, with numerous answers suggested. The Meam Loez says that the salvation may come via a regime change, with the new regime canceling Haman's decree. This would save the Jewish nation, but in order for a regime change to occur, the king must be defeated, which likely includes killing him and his family. Since Esther is part of his family, she, and her family, would be killed even though the rest of the nation would now be spared. Mordechai is therefore telling her to make sure that Haman's decree is changed under the current regime, so that she can survive too. The Ralbag and several Tosafists are among those who say that although the rest of the nation will be saved, she will be punished for not getting involved when she should have. The Midrash (Esther Rabbah 8:6) has a similar approach, except that instead of the punishment being in this world it will come in the next world. Although these sources do not explain why her family would be included in this punishment, R"Y Nachmiash suggests that Mordechai was referring to himself when he added "your father's house," i.e. if he does not try getting her to intervene. R"M Chalou, and others, say that while those not near the palace can run away to escape the decree, those who live within the royal compound (i.e. Esther and her family) will not be able to. He also suggests that Mordechai included her family because if she is punished they will suffer too. Rabbeinu Zecharya ben Serok and the Malbim understand Mordechai's warning to mean that she will lose her position of royalty (not literally be destroyed), as since she only became queen

in order to be able to plead for her nation, if she doesn't, she will not stay queen. Therefore, all those that had benefited from her being queen, i.e. her family, would lose those privileges. If the net gain of her intervening is that she and her family will not be lost, we can understand why she should take the chance of approaching the king even though everyone else would be spared anyway.

Another possibility had occurred to me, and B"H this approach is suggested by several commentators, including some of the Tosafists and Rabbi Yaakov of Lisa (the "Nesivos") in his commentary on Esther, Meggilas Setarim, quoting the Alshich. Although Shaul, the first King of Israel, set out to fulfill the Biblical commandment to wipe out Amalek, he spared their king, Agag (Shemuel I 15:1-9). Haman descended from Agag (see Meggillah 13a), while Mordechai and Esther were descendents of Shaul (see Targum Shayni 2:5). Had Haman succeeded in wiping out the Jewish nation, it could be attributed to Shaul not killing Agag. However, by thwarting Haman's plan, Mordechai and Esther would prevent this, thereby keeping their ancestor's sin to a minimum. And because Esther would risk her own life in order to save her people, she would even atone for Shaul's sin. Therefore, even though the nation would be saved regardless of whether or not the salvation came through Esther, Mordechai tells her that if she does not take advantage of the opportunity, the nation will be saved some other way while she and her father's house will still have Shaul's sin as part of their legacy. "And who knows," he continued, "whether it was specifically for this situation," where a descendent of Agag is threatening us, that "you," a descendent of Shaul, "became queen." Not just to save the Jewish people, but to reverse the mistake that our family has had to bear for generations. © 2008 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### **RABBI BORUCH 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 a 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 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.  
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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. © 2008 Rabbi A. Lieberman & aish.com

### 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. © 2008 Rabbi A. Wagensberg & aish.com