

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

The end of Parashas Shemini deals with which animals are kosher and which are not. Although this is but one aspect of the laws of kashrus (it doesn't deal with ritual slaughter, removing the blood, not mixing milk with meat, separating tithes, or several other aspects), being read just a couple of days after we have transitioned back from only eating things that are "kosher for Passover" provides an interesting context.

I'm not referring to those that alter their diet just for Passover but are not concerned with keeping kosher the rest of the year. I doubt many in this category are going to be in synagogue to hear about an aspect of keeping kosher that applies all year (and even if they are, would not pick up on it). The chances of someone who only keeps kosher on Passover hearing about land animals needing to have split hooves and chew their cud and sea creatures needing to have both fins and scales, and therefore realize that kashrus is more than just a week-long adventure, is quite slim. Rather, I'm referring to the tremendous amount of effort (and expense) that goes into making extra sure that every last crumb of food that is not approved for Passover (even those foods that do not contain any of the five grains) is out of our lives, then, shortly thereafter (at least this year), reading about which animals are not kosher. It's like (lehavdil) a NASCAR champion going for a driver's perm it after his latest victory! There must be a "take-home" message that comes from this contrast.

As we know, there are many that think that it would be too hard to keep kosher (at all, let alone on Passover). The thought of giving up the ease of not having to think before putting food in your mouth, including where you can eat and who will be willing to eat with someone with such dietary restrictions, is too much for most to even make the attempt. Having to give up bacon and/or lobster itself may be too much for some. Nevertheless, many have done just that, and are now quite comfortable keeping the highest of kashrus standards. Was the task any less daunting? Of course not. But, in hindsight, an obstacle that seemed insurmountable becomes something that no longer requires any thought or effort.

Reading about keeping the most basic of kashrus laws so soon after putting away our Passover dishes reminds us that even if avoiding shellfish is second nature to us, for others it is not as easy. By the same token, there are things that we could/should be doing or avoiding that seem too tough to tackle, yet for others is a part of their daily routine. Whether it is setting aside time each and every day to study Torah, committing to learn halacha every day, doing "shenayim mikreh ve'echad targum" every week, donating time and/or money to help those less fortunate than ourselves, or anything else that we know we really should do but convince ourselves we can't do just yet, our perception of the difficulty is only relative. Let's use this time between the commemoration of our exodus from Egypt and our once again accepting the Torah to figure out which "difficult" thing we can turn into a relatively easy one. © 2009 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

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

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

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

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

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tzafun sounds like tzafon which means north. It is said that the Messiah will come from the north.

Tzafun is followed by the Grace After Meals, the prayer of thanksgiving for food eaten during the main course. This prayer, that we recite after each meal during the year, interestingly includes the prayer that G-d send to us Elijah the Prophet who announces the coming of the Messiah.

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

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

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

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

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

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

including the Oneness of G-d, so crucially necessary for redemption.

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

One wonders, why is this deep message written in metaphor. It may be to teach that so much in Jewish history cannot be understood as it occurs, it can only be deciphered in hindsight. And it may be that the Chad Gadya is written playfully and humorously to teach that to survive against the odds requires the ability to laugh. Our very existence is difficult to believe, and in that sense almost funny.

As we sit down to the seder this year, we will be focusing not only on past redemption, but on the hope for future redemption. And we will sing Chad Gadya, that funny little song to remind us to laugh. The Chad Gadya, the song written in metaphors to remind us that even though we don't understand—one day we will. © 2009 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.

JEWISH WORLD REVIEW

The Illusion of Freedom

by Rabbi Yonason Goldson

<http://www.JewishWorldReview.com>

After generations of slavery and oppression, amidst miracles unprecedented and unrepeated, the Children of Israel marched forth out of Egypt and into the wilderness as a free people for the first time in their collective memory. Fifty days later they stood together at Sinai to receive the Torah - the code of 613 commandments that would define every aspect of their lives.

What happened to freedom? What happened to the promise of redemption when all that really happened was the trading of one master for another?

Much of the modern world has built its understanding of freedom upon Thomas Jefferson's famous formulation of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." But what would life be like in a society of unrestricted freedom? How many of us would chose to live in with no rules at all, where everyone was free to drive on either side of the road, to take whatever they desired regardless of rightful ownership, to indulge every whim and impulse without a thought of accountability? The absolute "freedom" of pure anarchy would provide no protection for the rights to life, liberty,

and the pursuit of happiness. Consequently, it would provide no freedom at all.

Intuitively, we understand that some freedoms have to be sacrificed in order to preserve order and ensure the common welfare. If so, we are forced to refine our concept of freedom. In contrast to ancient Egypt, in which our ancestors were coerced by the rod and the whip to bow before Pharaoh's will, the G-d of our redemption allows us the freedom from immediate retribution. By doing so, the Almighty empowers us with the freedom to make our own choices, to take responsibility of our own actions, and to transform ourselves from creatures of physical impulse into beings of spiritual refinement.

Ultimately, the freedom we possess is the freedom to choose our own master, to choose the leaders and system of laws that will best serve our collective interests in the long run.

Because we live in a society with others who also demand freedom, our choices will necessarily be limited by the conventions of society. More significantly, the values of the society in which we live will shape our own attitudes, influencing the ways we think that priorities we hold dear. From the moment we are born, our impressions are determined by others: our parents, our teachers, and our peers, as well as writers, celebrities, sports stars, and advertisers.

How often have we asked ourselves whether the ideas that govern our choices as spouses, as parents, and as community members are truly our own? How often do we stop to reflect whether we have acquired the values that guide us in our relationships and our careers through thoughtful contemplation or through cultural osmosis?

The illusion of freedom convinces us that our own gratification comes before our obligations to others, before even our obligations to ourselves. If we allow our desire for unrestricted freedom to steer our lives, we will find ourselves enslaved by our desires no less than a chain smoker is a slave to his cigarettes or an alcoholic is a slave to his gin. Convinced that freedom is a goal in itself, we will sacrifice everything of true value for the cruel master of self-indulgence. Deceived into believing that responsibility is the antithesis of freedom, we will invest ourselves, consciously or unconsciously, in philosophies like this one:

Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose, Nothing don't mean nothing honey if it ain't free, now now. And feeling good was easy, L-rd, when he sang the blues, You know feeling good was good enough for me, Good enough for me and my Bobby McGee.

These are the words that made Janice Joplin into a counterculture idol, before she died of a heroin overdose at the age of 27.

Less dramatic examples confront us every day. Politicians, movie icons, and athletes destroy their careers and their family lives for a few fleeting moments of pleasure. Parents allow their children to grow up without direction or discipline lest they quash their creativity or damage their egos by imposing structure and meaning upon their lives. A once-productive citizenry increasingly looks to receive support on the backs of others, whether through welfare, lawsuits, or pyramid schemes that leave countless victims footing the bill.

More than anything, Passover celebrates the freedom to think, to take stock of our lives and reassess our values, to take a fresh look at our own motivations and our own decisions, to acknowledge where we may have lost sight of truly meaningful goals and sincerely commit ourselves to striking out on a truer course.

Last year we were slaves to our inner masters; this year we have a chance to set ourselves free to seek the paths of truth and follow them toward the destination of enduring spiritual redemption. © 2009 Rabbi H. Belovski & Jewish World Review

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd it happened on the eighth day, that Moses called Aaron and his sons, and the elders of Israel” (Lev. 9:1)

One of the most moving rituals of the Jewish week, at the advent of the eight day, is the Havdalah (lit. separation) ceremony, when we intone a sweet-sad melody to the chant, "Behold, the Lord of my salvation in Whom I trust and thus I do not fear," and as we bid a sorrowful and faithful farewell to the warm comfort of the fleeting Shabbat amidst wine, spice and fire. Perhaps the feelings we experience as we go through this act of 'separation' (dividing the Sabbath from the rest of the week) require the wine and the sweet smelling fragrances to refresh and re-invigorate our spirits when we sense the leave-taking of the Sabbath Queen.

And we intone the blessing over the fire-recalling the teaching of our Sages that fire was created by Adam on that first, primordial Saturday night - we customarily look at our fingernails. Why our fingernails?

The most rational explanation is that we can see, in the reflection of the light on one side of our fingers and not on the other, the actual power of light to provide enhanced vision. The early commentary, Rabbi Menahem Meiri, a Rishon, (citing the Gaonim) suggests that when Adam was first created, his entire body was covered with the same strong substance of the fingernails as a protective coat. Subsequently, when the forbidden fruit of knowledge of good and evil was eaten, this protective coat was removed - with only the finger-nails serving as a reminder of his earlier more protected and invincible state. Since we are

about to intone the prayer for the speedy arrival of Elijah the Prophet, herald of redemption, at the end of the Havdalah ceremony, we are in effect requesting a return to the more exalted and guarded human estate in Eden.

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

The "eighth day" is indeed fraught with significance. Let us return to the initial seven days of creation, when the Almighty created the heavens and the earth, and all of their hosts. On the sixth day He created the human being and placed him - Adam together with his wife Eve - in the Garden of Eden. The first couple sinned by plucking the fruit of Knowledge of Good and Evil from off the tree and eating it, severing good and evil from their Divine source, thereby reducing morality into a subjective experience, relative to the 'flavor of the day.' From that moment in the garden, good and evil were no longer rooted in a Divine objective morality created by G-d; good and evil became whatever the human being believed is good for him/her, and or evil for him/her. That is why our mystical literature refers to Adam's sin as his having "severed the plantings" (*kitzet banetiyot*), removing the seed from its source. And so Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden.

Then came the first Sabbath Day, the specific span of time when each individual can find refuge and comfort under the wings of the Divine Presence, the day when the Almighty especially extends His 'arms' to embrace the penitent. Indeed the Midrash (Bereishit Rabbah) teaches us that Adam recited the Psalm for the Sabbath Day for the first time, genuinely uplifted by the understanding that there truly existed a road back to Eden and that it was paved with stones of repentance and repair.

And then came the first Saturday night, the beginning of the first eighth day. "This was the first time that darkness began to descend upon the world.... And the Almighty prepared two flint stones for Adam; Adam rubbed them together and there emerged fire...." (Bereishit Rabbah 11,2). Hence the first 'eighth' day is parallel to the very first day: on the first day G-d created light (*ohr*) for the world, and on the eighth day Adam created light and warmth (*eish*) for the world.

But it goes much deeper than that. On the seven days of creation, G-d created a world for the human being to live in; on the eighth day Adam discovered - through fire - how he could repair and improve that world, re-create that world as a true picture of the Divine. And if on the primordial seven days of creation, G-d made a world for humanity, on the eighth day of the consecration of the Sanctuary the Israelites made a Sacred Space - an improved world - in miniature, in which G-d could dwell together with humanity: "They shall make for a Sanctuary so that I may dwell in their midst." (Exodus, Trumah).

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

G-d sent down His Divine light and fire as a sign that He accepted our Sanctuary, the work of human hands - which carried out to perfection the Divine architectural directions. Then Nadav and Avihu came along with "a strange fire, which they had not been commanded to bring....(Lev. 10:1)." Yes, we must use our creativity in the service of G-d to perfect ourselves and our world - but only in accordance with His will, in accordance with the limits He has placed on Divine Service, so that we never fall into the trap of bringing the strange fires of Moloch (Deut 18:10) and the immoral wars of Jihad (which also involves the sacrifice of children). Human hands created fire - but human hands must use that fire to recreate and not to destroy. And therefore we look at our fingers as we make the blessing over fire every Saturday night, the beginning of our weekly "eighth day." We are telling ourselves that everything - the entire future of our lives and our world - lies in our own hands! © 2009 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BARUCH LEFF

Kol Yaakov

It sounds funny doesn't it. Can there really be something valuable in worshipping idols? Isn't idol worship Public Enemy #1 in the eyes of the Torah? Don't we find tens of admonishments against idol worship in the Torah?

The answer, of course, is a resounding "Yes!" However, we will discover that the drive for idol worship comes from a holy place. The concept of sacrifices, which has some of its aspects described in this week's Torah portion, very much relates to the positive elements of idol worship.

We first turn, by way of introduction, to Abraham and his idol-worshipping father, Terach. We studied recently on Passover night the following passage: "Originally our forefathers were idol worshippers, but now G-d has drawn us close to serve Him ... As the verse states, 'Your ancestors ... Terach, the father of Abraham and Nachor, worshipped other lords.'"

It is strange that we credit Terach as being one of our forefathers. Usually, we think of Abraham as the first father of monotheism and Judaism, not an idol worshipper, Terach. Somehow it appears that we owe some credit to Terach. Why?

Another question. Genesis (11:10-32) lists the 10 generations between Noah and Abraham. The Torah describes the ages when each generation began having children. The average age was 30. Yet, Terach had his first child at the age of 70. What is the reason that Terach married so late?

It must be that Terach was a very uniquely spiritual person and did not want to have children until he felt himself ready. He was spending his time growing in his idolatrous service, what he believed was spirituality. He was misguided but sincere in his realizations of the spiritual realm and the need to serve a higher power. This is why we find Terach leaving his comfortable home and sojourning in the direction of the land of Israel (Genesis 11:31). Terach understood that holiness could be found in Israel and wanted to access it. So he sacrificed his cozy surroundings and moved.

It cannot be a coincidence that Abraham, who became, arguably, the greatest of all men, comes from Terach. Terach possessed great spirituality and devotion but utilized it improperly for the wrong purpose. Abraham would take the non-actualized and misguided potential that was present in Terach, and use it for true spirituality and service of the real and only G-d.

If Abraham's greatness is credited to Terach, it is no longer so far-fetched to say that much of the true service of G-d, and especially the service of sacrifices, can be found in the basic roots of idol worship. Let us now begin to discuss the key to understanding sacrificial worship.

We no longer appreciate what the lure and temptation of idol worship was to the world more than 2000 years ago. We also no longer understand the beauty and meaning of sacrificial worship. These two phenomena are directly intertwined.

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 64a), describes that the Sages of over 2,000 years ago fasted and prayed to G-d to abolish the temptation for idol worship. Idol worship had become such a powerful force that it was virtually an impossible challenge to withstand. The Sages request was granted. There is no longer a desire to worship idols present in the world. To us, the whole notion of idol worship seems foolish. This is due to the

success of the Sages' prayers. But this success and lack of temptation for idol worship did not come without a heavy price.

G-d made the world perfectly balanced. The goal for mankind is to use free choice to choose good over evil. In order for free choice to exist, it must be equally possible for one to choose good or evil. This means that if G-d removes a certain lure for evil from the world, he also must counter the imbalance by making good more difficult to achieve. If idol worship no longer exists, something that is utilized for choosing good must also be lost from the world. That thing became the service of sacrifices. Desire for idol worship and desire for sacrifices are interrelated and if one goes out the door, the other inevitably goes with it. If you remove the desperate need that people had to worship idols, you also remove the desperate need to worship G-d.

How are idolatry and sacrificial worship related? And just what is the element of goodness and truth found in idolatry?

The basic rationale for the obsession the ancients had for idolatry was the recognition that they were dependent on a higher power. Humanism as a philosophy and movement did not exist, and they did not feel, as the moderns do, that humans can solve all of the problems of the world. They knew they had to rely on the supreme controlling heavenly force of the world. The only question was whether there was a multiplicity of forces or a single one. No matter what, though, they desperately needed to relate to a higher power. So they constructed idols that represented in physical form the higher powers in which they believed.

Sacrifices are an outgrowth of a tremendous drive to serve and relate to a higher power. A man who really loves his wife cannot simply tell her that he loves her. He feels compelled to buy her flowers or chocolates to express his love and to give something of his self to her. So it is with relating to G-d. Because we are physical beings, we are driven (under normal pre-nullification of the desire for idolatry conditions) to show our love and passion for G-d in some physical form. And this giving of oneself to G-d must be in an ultimate sense. I want to give my entire existence, my whole life to G-d. I express this with the offering of my animal's life. As many have pointed out, this is why the word for sacrifice in Hebrew is "Korban," meaning closeness.

The minute we would truly feel G-d's reality, we would be overcome with an enthusiasm to worship and offer Him a sacrifice. This is why the Torah is replete with admonitions and violations of the commandment not to offer sacrifices on an altar (called a bamah in Hebrew) outside of the Temple. People had a very difficult time controlling their desire to offer a sacrifice to G-d. It was very much like a hunger to eat. It would be an extremely hard task to tell someone that he had to wait until they reached the Temple in Jerusalem in

order to eat. The same was true with the offering of sacrifices to G-d.

So, after much contemplation, we have found the depth of truth within idolatry and how it relates to the proper service of G-d. Our task now is to discover where in our lives we can maintain a concept of sacrificing for G-d. Which negative character trait needs to be weeded out of our system and burnt on the altar?

Remember that it can be an easier decision to die for G-d than to live day-to-day for G-d. True offerings and sacrifices for G-d involve the small but consistent decisions to do the right thing when there is no spiritual crisis or adrenaline present.

As the Yiddish expression goes, "Big actions-small man. Small actions-big man." If you are only concerned about the 'big' aspects of life, then you will remain a shallow person.

True greatness can only be achieved through the caring about the small but steady things of life.

Be a big man. Care about small actions. © 2009 Rabbi B. Leff and torah.org.

RABBI YISROEL CINER

Parsha Insights

This week we read the parsha of Shemini. "Va'y'hee ba'yome ha'shmini {And it was on the eighth day}, Moshe summoned Aharon and his sons and the elders of Israel. [9:1]" Rashi explains that this was the eighth day of the consecration and the day that the Mishkan {Tabernacle} was erected.

"And he said to Aharon, take a calf as a sin offering... because on this day Hashem will appear to you. [9:2,4] And Moshe said to Aharon: 'Draw close to the altar and offer your sin offering... and atone for yourself and for the nation.' [9:7]"

Moshe needed to urge Aharon to draw close to the altar. Aharon was both embarrassed and afraid to draw close-he saw a vision of the Golden Calf blocking any atonement that he would offer. Rashi explains that Moshe assuaged his fears by asking, "Why are you embarrassed-for this you have been chosen."

There are many different explanations on what Moshe meant when he told him "for this you have been chosen." There are those who explain that it was specifically this sensitivity and humility, manifested by his embarrassment and fear of the sin he had committed, which made him worthy of being chosen as the Kohen Gadol {High Priest}.

We can perform an act which should cause us to feel embarrassment before Hashem and then immediately afterwards perform a mitzvah {commandment} or make a bracha {blessing}. Now, of course, having done something wrong is no reason not to do something right. However, at the same time, one should feel at least a little bit sheepish coming to stand before Hashem and serve Him after just having done something clearly contrary to His will.

The vision of the Calf was embedded in his mind-he felt that he couldn't draw close to Hashem. Moshe explained to him that it was that attitude which made him worthy of being the Kohen Gadol. "For this you have been chosen."

The Imray Emes, quoting Rav Chaim Vital, offers a different explanation. Every person has a specific life-mission to obtain or correct a certain attribute or tendency. Since this is the reason why his neshama {soul} was sent to this world, he will encounter resistance, challenges and difficulties in regard to that specific area. As opposed to these difficulties being seen as an indication that this area 'just isn't for me,' one must have the insight to realize that those difficulties are the highway markers on the long road of life, revealing the area which contains the potential for optimal growth and greatness. The greater the challenges that one is confronted with, the more Hashem wants and expects from the person.

Aharon had stumbled and had sinned with the Golden Calf. As he was now going to induct the service to Hashem in the Mishkan, he encountered tremendous obstacles. It appeared as if Hashem didn't want his service. He was embarrassed and afraid to draw close. Perhaps he was in the wrong line of business...

Moshe tells him: "Draw close to the altar-for this you have been chosen." The difficulties and obstacles that you are encountering are the strongest and clearest indications that this is your line of business, "for this you have been chosen."

The Vilna Gaon takes this even a step further. At times a soul must return to this world in order to take care of some unfinished business. This is known as 'gilgul' or reincarnation. The Kabbalists teach that in our 'last-minute-before-the-Moshiach-generations' we are all in such a state-we're back trying to make good on where we fell short in the past.

But how does a person know, besides general mitzvah observance, what specific aspect or area he has returned to correct? The Vilna Gaon says that there are two ways of knowing. Firstly, the area where a person has stumbled and 'given in' many times and secondly, the area for which he feels a strong pull of desire. Those are the areas where he can shine and that is why he is walking this earth.

Rav Hutner zt"l, in a famous letter to a student who was getting discouraged by his stumbles in life, wrote that the stories we tell of the greatness of our Gedolim {great Jewish scholars and leaders} can sometimes serve a disservice. We tell of the final end product, skipping the struggles and stumbles, which, only through them, was that greatness achieved.

The classic example amongst Klal Yisroel {the Jewish people} of a person who guarded his tongue and attained the highest level of taharas halashon {purity of speech} is the Chofetz Chaim. Ask any child and he'll tell you that the Chofetz Chaim never spoke or

listened to lashon harah {derogatory statements}. That of course is incorrect. It was only as a result of his battles, his struggles, his stumbles and his setbacks that he ultimately attained the purity that he did. But that is not discussed! The result is that a person who slips and sometimes speaks lashon harah can feel discouraged and disgusted with himself. "I'm not cut out for this," he'll say to himself.

I recall a conversation I had with a parent of a student of mine who had progressed beautifully during the year but had regressed a bit while home for the Pesach vacation. The parent was so upset and frustrated that she was questioning if the time spent in Yeshiva in Israel had been worthwhile. My response was that, as compared to the state that he was in before coming to Yeshiva where he had basically thrown in the towel, if now he was struggling, albeit stumbling, then the gains that had been made were immeasurable.

"Why are you embarrassed-for this you have been chosen." Important words to keep in mind as we bump along the road of life... © 2000 Rabbi Y. Ciner & Project Genesis

RABBI LIPMAN PODOLSKY

Yeshiva HaKotel

After a whole week devoting themselves to their self-consecration in the Mishkan, one would have thought that Aharon and his sons had had enough! Of what significance, then, is the eighth day-the title of our Parsha? Is seven not sufficient?

After a whole week of celebrating Pesach, is it not enough? Must I truly bind the festival, as it were, to the corners of the altar? What exactly is the point of "Isru-Chag", which seems to be a virtual extension of the holiday?

You know, it's not easy being a kid. You ask questions, but the grownups don't seem to hear. The wise son posed a very wise question: "What are the testimonies and the statutes and the laws that Hashem our G-d has commanded you?" Does the father answer his question? All he does reply is: "One may not eat desert after the Korban Pesach." How does the response fit the query?

Once upon a time, I had the great fortune of learning with a very strong-willed chavrusa (study partner). He never missed a learning session. He never came late, never left early, and took no breaks. He pushed himself till he could push no more. His stated goal was to uncover the Truth concealed within the Gemara. We would typically spend several days plumbing the depths of a sugya (topic).

Finally, when I felt I had a decent understanding of the material and was more than ready to move on, he would plead, and sometimes even demand to spend just one more day on this particular sugya. "You'll see," he would say, "the real truth will

show itself if we just give it a chance!" Invariably, he was right. As much as I thought I understood the Gemara, after that extra day angels would descend and shine upon us the light of Heaven. Had we concluded prematurely, we would have remained in the dark; but, I am ashamed to admit, we would have thought that we truly understood.

The problem with time is, it passes. After a while, all we have are memories. How can we keep the experience alive? How can we prevent Pesach from passing over? How can we transcend time, plugging into the eternal?

This is Isru-Chag. We don't just pass through a holiday, we live it, and try to take it with us. No, seven is not sufficient. Just one more day, one more moment of basking in the divine presence, will solidify the glue. Pesach will become part of us, part and parcel of our psycho/spiritual DNA.

This is the answer to the wise son. All these mitzvos that we do on Pesach aren't a one-time deal. The goal is to keep them alive long after we performed them. Thus we eat no desert after the Korban Pesach. We want the taste of Pesach to linger in our mouths, to linger in our lives. As we grow, as we build on yesterday, we keep yesterday alive, today. Sefiras HaOmer symbolizes this process. Shavuot stands on Pesach's shoulders. As such, Pesach still lives.

This is the eighth day. Seven is ephemeral; eight is forever. The Divine presence for which they so yearned appeared only on the eighth day. Aharon and his sons thus became forever bound to the Divine. And so can we.

The Yetzer HaRa would love to see us drown in the quagmire of time, to behold us bogged down in the morass of materialism. But we can outsmart him if we so desire. Bind ourselves! The more secure, the better! Don't throw away the past; build on it! The heights we attain will more than recompense us for our struggle.

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RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Playing With Fire

It was the best of times. It was the worst of times. The Mishkan (tabernacle) was finally completed, and the celebration had begun. Ahron the High Priest and his children brought special offerings, and the joy of accomplishment permeated the camp of the Jewish Nation. Then tragedy struck. Ahron's two sons, Nadav and Avihu, brought an offering that the Torah characterizes as "an alien fire that Hashem had not commanded. A fire went out from before Hashem and consumed them, and they died before Hashem." (Leviticus 10:1-3)

Varying Talmudic and Medrashic opinions argue as to what exact sin they committed. Some

commentaries interpret the literal verse by explaining that Ahron's children rendered a Halachic (Biblical law) decision in front of their master, Moshe. Others say that they performed their service after drinking wine. Still others argue that their true punishment was deserved at Sinai. They refused to marry claiming that their lineage was so dignified that no maiden could ever meet their standard. Another interpretation is that they began to discuss their future leadership roles that they would secure after the two old men (Moshe and Ahron) passed on.

In all these varying opinions a major question must be addressed. If those were their actual sins, why then did the Torah use the terminology "a strange fire that Hashem had not commanded" to describe their transgression? Obviously those words are fit to describe each interpretation that is offered. How?

The Dubno Magid would often relate the following parable: After receiving his promotion to captain, a young sergeant was given his new uniform. He was strictly warned by his appointing general. "Officer, this uniform is your badge of honor. Wear it with pride, and never remove it in public! Remember, you represent the king's elite forces, and your life is now devoted to enhance the honor of his kingdom."

Not long after his commission some seamen in a public park chided the young officer. "We hear you have a large tattoo across your chest reading "I miss my Mom." The young officer was enraged at this humiliating claim, and disputed it vehemently. He was tempted to strip to the waist, but remembered the stern warning not to remove his coat. Suddenly one of the sailors declared, "we will contribute 500 golden pieces to the King's treasury if you don't have the tattoo -- but only if you prove it now!"

In a patriotic move that the sergeant felt would surely bring pleasure to the commander-in-chief, he bared his chest, proved his point and collected the 500 gold coins. He ran to the general with the money and expected a commendation. Unfortunately, a shower of abuse greeted the neophyte officer. "You fool! I just lost a fortune because of your stupidity. I bet the Navy admiral 2,500 gold pieces that not one of my soldiers would ever remove their uniforms publicly! "

Perhaps there is a common thread among all the explanations of the sins of Nadav and Avihu. In all of the opinions, they had the best of intentions but their actions lacked protocol and guidance. Actions without protocol can have disastrous results. Nadav and Avihu were considered very holy and pious. But the small degree of over-confidence led to their acting without consort. It led to their demise. Perhaps they felt that they were in a position to render judgment without Moshe, or that a little wine may have enhanced their service. Maybe they felt that marriage was beneath them. In theory they may have been correct. But they made decisions without consultation, advice, or

consent. They were looked forward to their own leadership -- a leadership that never materialized. They had the desire to contribute their own fire, according to their own visions, but the Torah considered it alien.

The Mishkan was given to the Jews to atone for the sin of the Golden Calf. It was at the Golden Calf where the young nation rushed to judgment without true guidance. As soon as Hashem felt that the self-directed scenario was about to recur in the Mishkan, He made a powerful statement. It was as if the Mishkan had a nuclear charge. When dealing with high levels of radioactivity, one cannot forego the slightest established protocol. If you experiment with fire, especially an alien fire, unfortunately you get burnt.

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RABBI SHLOMO KATZ

HaMa'ayan

“I will be sanctified through those who are nearest to Me.” (10:3) R' Aharon Kotler (Lakewood Rosh Yeshiva; died 1962) writes: This is an illustration of an inadvertent Kiddush Hashem / sanctification of G-d's Name. Although Nadav and Avihu never intended to sanctify Hashem's Name by dying as they did, nevertheless, G-d's Name was sanctified when Bnei Yisrael witnessed His judgment at work. And, because Nadav and Avihu played a role in this Kiddush Hashem, even unwittingly, it is mentioned to their credit.

This idea answers a famous Pesach-question. The Gemara (Megillah 10b) says that Hashem would not permit the angels to sing a song of praise as the Egyptians were drowning in the Yam Suf / Red Sea. Yet, we know that Bnei Yisrael did sing. Why?

R' Kotler explains that there is a difference between the angels' song and Bnei Yisrael's song. Angels are called "Omdim" / "Those who stand," because angels can never grow spiritually. Thus, when they praise G-d, it is an honor to G-d, but it has no effect on the angels' own spiritual condition. In contrast, when man praises Hashem, man himself grows. G-d did not want to be honored for drowning the Egyptians, so He did not allow the angels to sing. However, when Bnei Yisrael sang, they honored Hashem and, at the very same time, grew spiritually by recognizing His great powers. And, the Egyptians themselves received credit in Heaven for aiding in Bnei Yisrael's growth because the Egyptians unwittingly played a role in that growth (just as Nadav and Avihu unwittingly caused a Kiddush Hashem). Since it was a benefit to the Egyptians themselves, Bnei Yisrael could sing. (Mishnat Aharon III p. 4) © 1998 Rabbi S. Katz & Project Genesis, Inc.

