

# Tortilla



# Aish

**This newsletter claims “I do the MAX-I-CAN to distribute Purr-in torah!”**

**RABBI NAFTALI REICH**

## Legacy

**T**he money didn't come out of the priests' own pockets. It came from the well-filled coffers of the Temple. Every year, money poured from all the Jewish people to a special fund which provided for the daily sacrifices. There really was no reason to skimp.

And yet, in this week's Torah portion we read that Hashem told Moses to "command Aaron and his sons" regarding the daily olah sacrifice. Why did the priests have to be "commanded"? Why wasn't it enough for them to be "told," as was usually the case? Our Sages tell us that Hashem was forewarning the priest not to cut corners in order to reduce the considerable expense of bringing an animal every morning and every afternoon.

But why was this necessary? Why would the priests even consider such a thing? After all, there was no cost to them personally, and there was plenty of public money for the sacrifices.

Let us consider for a moment the nature of the sacrificial service. There were actually two aspects to it. First, the detailed physical process of the sacrifice. Second and even more important, the thoughts, feelings and commitments that the sacrifice represented; without the idea behind it, the sacrifice was meaningless.

Unlike most of the sacrifices, which were partially burnt on the altar and partially eaten, the olah sacrifice was kalil, completely incinerated. Therefore, the commentators explain, there was a real possibility that the priest would focus on the intent and not attribute enough importance to the physical act itself. Since the sacrifice was all being given to Hashem, they might reason, what difference would it make if fewer funds were expended on the sacrifices? All that mattered was the intent.

Not so, the Torah warned. It was not the place of the priests to make such judgments. If the Torah commanded that two animals be brought daily, the commandment was to be obeyed without question.

An elderly king appointed a new chamberlain to oversee his palace affairs. "Your first major responsibility in your new post," said the king, "will be to arrange the parade in honor of my birthday next week. Find out how it is done every year. The information is in the palace records."

The following week, on the king's birthday, there was no parade. Instead, the chamberlain brought together the greatest poets in the land in a gala public ceremony, and each of the poets read an exquisite poem composed for the occasion. The king was pleased.

The next day, the king summoned the chamberlain and removed him from office for failing to stage the customary parade.

"But, sire," the chamberlain protested, "I only tried to please you, and if I am not mistaken, you really did seem pleased."

"The poems were very beautiful," said the king, "but it is not for you to substitute poems for the customary observance. You are not a chamberlain for me."

In our own lives, it is easy to take a somewhat cavalier attitude towards the rituals and observances of the Torah by rationalizing that it is the heart that counts. The heart indeed counts a great deal, but actions speak more loudly than words. As servants of the Almighty, we should leave it to Him to decide what form those actions should take. With our own limited scope, we cannot possibly know the extent to which a particular ritual or observance described in the Torah may stimulate our inner feelings and touch our very souls. We all understand that the Almighty needs nothing from us. Therefore, if the Torah calls for a certain action, we can rest assured that it is for our own benefit and that in the end it is we ourselves who will be immeasurably enriched. © 2011 Rabbi N.Reich & torah.org

*A college senior took his new girlfriend to a football game.*

*The young couple found their seats in the crowded stadium and was watching the action when a substitute was sent into the game. As the promising young player ran onto the field to take his position, the boy pointed at him and said to his girlfriend,*

*"Keep an eye on that fellow. I expect him to be our best man next year." His girlfriend snuggled closer to him and said, "That's the strangest proposal I ever heard, but I accept!"*

TORTILLA AISH IS A SMOKIN HOT PURIM PUBLICATION!  
IT'S THE PARSHA NEWSLETTER WITH LOTS OF SPICE THAT'LL  
HAVE YOU BELCHING OUT WORDS OF TORAH! YOU'LL DEFINITELY  
WANT TO INTRODUCE THIS TO YOUR AUNT...YOUR AUNT ACID!  
HA! I JUST CRACK MYSELF UP.



And now in this part of the window I'm supposed to put some very important information. The kind of stuff you wouldn't be able to live without if you missed it so pay attention!

(ahem)

Please do not remove this blurb under penalty of law.

Seriously. We'll have the mattress tag police after you. You DON'T wanna mess with them. Think you're having trouble sleeping NOW? Just you wait!

Bwaahaahahah! (evil laugh)

### **RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## **Taking a Closer Look**

One of the themes of Purim is "Kabbalas HaTorah," accepting the responsibility of keeping the Torah. The Talmud (Shabbos 88a) tells us that G-d held Mt. Sinai over our heads, telling us that if we didn't accept the Torah we would be buried there. This, the Talmud continues, provides a built-in excuse for not keeping the Torah, as apparently we didn't accept it willingly, but were forced to. Rava then says that even so, the nation accepted the Torah willingly in the days of Achashveirosh.

This concept seems a bit difficult to accept (pardon the pun-but hey, it's Purim). At Sinai, the entire nation was there, and each of the Tribal leaders could speak to their constituents, find out whether or not they were willing to accept the Torah, and report back (see Shemos 19:7-8). The nation could either accept, or reject, the Torah. During Achashveirosh's rule, however, the Jewish nation was spread throughout his kingdom of 127 countries. How could it be determined whether or not they were now willing to accept the Torah they had been "forced" to accept over 900 years earlier? Did Mordechai have the same royal messengers that originally spread the word of Haman's decree, and then sent word of Mordechai's decree

preempting it, serve as pollsters to determine whether or not there was a consensus to accept the Torah willingly? What does it mean that the Jewish nation accepted the Torah willingly in the days of Achashveirosh?

Ritva (Shabbos 88a), discussing whether until the Purim miracle we had a built-in excuse not to keep the Torah, says that being "forced" to accept the Torah does not invalidate our having accepted it, so the requirement and responsibility to keep the Torah was in full force (pardon the pun) from Sinai. (This is true for most transactions that occur under duress; as long as it was agreed to, the deal is done.) The discussion in the Talmud is not about having a real excuse, but how heretics will use this teaching-that we were forced to accept the Torah-as an excuse not to keep it. Rava addresses this concern by saying that even according to their rationalization, they are still be required to keep the Torah, since it was accepted willingly in the days of Achashveirosh.

It is unlikely that Rava was suggesting an answer that does not stand up to scrutiny, as heretics would dismiss such a response and continue to avoid their religious responsibilities. If the "acceptance" after the miracle of Purim is something even a heretic would not dismiss, it must be quite straightforward. Learning something through exegesis would not convince a heretic that he must keep the Torah, so Rava's "d'rasha" (based on Esther 9:27) that the Jews "fulfilled what they had previously accepted" must be more than just teaching us how the verse is traditionally understood.

The commandments referred to in the verse Rava quotes are the new, additional responsibilities that stem from the Purim story; reading the Megila, having a festive meal, sending food to others, and giving gifts to the poor. Most rabbinical decrees are designed to build a "fence" around an already existing biblical commandment, to ensure that it is not inadvertently violated. The Purim commandments are different in that there is no biblical commandment that they are protecting; they are completely rabbinical in origin.

The year that they were saved from Haman's decree, the Jews celebrated (Esther 9:17-18). When Mordechai asked them to commemorate this celebration every year, from then on, by keeping these new mitzvos (9:20-23), his request was accepted. If the nation resented having to keep all of the biblical mitzvos, if the only reason they were fulfilling them was because they were forced to, they would never have willingly accepted any new ones (see Ran, alternate version of D'rasha #5, regarding why G-d places a premium value on rabbinical decrees; see also Maharal in his introduction to Or Chadash and on Esther 9:27, although he focuses on reading the Megila because of its special status that connects it to keeping the biblical commandments). The fact that the Jews, in every community,

accepted upon themselves and kept additional mitzvot, indicated that they were keeping the others (that they had already been responsible for) willingly as well. A poll didn't have to be taken to see if they would now accept the Torah willingly; agreeing to keep the mitzvot of Purim (and the fact that they did so in subsequent years) was, in and of itself, a re-acceptance of the Torah. This time, though, there was no mountain over their heads. There were no overt miracles to prevent them from refusing G-d's offer, only the recognition that even if it's behind the scenes, G-d will always be there for them. © 2011 Rabbi D. Kramer



*A Doctor was addressing a large audience in Tampa. "The material we put into our stomachs is enough to have killed most of us sitting here, years ago. Red meat is awful. Soft drinks corrode your stomach lining. Chinese food is loaded with MSG. High fat diets can be disastrous, and none of us realizes the long-term harm caused by the germs in our drinking water.*

*"But there is one thing that is the most dangerous of all, and we all have eaten, or will eat. Would anyone care to guess what food causes the most grief and suffering for years after eating it?"*

*After several seconds of quiet, a small 75-year-old Jewish man in the front row, raised his hand and said, "Wedding Cake?"*

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

Apparently we must continue to drink on Purim until the truths of the Bible completely overturn the confusion of a world which has lost its moral compass. I think that the Scroll of Esther, read on Purim, provides the best critique I know of our present day "situational ethics" environment. What led me to this insight was a strange talmudic comment: "Where do we find Haman in the Torah? 'Is it from the tree [Hebrew: hamin ha'etz] which I commanded you not to eat of it, that you ate [Genesis 3:11]?" (B.T. Hulin 139b). This verse, part of the biblical portion of punishments meted out to Adam, Eve and the serpent after their transgression, links Haman, Esther's story and the sin of eating the fruit of knowledge of good and evil.

What was the nature of the garden prohibition? It certainly could not have been "knowledge" which the Bible was forbidding; after all, the Book of Proverbs praises wisdom, the sages of the Talmud were well-versed in the sciences and Greek culture, Rabbenu Sa'adia Gaon and Maimonides urge us to accept knowledge from anyone who teaches it, Jew or gentile, and although the Scroll of Ecclesiastes maintains that "he who increases knowledge increases pain" (Ecclesiastes 1:18), the Kotzker Rebbe commented, "be pained, but acquire knowledge." I believe that G-d was forbidding Adam and Eve from eating the fruit of knowledge of good and evil

so that they would not try to become their own arbiters over what is morally right and wrong. The Bible is teaching - as the most fundamental axiom of the book of divine wisdom - that objective Good and Evil must be decided by a Higher Authority. As Sigmund Freud says in his /Civilization and its Discontent/, when it comes to self-justification and rationalization, every human becomes a genius.

Uriel Eitam, in a magnificent article published in Haddassah, She is Esther (Esther (Dassy) Rabinowitz Memorial Volume 5757, Tvunot Press, Alon Shvut), shows how Ahasuerus confuses concepts of good and evil, and how Haman actually turns evil into good - each in order to execute his nefarious designs. Ahasuerus confuses the moral concept of "good" with the physical, sexual category of maidens of "goodly appearance" (tovot mar'eh/ as in Esther 1:11, 2:2, 3). The confusion becomes far more serious when it becomes "good" in Ahasuerus' eyes to banish/execute Vashti for her refusal to "show off her beauty" to his drunken guests (1:19, 21). The source of the king's confusion is because his "heart had become 'good' with wine," which causes one's rational faculties to become impaired. Haman actually converts evil into good when he claims it to be "good" for the king to destroy the Jews of Persia in order to gain 10,000 silver talents (3:9). Ahasuerus abandons the Jews, making them and the funds necessary to exterminate them available to Haman so that he may do that which is "good" in his eyes (3, 11). And when Haman decides to listen to his wife's advice and murder Mordecai (one of the true - and truly good - heroes of the tale) by having him hanged, the Scroll of Esther reports: "And the matter was good before Haman, and he prepared the tree" (5:14).

It is Esther who sets the record straight by clearly separating evil from good. Indeed, for the first six chapters of the scroll the world evil (/ra/) is not found; no wonder, since the worst evil has been called "good": It is Esther who reveals the truth by declaring at her feast with Ahasuerus, "An adversary and an enemy is this evil Haman" (7:6). And Esther also places "good" in proper perspective: "And if it be good to the king, let him give me my life for my request and my nation for my petition" (7:3); "And if it be good to the king, let him countermand the thoughts of Haman... who has written to destroy the Jews" (8:5); "And if it be good to the king,... let the 10 sons of Haman be hanged from the tree" (9:13, 14).

But if the wrong was righted, if true knowledge was restored, if good and evil were placed in their proper perspective, then how can we account for the inordinate drinking which marks our celebration of Purim, as our sages teach: "It is incumbent upon a person to drink on Purim until he can no longer know the difference between cursing Haman and praising Mordecai" (B.T. Megila 7b)?

I believe the answer is the same response the Talmud gives as to why we do not recite the Hallel psalms of praise on Purim: The Scroll of

Esther concludes with the Jews still living in the /galut/ (Diaspora) of Persia; they remain servants of Ahasuerus. The world has not yet been redeemed. Indeed, Iran (Persia) continues to threaten our security even today. Suicide bombers are still described as freedom fighters and martyrs. Apparently we must continue to drink on Purim until the truths of the Bible completely overturn the confusion of a world which has lost its moral compass.

Retraction: I am very grateful to Majer Goldstein of Montreal and Florida for bringing to my attention a badly worded paragraph that appeared in last year's Purim column. My words may have been construed to mean that G-d sent Hitler in order to remind the Jews that they were Jews. I do not submit to such a theology. Hitler, may his name be blotted out, committed actions that were totally antithetical to the will of our G-d of Love and compassion. © 2011 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

*The young couple was at a baseball game. About halfway through the game, they noticed a much older couple in the seats below them. They were being VERY affectionate. They looked like two teenagers. He had his arm around her most of the time. Every few minutes, one of them was whispering in the other's ear. They also would hold hands and gaze into each other's eyes, or nibble at their mate's ear. There was also a lot of giggling going on. The young man said to his girlfriend, "I don't know whether to watch them or the game."*

*She said, "Watch THEM! You already KNOW how to play baseball."*

## **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**he entire thrust of Torah life lies in the word tzav which informs us as the title of the parsha of this week. Tzav means command, order, instruct. It allows little leeway for individual creativity in the performance of ritual and commandments.

The values of Torah life come with an instruction manual. And just as the wonderful gadgets of technology in our lives require adherence to the manual that accompanies each device, in order for it to operate effectively, so too the Torah in the spiritual realm of Judaism requires adherence to specific instructions.

It is not for naught that any and all of the blessings that were composed by the rabbis to be recited before the performance of a mitzvah contains the word v'tzivanu - and He has commanded us, for the word mitzvah itself, which we usually translate in terms of being a good deed, literally means something which has been commanded.

It is this recognition of being commanded, of following the instruction manual of the Torah in a committed and punctilious fashion that defines Judaism throughout the ages. In today's world there are many who seek to "improve" upon the Torah. They have written a new and ever changing

manual of instructions using such sweet sounding terms as "relevant" "progressive" "attractive" to describe prayer services, Torah commandments and Jewish values.

The fault line in Jewish life today remains as it always has been this acceptance or rejection of the concept of v'tzivanu. But Jewish history teaches us that none of this tinkering with that concept survives the passage of time and the ever changing mores of human society. It is only the old instructional manual that still stands and preserves us after all else has passed from the scene.

The concept of v'tzivanu rubs us the wrong way. We are by nature rebellious against authority imposed upon us by others. From infancy onward we demand to do it all by ourselves, when and how we wish. Therefore we can sense what the rabbis meant when they said that the people of Israel accepted the Torah at Mount Sinai and they felt that the mountain hung over their heads as a terrible and forced burden.

Here they were going to be commanded to do things a certain exact way, to make the Torah's values supreme over their own personal desires, logic and way of life. But they were warned then that abandoning the Torah and not following the instructional manual would bring personal and national problems, tragedies, defections and harsh judgments.

The mountain still hangs over our heads as we are witness to this fact in so many facets of our lives. So again we are brought full circle to the idea of tzav and v'tzivanu. The concept of tzav as promulgated in this week's parsha is not addressed solely to Aaron and his descendants but it is part of the heritage of Judaism for all Jews and for all who wish to witness Jewish continuity in their families and the Jewish people as a whole. © 2011 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory](http://www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory).

*"What's your father's occupation?" asked the teacher on the first day of the new academic year. "He's a magician, Ma'am," said the new boy.*

*"How interesting. What's his favorite trick?" "He saws people in half."*

*"Gosh! Now, next question. Any brothers or sisters?"*

*"One half brother and two half sisters."*

## **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**O**ur parsha informs us that the priestsâ (tm) first task of the day was to remove the ashes from the offering sacrificed the previous day. (Leviticus 6:3) Is there any significance to this being the priests first order of business with which to start the day? Samson Raphael Hirsch



suggests that this mandate serves as a constant reminder that service of the new day is connected to the service of the previous day. After all, it was the ashes from the remains of yesterdayâ (tm)s sacrifice that had to be removed. In one word: even as we move forward in time and deal with new situations and conditions it is crucial to remember that all that is being done is anchored in a past steeped with religious significance and commitment.

Another theme comes to mind. Just as a small portion of every food grown in Israel must be given to the priest (terumah), so is the priest responsible to remove the last remains of the sacrificial service (terumat ha-deshen). Thus, the entire eating and sacrificial experience is sanctified through a beginning or ending ritual. Terumah elevates the food as we give its first portion to the priest; terumat ha-deshen elevates the sacrifice as the kohen maintains contact even with the remains of the sacrificial parts. Not coincidentally, the portion given to the priest and the ashes removed by the priest are given similar namesâ "terumah and terumat ha-deshenâ "as the word terumah comes from the word ruum, to lift.

One last thought. The priest begins the day by removing the ashes to illustrate the importance of his remaining involved with the mundane. Too often, those who rise to important lofty positions, separate themselves from the people and withdraw from the everyday menial tasks. The Torah through the laws of terumat ha-deshen insists it shouldnâ (tm)t be this way.

A story reflects this point. A few years ago a husband and wife appeared before Rabbi Gifter, Rosh Yeshiva of Tels, asking him to rule on a family dispute. The husband, a member of Rabbi Gifterâ (tm)s kollel (an all day Torah learning program) felt that as one who studied Torah it was beneath his dignity to take out the garbage. His wife felt otherwise. Rabbi Gifter concluded that while the husband should in fact help his wife he had not religio-legal obligation to remove the refuse.

The next morning, before the early services, the Rosh Yeshiva knocked at the door of the young couple. Startled, the young man asked Rabbi Gifter in. No, responded Rabbi Gifter, lâ (tm)ve not come to socialize but to take out your garbage. You may believe itâ (tm)s beneath your dignity, but itâ (tm)s not beneath mine.

And that may be the deepest message of terumat ha-deshen. © 2011 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA

*One night a woman found her husband standing over their newborn baby's crib. Silently she watched him. As he stood looking down at the sleeping infant, she saw on his face a mixture of emotions: disbelief, doubt, delight, amazement, enchantment, skepticism. Touched by his unusual display of deep emotions, she felt her eyes grow moist. She slipped her arms around her husband.*

*"A penny for your thoughts," she lovingly whispered in his ear. "It's amazing!" he replied. "I just can't see how anybody can make a crib like that for only \$49.95!" ☺*

**RABBI JONATHAN SACKS**

**Covenant & Conversation**

In her recent *The Watchman's Rattle*, subtitled "Thinking our way out of extinction", Rebecca Costa delivers a fascinating account of how civilizations die. Their problems become too complex. Societies reach what she calls a cognitive threshold. They simply can't chart a path from the present to the future.

The example she gives is the Mayans. For a period of three and a half thousand years, between 2,600 BCE and 900 CE, they developed an extraordinary civilization, spreading over what is today Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Belize with an estimated population of 15 million people.

Not only were they master potters, weavers, architects and farmers. They developed an intricate cylindrical calendar system, with celestial charts to track the movements of the stars and predict weather patterns. They had their own unique form of writing as well as an advanced mathematical system. Most impressively they developed a water-supply infrastructure involving a complex network of reservoirs, canals, dams and levees.

Then suddenly, for reasons we still don't fully understand, the entire system collapsed. Sometime between the middle of the eighth and ninth century the majority of the Mayan people simply disappeared. There have been many theories as to why it happened. It may have been a prolonged drought, overpopulation, internecine wars, a devastating epidemic, food shortages, or a combination of these and other factors. One way or another, having survived for 35 centuries, Mayan civilization failed and became extinct.

Rebecca Costa's argument is that whatever the causes, the Mayan collapse, like the fall of the Roman Empire, and the Khmer Empire of thirteenth century Cambodia, occurred because problems became too many and complicated for the people of that time and place to solve. There was cognitive overload, and systems broke down.

It can happen to any civilization. It may, she says, be happening to ours. The first sign of breakdown is gridlock. Instead of dealing with what everyone can see are major problems, people continue as usual and simply pass their problems on to the next generation. The second sign is a retreat into irrationality. Since people can no longer cope with the facts, they take refuge in religious consolations. The Mayans took to offering sacrifices.

Someone mention POOH-rim?



Archeologists have uncovered gruesome evidence of human sacrifice on a vast scale. It seems that, unable to solve their problems rationally, the Mayans focused on placating the gods by manically making offerings to them. So apparently did the Khmer.

Which makes the case of Jews and Judaism fascinating. They faced two centuries of crisis under Roman rule between Pompey's conquest in 63 BCE and the collapse of the Bar Kochba rebellion in 135 CE. They were hopelessly factionalised. Long before the Great Rebellion against Rome and the destruction of the Second Temple, Jews were expecting some major cataclysm.

What is remarkable is that they did not focus obsessively on sacrifices, like the Mayans and the Khmer. Instead they focused on finding substitutes for sacrifice. One was gemillat chassadim, acts of kindness. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai comforted Rabbi Joshua, who wondered how Israel would atone for its sins without sacrifices, with the words, "My son we have another atonement as effective as this: acts of kindness, as it is written (Hosea 6:6), 'I desire kindness and not sacrifice'" (Avot deRabbi Natan 8).

Another was Torah study. The sages interpreted Malachi's words (1:11), "In every place offerings are presented to My name," to refer to scholars who study the laws of sacrifice. (Menachot 100a). "One who recites the order of sacrifices is as if he had brought them" (Taanit 27b).

Another was prayer. Hosea had said, "Take words with you and return to the Lord... We will offer our lips as sacrifices of bulls" (Hos. 14:2-3), implying that words could take the place of sacrifice. "He who prays in the house of prayer is as if he brought a pure oblation." (Yerushlami Berakhot 8d).

Yet another was teshuvah. The Psalm (51:19) says "the sacrifices of G-d are a contrite spirit." From this the sages inferred that "if a person repents it is accounted to him as if he had gone up to Jerusalem and built the Temple and the altar and offered on it all the sacrifices ordained in the Torah" (Vayikra Rabbah 7:2).

A fifth was fasting. Since going without food diminished a person's fat and blood, it counted as a substitute for the fat and blood of a sacrifice (Berakhot 17a). A sixth was hospitality. "As long as the Temple stood, the altar atoned for Israel, but now a person's table atones for him" (Berakhot 55a). And so on.

What is striking in hindsight is how, rather than clinging obsessively to the past, sages like Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai thought forward to a worst-case-scenario future. The great question raised by Tzav, which is all about different kinds of sacrifice, is not "Why were sacrifices commanded in the first place?" but rather, given how central they were to the religious life of Israel in Temple times, how did Judaism survive without them?

The short answer is that overwhelmingly the prophets, the sages, and the Jewish thinkers of the Middle Ages realised that sacrifices were symbolic enactments of processes of mind, heart and deed that could be expressed in other ways as well. We can encounter the will of G-d by Torah study, engage in the service of G-d by prayer, make financial sacrifice by charity, create sacred fellowship by hospitality and so on.

Jews did not abandon the past. We still refer constantly to the sacrifices in our prayers. But they did not cling to the past. Nor did they take refuge in irrationality. They thought through the future and created institutions like the synagogue and house of study and school that could be built anywhere and sustain Jewish identity even in the most adverse conditions.

That is no small achievement. The world's greatest civilizations have all, in time, become extinct while Judaism has always survived. In one sense that was surely Divine providence. But in another it was the foresight of people like Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai who resisted cognitive breakdown, created solutions today for the problems of tomorrow, who did not seek refuge in the irrational, and who quietly built the Jewish future.

Surely there is a lesson here for the Jewish people today. Plan generations ahead. Think at least 25 years into the future. Contemplate worst-case scenarios. Ask what we would do, if... What saved the Jewish people was their ability, despite their deep and abiding faith, never to let go of rational thought, and despite their loyalty to the past, to keep planning for the future. © 2011 Rabbi J. Sacks & torah.org

*I thought I saw an eye doctor on an Alaskan island,  
but it turned out to be an optical Aleutian ☺*

#### **RABBI YISROEL CINER**

## **Parsha Insights**

**T**his week's parsha, Tzav, deals predominantly with different karbanos {sacrifices} that were brought. "And these are the instructions for the peace-offerings which one may offer to Hashem. If as a "Todah" {Thanksgiving Offering} he will offer it, then he shall bring with the sacrifice, cakes of matzo mixed with oil... [7:10-12]"

This Korbon Todah {Thanksgiving Offering} was brought by one who was saved from a perilous situation. This includes four categories: those who traveled overseas, those who traveled through the wilderness, those who were released from prison and those who were healed from a serious illness. This karbon demonstrates the appreciation they feel to Hashem for His deliverance.

The word 'todah' has two seemingly disparate meanings. The very common use is as an expression of thanks. It also means an admission.

'Hoda'as (the same root as todah) ba'al din' is the admission of one side to the claims that another side made against it.

Rav Huttner zt"l explains that the common word that these two concepts share, reveals the common foundation that they are based upon.

We like to feel that we are independent-self-made men. We have only ourselves to thank for reaching the point we're at. We might pay lip-service to "all those without whom it would have been impossible for me to be standing here tonight to receive this honor" but deep down we feel most comfortable when it's our own back that we are patting.

An honest 'thank you' is in fact an admission. It's the first installment on a debt of gratitude. I admit that I couldn't have done it without you and I therefore thank you.

We can determine if the todah is 'admission' or 'thanks' based on the wording that follows it. An admission is followed by the word that {the Hebrew prefix of sh'} -- I admit that-Thanks, on the other hand, is followed by that which we are thanking for {in Hebrew, oll} -- thanks for...

With this Rav Huttner zt"l explains the wording in the Modim {Appreciation} part of the silent Amidah prayer {the Shmone Esrei}. The Modim prayer begins: "Modim anachnu lach she'atah hu Elokainu-we admit that you are our G-d of Power." It then continues: "Nodeh l'cha ol chayeinu-we thank you for our lives that are in Your hands."

As such, the Korbon Todah (upon which the Modim section of the Amidah prayer is based) encompasses both of these aspects. The korbon is a statement of gratitude that demonstrates the recognition and admission that we have only Hashem to thank for our deliverance.

How does this sacrifice, to the degree that it's possible, pay Hashem back for what He has done for us?

There are a number of distinct laws that apply to the Korbon Todah. The Talmud [Menachos 76] teaches that ten loaves were brought from each of the four types of bread/matzo that the passuk {verse} [7:12-13] mentions. Furthermore, whereas one has a two-day period to consume a regular Korbon Shlomim {Peace Offering}, the Korbon Todah {Thanksgiving Offering} and its forty loaves must be completely eaten on the day it is brought.

The N'tziv writes that this expansive obligation to bring forty loaves of bread/matzo on one hand, and, at the same time, the diminished one-day time period within which it must be eaten, forces a person to invite a large number of people to share this seudah {festive meal}. This meal will then lead to the purpose of this Korbon Todah-the public proclamation and voicing of gratitude to Hashem for all that He has done for us.

The way to pay Hashem back is by teaching others to appreciate Him and to thereby sanctify His name.

It always bugs me when I hear someone respond "not bad" to the common question of "how are you?" Not bad? In other words, when I rate how Hashem is doing in His job of running the world He gets a solid 65. Not bad. Room for improvement but clearly a strong effort. When a person looks honestly at all that Hashem has done and is doing for him, even when there are difficulties, illnesses, etc. that one is dealing with, his response should be "fantastic, thank G-d!"

But the truth is, even more important than what we say is the face we show the world. The face and expression that we wear is our present-day Korbon Todah. It should show happiness and appreciation for all that Hashem has granted us and should thereby sanctify Hashem's name.  
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*Who was the greatest female financier in the Bible?  
Pharaoh's daughter. She went down to the bank of the Nile and drew  
out a little prophet! (Aww come on, that was a GOOD one!)*

## RABBI YISSOCHER FRAND

# RavFrand

*Transcribed by David Twersky; Technical Assistance by Dovid Hoffman*

**P**arshas Tzav introduces the laws of the Korbon Todah [Thanksgiving offering] [Vayikra 7:12]. Rashi explains that a Todah offering is brought by "someone who experienced a personal miracle". Rashi gives as examples of such- one who traveled on the High Seas or one who traveled through the desert and safely reached his destination, one who was thrown in jail and then released, and one who was sick and recovered.

Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld makes an interesting observation. Parshas Vayikra enumerates all the sacrifices that an individual might ever bring with one exception. For some strange reason, the law of Korbon Todah does not appear in Parshas Vayikra, but rather first appears in Parshas Tzav.

Parshas Tzav begins with the words: "Command Aaron and his sons, saying: This is the law of the Olah offering." This entire parsha is addressed to the Kohanim.

They have to know how to execute the laws of sacrifices-how do you bring a Korban, where do you bring a Korban, when do you bring a korban, etc. In a sense, Parshas Tzav serves as a manual for Kohanim. Israelites do not need to be as familiar with the contents of the parsha because they do not offer the actual sacrifices. This strengthens the question. Not only is it problematic why the laws of the Thanksgiving offering do NOT appear in Parshas Vayikra, it is also problematic why DO they appear in Parshas Tzav?

Rav Sonnenfeld further asks about Rashi's use of the word "miracle" (nes) to describe the four events that trigger the requirement to bring a

Korban Todah. True, each of these situations might involve risk or danger to some extent, but can they truly be categorized as "miracles"? What does this mean?

The truth of the matter is that while these situations may not be in the same category as the splitting the Red Sea or other "Open miracles" (nes galui), they certainly reflect Divine Providence, the Hand of G-d watching over us and do at least fall into the category of "hidden miracles" (nes nistar).

Today, because of advances in medicine, we take for granted that a person can have heart bypass surgery and be back on the job a short time later. For several hours, this person was not breathing on his own, yet we take his recovery for granted! Despite our growing accustomed to the "miraculous", it nevertheless remains miraculous.

The obligation to offer thanksgiving to the Almighty is even to offer it upon experiencing a so-called "natural miracle". The Talmud tells us [Brachos 7b] that when Leah had her fourth child and called him Yehuda saying, "This time I will thank the Almighty" (hapa'am ODEH es Hashem) [Bereshis 29:35], it was the first time in the history of the world that someone expressed gratitude to the Almighty.

This statement puzzles many commentaries-do we not find other places where people expressed gratitude prior to Leah? Was Noah's offering of sacrifices to G-d upon exiting the Ark not a form of thanksgiving to Him? The answer is that until Leah, the people who brought sacrifices or expressed thanks to the Almighty were expressing thanks for OPEN miracles. Leah was the first to express thanks to Him for even a HIDDEN miracle.

When Noah and his family were the only people saved while the whole planet was destroyed, the obvious miracle demanded thanksgiving to the Almighty. However, when one has a baby, it is all too easy to take the attitude "I did it myself". What is more natural than having a baby?

Leah said, "No. It is a big deal!" The fact that a woman becomes pregnant and has a normal pregnancy and a normal delivery is a very big deal. It requires an expression of thanksgiving to the One who made it all possible.

A young man who had been married one year had a baby girl. The man asked Rav Eliezer Schach, his Rosh Yeshiva, whether he should make a Kiddush to celebrate the occasion. Rav Schach said, "Suppose you were married for 8 years and your wife was unable to conceive all that time, and then she

became pregnant and you had a baby girl. Would you make a Kiddush then? Of course you would. Now that Hashem saved you from 7 years of anguish and frustration, should you not certainly make a Kiddush expressing your gratitude?" It is not just a miracle when a woman has a child after many years of childlessness. It is a miracle even when she has a baby after just one year of marriage.

This is what Leah taught us. A natural miracle is a miracle nevertheless. This is the idea expressed by Rashi when he calls the four types of people who bring a Todah offering, people who have experienced miracles. It is the Nes of seeing the Hand of G-d in every act of nature.

This, Rav Sonnenfeld says, explains why the Korban Todah is located in Parshas Tzav and not in Parshas Vayikra. If there is a group of people who need a special exhortation regarding "natural miracles" it is the Kohanim. The Mishna in Avos [5:5] says that there were miracles every single day in the Beis HaMikdash. Flies never came to the slaughtered animals. The wind never deflected the smoke arising from the Altar. They lived with miracles. When someone lives with miracles on a daily basis, then the occurrence of a nes is just another day at the office. People get used to the miracles. That is life. We can become so accustomed to miracles that we no longer appreciate them.

There is a Yiddish expression that conveys the concept that "In a place where there is a printing press, people step on shaimos [Torah texts, etc.]". Outside the printing press, when someone sees shaimos on the floor, he rushes to pick it up and kiss it. However, if the printer would stop to pick up shaimos from the floor every time he saw it, he would not get anything done.

The same thing is true with "common place miracles"-having a baby, recovering from an illness, passing through the desert, and so on. We can become jaded and forget that we are experiencing "miracles".

This is why the laws of Korban Todah are located in Parshas Tzav. We all need to be reminded of the truth that G-d's Providence must be recognized as Divine intervention-i.e. a miracle-even when it occurs frequently. However, the Kohanim who witness miracles on a daily basis, have a special need for this reminder. Therefore, Korban Todah is located in Parshas Tzav, which is directed specifically to the Kohanim. © 2011 Rabbi Y. Frand & torah.org



Why is the rum gone?



*A rabbi walks into a bar with a parrot on his shoulder. The bartender says 'Hey, where'd you get that?' The parrot says 'Brooklyn. They're everywhere!'" ©*

**Pie-Rum Samayach!**