

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SIR JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Tmong the sacrifices detailed in this week's sedra is the korban todah, the thanksgiving offering: "If he offers it [the sacrifice] as a thanksgiving offering, then along with this thanksgiving offering he is to offer unleavened loaves mixed with oil, unleavened wafers spread with oil, and loaves of fine flour well-kneaded and mixed with oil." (Lev. 7: 12).

Though we have been without sacrifices for almost two thousand years, a trace of the thanksgiving offering survives to this day, in the form of the blessing known as Hagomel: "Who bestows good things on the unworthy", said in the synagogue, at the time of reading of the Torah, by one who has survived a hazardous situation.

What constitutes a hazardous situation? The sages (Berakhot 54b) found the answer in Psalm 107, a song on the theme of giving thanks, beginning with the best-known words of religious gratitude in Judaism: Hodu la-Shem ki tov, ki le-olam chasdo, "Give thanks to the Lord for His lovingkindness is forever".

The psalm itself describes four specific situations:

1. Crossing the sea: "Some went out on the sea in ships; / they were merchants on the mighty waters... / They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths; / in their peril their courage melted away... / Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, / and he brought them out of their distress. / He stilled the storm to a whisper; / the waves of the sea were hushed."

3. Recovery from serious illness: "They loathed all food / and drew near the gates of death. / Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, / and he saved them from their distress. / He sent forth his word and healed them; / he rescued them from the grave."

2. Crossing a desert: "Some wandered in desert wastelands, / finding no way to a city where they could settle. / They were hungry and thirsty, / and their lives ebbed away. / Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, / and he delivered them from their distress."

4. Release from captivity: "Some sat in darkness and the deepest gloom, / prisoners suffering in iron chains... / Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, / and he saved them from their distress. / He

brought them out of darkness and the deepest gloom and broke away their chains."

To this day, these are the situations of hazard (many nowadays include air travel as well as a sea voyage) on which we say Hagomel when we come through them safely.

In his book *A Rumour of Angels*, the American sociologist Peter Berger describes what he calls "signals of transcendence"-phenomena within the human situation that point to something beyond. Among them he includes humour and hope. There is nothing in nature that explains our ability to reframe painful situations in such a way that we can laugh at them; nor is there anything that can explain the human capacity to find meaning even in the depths of suffering.

These are not, in the classic sense, proofs of the existence of G-d, but they are experiential evidence. They tell us that we are not random concatenations of selfish genes, blindly reproducing themselves. Our bodies may be products of nature ("dust you are, and to dust you will return"), but our minds, our thoughts, our emotions-all that is meant by the word "soul"-are not. There is something within us that reaches out to something beyond us: the soul of the universe, the Divine "You" to which we speak in prayer, and to which our ancestors, when the Temple stood, made their offerings.

Though Berger does not include it, one of the "signals of transcendence" is surely the instinctive human wish to give thanks. Often this is merely human. Someone has done us a favour, given us a gift, comforted us in the midst of grief, or rescued us from danger. We feel we owe them something. That "something" is todah, the Hebrew word that means both "acknowledgement" and "thanks".

But often we sense something more. It is not just the pilot we want to thank when we land safely after a hazardous flight; not just the surgeon when we survive an operation; not just the judge or politician when we are released from prison or captivity. It is as if some larger force was operative, as if the hand that moves the pieces on the human chessboard were thinking of us; as if heaven itself had reached down and come to our aid.

Insurance companies tend to describe natural catastrophes as "acts of G-d". Human emotion does the opposite. G-d is in the good news, the miraculous survival, the escape from catastrophe. That instinct-to offer thanks to a force, a presence, over and above

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natural circumstances and human intervention- is itself a signal of transcendence. That is what was once expressed in the thanksgiving offering, and still is, in the Hagomel prayer. But it is not just by saying Hagomel that we express our thanks.

Elaine and I were on our honeymoon. It was summer, the sun was shining, the beach glorious and the sea inviting. There was just one problem. I could not swim. But as I looked at the sea, I noticed that near to the shore it was very shallow indeed. There were people several hundred yards from the beach, yet the water only came up to their knees. What could be safer, I thought, than simply to walk out into the sea and stop long before I was out of my depth.

I did. I walked out several hundred yards and, yes, the sea only came up to my knees. I turned and started walking back. To my surprise and shock, I found myself suddenly engulfed by water. Evidently, I had walked into a deep dip in the sand. I was out of my depth. I struggled to swim. I failed. This was dangerous. There was no one nearby. The people swimming were a long way away. I went under, again and again. By the fifth time, I knew I was drowning. My life was about to end. What a way-I thought- to start a honeymoon.

Of course someone did save me, otherwise I would not be writing these lines. To this day I do not know who it was: by then I was more or less unconscious. All I know is that he must have seen me struggling. He swam over, took hold of me, and brought me to safety. Since then, the words we say on waking every day have had a deep meaning for me: "I thank You, living and enduring G-d, for You have restored my life to me: great is Your faithfulness." Anyone who has survived great danger knows what it is to feel, not just to be abstractly aware, that life is a gift of G-d, renewed daily.

The first word of this prayer, Modeh, comes from the same Hebrew root as Todah, "thanksgiving". So too does the word Yehudi, "Jew". We acquired the name from Jacob's fourth son, Judah. He in turn received his name from Leah who, on his birth, said: "This time I will thank [some translate it, "I will praise"] G-d" (Gen. 29: 35). To be a Jew is to offer thanks. That is the meaning of our name and the constitutive gesture of our faith.

There were Jews who, after the Holocaust, sought to define Jewish identity in terms of suffering,

victimhood, survival. One theologian spoke of a 614th commandment: You shall not give Hitler a posthumous victory. The historian Salo Baron called this the "lachrymose" reading of history: a story written in tears. I, for one, cannot agree. Yes, there is Jewish suffering. Yet had this been all, Jews would not have done what in fact most did: hand on their identity to their children as their most precious legacy. To be a Jew is to feel a sense of gratitude; to see life itself as a gift; to be able to live through suffering without being defined by it; to give hope the victory over fear. To be a Jew is to offer thanks. © 2010 Rabbi Sir J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

This 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 G-d's presence more powerfully. This was also the purpose of the Mishkan, where G-d'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 G-d was heard, so too, did Israel encamp around the Mishkan from where the presence of G-d was especially felt. In this sense, the Mishkan was a constant ratification of the covenant at Mt. Sinai between G-d 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 G-d 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 G-d and his people. Much like a seuda (a lavish meal) celebrates our relationship with G-d 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 G-d 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, G-d Himself. © 2010 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 BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

As we all know, the word "tzav" implies command, mandated instruction. The word and its inherent concept is the foundation of Jewish law and ritual observance. In our blessing over the performance of an act of our ritual we state that we have been commanded-v'tizvanu-regarding its performance. The Hebrew word that is commonly and popularly used for the performance of a good deed is mitzvah-again from the root of the Hebrew word that implies command.

Of course each and every one of us has the power of free choice to perform mitzvot or not. But when performing a mitzvah, we should be aware that its performance is in accordance with G-d's commandment to us and not purely out of the goodness of one's heart and/or the logic of one's mind. Though there is much emotional feeling present in Judaism, it is not an emotionally-based faith.

The commandment aspect of Judaism helps us operate correctly in life even when the proper emotion and/or logic is temporarily absent at the moment of decision- whether to do the good deed or refrain from acting wrongly. The nature of human beings from infancy onwards is to resent and even reject authority.

Yet the Torah describes Jews as being G-d's servants, subject to His commands and value system. It states clearly that though we are free people and have the options of all choices in life, we are not to abuse that freedom of choice. G-d has the right to command us and His commandments form the basis of Jewish life

and behavior. We are a religion of behavior and actions as much as one of knowledge, study and intellect.

The parsha teaches us that our public servants are also subject to Heavenly command and instruction. Aharon and his sons forever after him perform their public service in the Mishkan/Temple according to G-d's command and not necessarily in consonance with their own understanding of current fashion or correctness.

We will be witness in the coming parsha of the tragic consequences that befell two of Aharon's sons when they substituted their personal judgments regarding proper and meaningful ritual for the commandments they were ordered to fulfill.

Jewish history is replete with the ruins of those individuals and groups who ignored the idea of command and substituted their own definitions of Judaism for that of the Almighty. An even cursory view of Jewish life and society today certainly bears witness to the tragedies of a Jewish society that has abandoned this core idea, of being a people commanded by Heaven to live a certain life style and to remain steadfast in its divinely derived value system.

The past centuries have shown much of the Jewish world to behave like the rebellious adolescent-contemptuous of its elders and convinced of its omniscience and omnipotence. The way back to a healthier Jewish society is through the restoration of the value of authority and command in our personal and national lives. It is the old that is really relevant and new and can revive and inspire us all. © 2010 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Asher Binyamini, Head of the Merkaz Neria Kollel and Torah Garin, Kiryat Malachi

“Give a command to Aharon' [Vayikra 6:2]... This phrase must be referring to giving special encouragement, both immediately and for later generations" [Torat Kohanim].

This week's Torah portion opens with a command, explicitly using the word "tzav" while Vayikra starts with a language that denotes fondness, as is written by Rashi (Vayikra 1:1). Why do the two portions begin in different ways, don't they both involve the laws of the sacrifices?

Perhaps the answer to this question is that Vayikra involves personal sacrifices, such as a donated Olah, and a fond approach is the best way to encourage contributions. This week's portion is concerned with public sacrifices such as the daily Tamid, and in this case the stronger language of a command is necessary, to strengthen the observance of the mitzva. As opposed to private sacrifices, which are

contributions that are brought in response to human desire, the public sacrifices are at a higher level, and they are the result of a Divine command. With respect to the daily Tamid sacrifice, it is written, "Rabbi Yudan said, Nobody ever slept overnight in Jerusalem and remained a sinner. Why is this so? The morning Tamid sacrifice atoned for sins of the night, and the evening Tamid would atone for the sins of the day." [Midrash Eicha Zuta].

What were we commanded with respect to this sacrifice? It should be kept "on its flame on the Altar all night" [Vayikra 6:2]. Pieces that remained from the sacrifices of the previous day were burned throughout the night. This is not easy to understand: The first Tamid sacrifice of the day is brought in the morning, why does the Torah begin the passage with the sections of the sacrifice that remain at night? Shouldn't it begin with the main sacrifice, the Tamid of the morning?

Perhaps this can best be explained following the lead of the Or Hachaim. "This can be seen as a hint of hidden things. The passage is referring to the last exile which still continues..." That is, the "night" in this passage hints at the suffering of the previous generations within the darkness of the terrible exile. In our generation the morning of the redemption has begun to shine, in that we have been privileged to return to our holy land and to begin to rebuild its ruins, but the Torah tells us that we should begin our labors based on the previous generations, which suffered so much and experienced the long night. It is due to their merits that the light of the redemption has begun to appear.

The labor in the Temple which precedes the Tamid sacrifice of the morning is the removal of the ashes that remain after the night has ended. The morning sacrifice is brought only after the ashes have been removed. What guidance should we learn from the previous generations? As we know, the Patriarch Yaacov instituted the evening prayer, Maariv. What did he leave as a legacy to teach his descendents, reaching as far as our own generation? It is written, "The Almighty said: I never performed miracles for Yaacov at all... (This is the unique trait of Yisrael, as is written, 'For G-d chose Yaacov, Yisrael as His treasure' [Tehillim 135:4])." [Tana D'Bei Eliyahu 6]. The same idea appears in the Ramban, in the portion of Vayishlach: "Yaacov did everything in a natural way and did not rely on miracles... And the actions of the forefathers are a sign for the descendents."

It is true that Yaacov's path is a difficult one, but in comparing Avraham's accomplishments (note that he instituted the morning prayer, Shacharit) to the nighttime labors of Yaacov it is written, "'This is what G-d said to the House of Yaacov, which redeemed Avraham' [Yeshayahu 29:22]... The rabbis say that Avraham was only created because of the merits of Yaacov." [Vayikra Rabba 36].

Thus we see that Avraham needed the traits of Yaacov. Even when the light of the redemption begins

to shine, represented by the trait of Avraham, we are still in need of the traits of Yaacov. That is, we must not expect miracles. We must do our part in striving for the redemption. We must do all we can to gather all of Yisrael into our land, our heritage. Education should conform to the spirit of Yisrael. We must awaken the people to the vision of rebuilding the Temple, based on the trait of Yaacov, not waiting for a Divine miracle.

That is the meaning of what is quoted above about the Tamid sacrifice: "... giving special encouragement, both immediately and for later generations." This command is relevant for our generation too. When we begin to encourage acting in the way of Yaacov, we will all be privileged to have the sun of the redemption shine on us. As the process continues we will also begin to see explicit miracles, in accordance with the trait of Avraham. We will then be able to bring the morning sacrifice, and the light of redemption will fall on all of Yisrael.

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The Sabbath before Pessah is called "The Great Sabbath" (Shabbat Hagadol), after the last verse of the reading from the prophets (haftara) for that day: "Behold I send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord" - the day of Redemption (Malachi 3:23). It is certainly logical that Elijah, the herald of the redemption, features before Pessah, the "time of our freedom" and redemption from Egyptian servitude.

But what kind of person is Elijah who will be the: "messenger of good news, salvation and comfort" (Grace after Meals)? The biblical Elijah was a zealot who slaughtered 450 prophets of Baal after a contest at Mount Carmel, and challenged G-d to punish the Israelites for having rejected His covenant and allowed Jezebel to murder the Lord's prophets (I Kings 19:10). But somehow in Talmudic and folk tradition, Elijah morphs into a benign, grandfatherly figure who drinks from a special goblet at everyone's Seder table, graces every newborn male baby with his presence at their circumcision and frequently appears as a deus ex machina to teach important lessons and save people's lives at critical moments.

Just when, why and how did this fiery fanatic become a venerable sage? Let us look again at the biblical text and I believe we'll discover the dynamics of the process.

Elijah lives in Israel under the idolatrous monarchy of Ahab and Jezebel, Baal devotees who murdered the prophets of the Lord. The wrath of G-d is expressed in the form of a drought, which wreaks havoc on the land. Elijah stages a Steven Spielberg-style extravaganza: He convinces King Ahab to invite all the Israelites to the foot of Mount Carmel, where he has the 450 prophets of Baal choose a bull. Elijah takes another

bull, and each animal is cut in half and placed on an altar without a fire - one altar to G-d and one to Baal. The victor will be the person whose altar is graced by fire from on high.

After the better part of a day of fruitless prayers, incantations and orgiastic immolations by the prophets of Baal, Elijah drenches his offering in water and then calls out to G-d. A fire descends from heaven, consuming his offering together with the wood, the stones, the water and the earth. The Israelites cry out: "The Lord! He is G-d!"

Elijah then slaughters the 450 prophets of Baal, clouds gather and a great rain comes down. Elijah is exultant, until he receives a message from Queen Jezebel, who vows that, "at this time tomorrow I shall make your soul like one of those [prophets of Baal]."

Elijah is shocked that she does not repent or seek forgiveness for her idolatrous ways. Yet he also understands the shrewdness in her words. After 24 hours, she shall have him killed! Why not immediately? Because it will take the Israelites only 24 hours to forget the immediacy of the miracle. After only one day, the Israelites will forget about G-d and allow the wicked queen to destroy His only remaining prophet.

Elijah escapes to Beersheba and asks G-d to take his soul. An angel provides him with food and sends him on a 40-day journey to Mount Sinai. When he arrives, G-d asks why he has come, and he responds: "I have been a zealot, yes, a zealot for the Lord G-d of hosts, because the Israelites have forsaken Your covenant; they have destroyed Your altars, they have killed Your prophets and they now seek to take my life as well, I who am now left alone" (I Kings 19:10).

Elijah understands that despite the great miracle he wrought at Mount Carmel, no one has repented, nothing has changed, and his life is in danger.

G-d then sends Elijah a vision: a great, powerful wind, but the Lord is not in the wind; an earthquake, but the Lord is not in the earthquake; a fire, but the Lord is not in the fire. And after the fire comes a still, silent sound - the voice of the Lord.

G-d is telling His prophet that people aren't moved in the long term by miracles on a mountain - whether Mount Sinai or Mount Carmel - and that the Israelites will not be forced into submission by dire punishments. After the first revelation at Sinai, they worshiped the Golden Calf, and after the revelation at Mount Carmel, they didn't repent of their idolatry, despite their shouts of "The Lord! He is G-d!"

The Israelites will be moved only by learning of G-d's second revelation at Sinai - the glimpse He shared with Moses into His divine essence by the still, small voice of kindness and understanding, by the G-d of love and forgiveness (Exodus 34:6-8).

And this is precisely what Malachi says at the conclusion of his prophecy. There is the possibility that "the end of days" will be awe-some and awe-full, replete with war, destruction and the bare survival of the faithful

remnant; but the preferred possibility is that the end of days come as a result of national repentance for ignoring the voice of G-d, and the return of Israel to our heavenly Father in love and gratitude rather than out of fear. Elijah must "turn back the hearts of the parents to their children and the hearts of the children to their parents" with the still, silent sound of unconditional love. G-d does not want to "strike the land with utter destruction" at the end of days (Malachi 3:24).

The rabbis of the Midrash go one step further. G-d is teaching Elijah that the prophet wanted to punish Israel only because he grossly misjudged them when he said, "They rejected Your covenant." Elijah will be "taken to heaven" (II Kings 2: 11, 12), but he will have to shuttle between heaven and earth, he will attend every Pessah Seder where Jews celebrate G-d's promise of redemption, and be present at every circumcision where Jews demonstrate their willingness to shed blood for the covenant. The prophet will transform his people not by judging (or misjudging) them, but only by loving them with the still, small sound of our Father's unconditional love. © 2010 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“In every generation [each] person is required to see himself as if he came out of Egypt.” This statement, coming at the end of "Magid" (the retelling of the Exodus story at the Seder) strongly parallels a similar statement made at the very beginning of "Magid," right after the four questions. "Had the Holy one, blessed is He, not taken our ancestors out of Egypt, we, and our sons, and our sons' sons would be subservient to Pharaoh in Egypt." And, many commentators explain our obligation to consider it as if we ourselves were freed from Egypt to be based on the notion that we would have never gotten out, and would still be in Egypt today.

Are these really two statements that portray the same message, book-ending the telling of the Exodus? Or are there two distinct messages, one being an introductory thought, explaining why it is important to retell the story and how it is relevant to us, and the other a closing message, a summation of the Exodus story that was just retold?

Rav Aharon Kotler, z"l, in *Mishnas Rebbe Aharon* (on Parashas Va'eira), discusses the purpose of our enslavement in Egypt. He explains how knowledge cannot be fully attained through intellectual exercises alone, but must be accompanied by physical experiences. Among the proofs he brings is the fact that other nations heard about the miracles G-d performed for the Children of Israel and become very frightened because of it (see Shemos 15:14-15), but rather than it causing them to come closer to G-d, they tried their best to thwart G-d's plans for His chosen people. The knowledge was shared by both those that were saved

by G-d's miracles and those that heard about them, but only those that went through the slavery and were saved from it came away "knowing G-d" to the point of being worthy of receiving His Torah.

Many Egyptians (and other non-Israelites that were living in Egypt) joined the Children of Israel when they left Egypt (the "Eirev Rav," mixed-multitude of people), yet despite having witnessed the miracles first-hand, and being impressed enough by them to join the Children of Israel, and never made it to the Land of Israel (see www.aishdas.org/ta/5769/shlach.pdf, page 2). They had at least as good a vantage point as the Children of Israel to see "G-d's mighty hand" at work (perhaps better, since they were directly affected by the plagues), yet did not come away from them with the same foundation of belief in, and knowledge of, G-d. Experiencing suffering and being saved from it brings about a much greater appreciation of the One who saved us than knowing about it (even first-hand) without having gone through the troubles.

Another example Rav Aharon uses is the "mun," the miraculous "bread" that fell from heaven every day in the desert. Should there be a difference in how the source of the "mun" is acknowledged if it were a year's supply of food that was supplied or if it was supplied on a daily basis? From a purely intellectual standpoint, there shouldn't be. However, each meal being a gift from the One above is a lot easier to internalize when concerned about where the next day's food will come from because there isn't any grain stored in a warehouse or food stocked in the pantry than when we know (or think we know) that we have what to eat for the foreseeable future (see Yoma 76a). Experiencing something provides a much higher level of "knowledge," especially (and specifically) when that experience includes going through suffering and being rescued from it. The knowledge of the details may be the same, but the level of appreciation is far from the same.

This may be why our Sages, of blessed memory (as well as the commentators) spent much time explaining how each of the ten plagues corresponded to the way the Egyptians mistreated us (see page 3 of www.aishdas.org/ta/5767/vaera.pdf and page 4 of [ta/5767/bo.pdf](http://www.aishdas.org/ta/5767/bo.pdf)). It not only gives us the opportunity to see how exacting G-d's justice is, but enables us to try to comprehend just how terrible our suffering was in Egypt. And, in doing so, if we can internalize the kind of suffering we would have had to endure ourselves had we still been in Egypt (which we would have), we can possibly approach the level of appreciation for, and knowledge of, G-d that we would have attained had we gone through the actual suffering.

Emotions can't be legislated, but the things that can bring us to appropriate emotions can. We may not be able to automatically "love" G-d, but if we study His Torah, His world and His ways (properly), appreciating and loving Him will follow. We can't just turn on "fear of

G-d" either, but we can keep reminding ourselves of His greatness, His grandeur, and what He expects of us, which will bring about (or bring back) fear and awe of Him. The same can be said of "knowing" G-d as well. We may not be able to (nor do we really want to) make ourselves suffer so that He can save us, but we can recreate (in our minds) what it might have been like to suffer in Egypt before G-d saved us.

At the beginning of "Magid" we mention the intellectual connection we have to the Exodus, as we would still be there had G-d not saved them. Through the process of the Seder, by retelling and reliving what our ancestors went through, by visualizing what it meant to have bosses that didn't just berate and overwork, but beat up and subdued (physically and emotionally), we can try to more fully appreciate what G-d saved us from. Hopefully, by the end of "Magid," we can actually see ourselves as if we actually came out of Egypt. Once we have progressed from talking about how they were saved to how we were saved, we are one step closer to knowing G-d well enough to receive His Torah seven weeks later. © 2010 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

Not everyone has the privilege of saying "thank you" to the Creator by bringing a thanksgiving offering to the Holy Temple. The Talmud tells us that only people who were recently delivered from extreme danger—an ocean voyage, a desert journey, a serious illness, a term of imprisonment—can bring this special sacrifice. Why is this so? Why can't we express our gratitude for other momentous occasions in our lives by bringing this selfsame thanksgiving offering?

Furthermore, we find an anomaly in the laws of this sacrifice. The thanksgiving offering falls into the general category of shelamim, peace offerings. However, we read in this week's Torah portion that there is less time allowed for eating the meat of the sacrifice. The peace offering can be eaten for two days, but the thanksgiving offering for only one day. Why does the Torah reduce the eating time of this sacrifice?

The answers to these questions are rooted in the fundamental concepts of the sacrificial service. The purpose of the sacrifices is to foster closeness between the Creator and ourselves. When we bring a sacrifice to the altar we are symbolically offering ourselves up to Him, subsuming our hearts, our minds, our souls, our very lives in the universal embrace of the Divine Presence. Eating the meat of the sacrifice, the Talmud explains, is an extension of the sacrificial service. Through the act of ingesting the sanctified meat, we connect to the transcendent concepts and symbolism of the sacrifice not only through our intellectual and emotional faculties but through our purely physical ones as well. In this way, the experience becomes total and the connection is absolute.

When we bring a thanksgiving offering, we take advantage of moments of outstanding inspiration to forge a closer relationship with our Creator. Life is full of little inspirations and numerous opportunities to express our gratitude to Hashem. Most of these, however, do not move us to our core, and therefore, they are not powerful enough to warrant a sacrifice. But when a person is reprieved after staring death in the face, he is totally energized and exhilarated, and the words of thanksgiving and joy he directs heavenward emanate from the essence of his being. This sort of inspiration can be brought to the Temple and presented to Hashem in the form of a thanksgiving sacrifice. This sort of inspiration can be channeled to foster an everlasting closeness.

But inspiration is an ephemeral thing. Like a flash of lightning, it illuminates our surroundings in painfully sharp clarity and then is gone, leaving only a memory that slowly fades away. During that moment, we gain a totally different and highly vivid perspective of what is important and what is trivial. During that moment, we have the ability to find new direction and meaning for our daily existence. Later, it is too late. Therefore, the Torah limits the time period for eating the thanksgiving offering. Grasp the moment! If we wait, it will be gone.

A high-level royal minister was deeply involved in a national crisis situation. During this time, while the king and his ministers conferred daily to discuss developments, the king's birthday came and went without the customary celebration. The crisis eventually passed, and the conduct of government affairs returned to normal. Shortly thereafter, the minister purchased a beautiful birthday gift and sent it to the king.

A few weeks later, the king and his minister were discussing the crisis and what could be done to prevent future recurrences.

"We can't afford to go through something like this again," said the king with a wry smile. "Do you realize that I didn't even receive any birthday gifts this year because of the crisis?"

"Your majesty, have you forgotten?" the minister protested. "I sent you a very beautiful gift. Didn't you receive it?"

"Indeed, I did," said the king. "And I thank you. Had you given it to me on my birthday, I would have perceived it as an expression of your joyous celebration of such an important day in my life. But it was given several weeks later. It did not represent your sense of joy but rather your sense of obligation. Much as I appreciate it, I do not consider it a true birthday gift."

In our own lives, we are often profoundly inspired during times of great joy or, Heaven forbid, great distress. On these occasions, we are inclined to take stock of our existence and resolve to make important changes, either to improve our relationship with our Creator, to correct our flaws and shortcomings or simply to spend more time with our families. When

this happens, it is important to translate our inspiration into action immediately, for if we wait until we get around to it, more often than not we never will. © 2010 Rabbi N. Reich and torah.org

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah, read in conjunction with Shabbos Hagadol, depicts the Jewish scene moments before the advent of Mashiach. Malachi, the last prophet before our first exile, shares with us the prevalent conversations during the final moments of our final exile. The masses of our people will reflect upon the generation's unprecedented affluence and conclude that Torah observance is a wasted exercise. Their argument will be, "What material gain has ever come from observing His commandments or walking the downtrodden path for His sake? We constantly praise the agnostics and the wicked who met much success and yet, escaped the wrath of Above." (3:14, 15) The impressive financial success of so many unaffiliated Jews will suggest an indifference on the side of Hashem, almost to the extent of condoning their inexcusable behavior.

What will be the response of the righteous? The prophet continues, "Then the G-d fearing people will speak amongst themselves and Hashem will hearken, listen and preserve the comments of those who revere Him and respect His name." (3:16) During those dark moments G-d fearing people will be scarce. However, those who will endure and persevere, despite the fierce influences of exile, will remain steadfast in their faith. They will gather and strengthen one another sharing their true perspectives on life. They do not seek tangible benefits from life and certainly do not expect a reward in this finite world (see Malbim to 3:16) Their service is based on reverence and respect rather than reward or material gain. To them, the absence of fame or financial success will not present a serious challenge to their commitment. Instead, they will patiently await the era of redemption wherein the glory of Hashem will become revealed to all.

Our Chazal in Yalkut Shimoni (591) explain this unwavering faith with the following parable. The queen was once confronted by a maidservant in the midst of a dark night. The latter argued that she was more attractive than the queen herself! The queen responded calmly, "Say all you wish now because tomorrow in the light of day the truth will be revealed." In the same vein righteous people, during our dark exile, find themselves at a serious disadvantage. In the absence of Hashem's clear revelations, anything can be presented and said. Allusions can easily be construed that promise eternal bliss for those who walk the unethical and immoral path. It requires men of great character and commitment to rise above public opinion and speak the truth. Their response to this senseless talk is, "The truth is around

the corner." "Soon Mashiach will arrive and the clear revelations of Hashem will tell the real story." Regarding these devout, the prophet says, "And for you who fear Hashem a gracious and healing sun will shine upon you." (3:20) Those who firmly awaited the light of redemption will merit its light, the brilliant radiance of Hashem. The light of day will finally arrive and those clear perspectives of the righteous will become self evident truths.

In truth, these very same discussions took place in Egypt and served as an essential factor in the preservation of our people. The Midrash Rabba (Shmos 5:18) reveals to us that the Jewish people observed Shabbos long before they were commanded. In defense of his people, Moshe Rabbeinu approached Pharaoh and insisted on a day of rest. After being granted his request, Moshe conveniently dedicated the seventh day of the week for this purpose. The Midrash adds that the Jewish people effectively utilized this day to study scrolls of redemption. In the midst of heavy persecution, the Jews maintained their faith in Hashem. Although no trace of Hashem could be seen, they remained devoted to Him. They didn't question Hashem's lack of involvement and were not influenced by the darkness of their exile. Although their wicked taskmasters enjoyed a comfortable life this could not seduce the Jewish people into straying from Hashem. They, too, gathered together and encouraged each other with the truths of Hashem. They understood that daylight would eventually arrive and, in the radiance of Hashem, the truth would become self evident. In this merit, they did experience those long awaited results. Eventually, Hashem did shine His light upon them as it says, "For the Jewish people there was light in their settlement." (Shmos 10:23) May we merit to experience this light speedily in our days. © 2010 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

RABBI SETH NADEL

Taste of the Afikoman

Pesach immediately conjures up vivid memories of childhood: the scents, sounds, and tastes, special time with family, and the experience of exploring our rich tradition. As a child, my eye was on the prize: the afikoman prize, that is. Hiding and stealing the afikoman is a rite of passage, and perhaps even a national pastime. It is the way that parents have kept their young children awake and engaged for Centuries of late night Sedarim. And it just may be the first time a Jewish child learns to "bargain." But, like everything in our tradition, it teaches us something profound.

The word afikoman, is based on a Greek word which means "that which follows." And of course, that which follows the meal is dessert! The word afikoman, over time has come to describe the piece of matza eaten at the end of the Seder which symbolizes the Passover offering. The Mishnah (Pesachim 10:8) teaches, "ain maftirim achar hapesach afikoman." A

loose translation renders, "One may not eat any dessert after eating the Passover Offering." One is required to leave the Seder with the taste of the Paschal Lamb, or in our case the matza, still in their mouth. One is required to savor it; to take it with them.

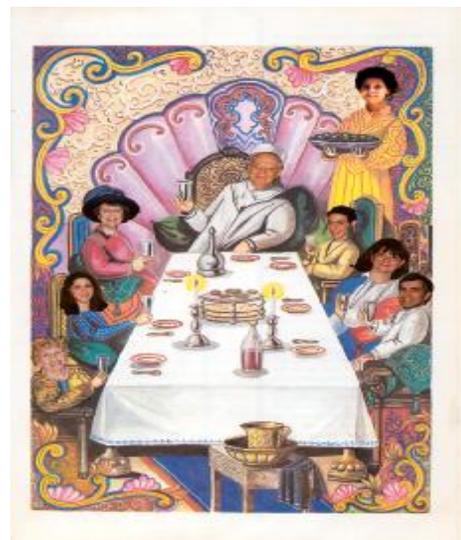
But why can't we eat anything after the afikoman? Why not even a little snack?

The Seder can be a powerful experience. To truly fulfill the mitzvah of sippur yetziat mitzrayim, relating the story of the Exodus from Egypt, one is required to make it more than just an intellectual experience. It should be experiential, emotional, and engaging. Rabban Gamliel said, "Whoever has not discussed three things on Pesach has not fulfilled their obligation. And they are: Pesach, Matza, and Maror." (Ibid 10:5) Every year, I introduce my Seder by saying, "Whoever has not laughed, cried, sung, and danced at their Seder has not fulfilled their obligation."

After experiencing so much, we are challenged to take the experience with us; to internalize it. That is why, explains the Sefat Emet, one of the great Chassidic thinkers of the 19th Century, we are not to eat anything after the afikoman. We go to bed with its taste on our lips to remind us to take this experience and savor it.

Perhaps that is why we answer the Chacham, the wise son with precisely this law. Wisdom is important, but the Seder is not solely an intellectual endeavor. One is required to engage their emotions. We teach the Chacham that this experience has to be more than just cognitive; it has to engage us emotionally and its message should resonate throughout the rest of the year.

May we all merit taking the taste of the afikoman with us! © 2008 Rabbi S. Nadel



חג שמח וכשר!