

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Tanakh, the Hebrew Bible, is remarkable for the extreme realism with which it portrays human character. Its heroes are not superhuman. Its non-heroes are not archetypal villains. The best have failings; the worst often have saving virtues. I know of no other religious literature quite like it.

This makes it very difficult to use biblical narrative to teach a simple, black-and-white approach to ethics. And that -- argued R. Zvi Hirsch Chajes (Mevo ha-Aggadot) -- is why rabbinic midrash often systematically re-interprets the narrative so that the good become all-good and the bad all-bad. For sound educational reasons, Midrash paints the moral life in terms of black and white.

Yet the plain sense remains ("A biblical passage never loses its plain interpretation", Shabbat 63a), and it is important that we do not lose sight of it. It is as if monotheism brought into being at the same time a profound humanism. G-d in the Hebrew Bible is nothing like the gods of myth. They were half-human, half-divine. The result was that in the epic literature of pagan cultures, human heroes were seen as almost like gods: semi-divine.

In stark contrast, monotheism creates a total distinction between G-d and humanity. If G-d is wholly G-d, then human beings can be seen as wholly human - - subtle, complex mixtures of strength and weakness. We identify with the heroes of the Bible because, despite their greatness, they never cease to be human, nor do they aspire to be anything else. Hence the phenomenon of which the sedra of Beha'alotcha provides a shattering example: the vulnerability of some of the greatest religious leaders of all time, to depression and despair.

The context is familiar enough. The Israelites are complaining about their food: "The rabble among them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites

started wailing and said, 'If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost -- also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!'" (Num 11:4-6)

This is not a new story. We have heard it before (see for example Exodus 16). Yet on this occasion, Moses experiences what one can only call a breakdown: "He asked the Lord, 'Why have you brought this trouble on your servant? What have I done to displease you that you put the burden of all these people on me? Did I conceive all these people? Did I give them birth?... I cannot carry all these people by myself; the burden is too heavy for me. If this is how You are going to treat me, put me to death right now -- if I have found favour in your eyes -- and do not let me face my own ruin.'" (Num. 11:11-15)

Moses prays for death! Nor is he the only person in Tanakh to do so. There are at least three others. There is Elijah, when after his successful confrontation with the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel, Queen Jezebel issues a warrant that he be killed: "Elijah was afraid and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, while he himself went a day's journey into the desert. He came to a broom tree, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. 'I have had enough, Lord,' he said. 'Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.'" (I Kings 19:3-4)

There is Jonah, after G-d had forgiven the inhabitants of Nineveh: "Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry. He prayed to the Lord, 'O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate G-d, slow to anger and abounding in love, a G-d who relents from sending calamity. Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.'" (Jonah 4:1-3)

And there is Jeremiah, after the people fail to heed his message and publicly humiliate him: "O Lord, You enticed me, and I was enticed; You overpowered me and prevailed. I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me... The word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all day long... Cursed be the day I was born! May the day my mother bore me not be blessed! Cursed be the man who brought my father the news, made him very glad, saying, 'A child is born to you -- a son!'... Why did I ever come out of the womb to see

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Mrs. Ida Weisberg ע"ה
חיה פייגה בת יעקב יוסף ז"ל
on her 19th yartzeit
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trouble and sorrow and to end my days in shame?" (Jeremiah 20:7-18)

Lehavdil elef havdalot: no comparison is intended between the religious heroes of Tanakh and political heroes of the modern world. They are different types, living in different ages, functioning in different spheres. Yet we find a similar phenomenon in one of the great figures of the twentieth century, Winston Churchill. Throughout much of his life he was prone to periods of acute depression. He called it "the black dog". He told his daughter, "I have achieved a great deal to achieve nothing in the end". He told a friend that "he prays every day for death". In 1944 he told his doctor, Lord Moran, that he kept himself from standing close to a train platform or overlooking the side of a ship because he might be tempted to commit suicide: "A second's desperation would end everything" (these quotes are taken from Anthony Storr, Churchill's Black Dog).

Why are the greatest so often haunted by a sense of failure? Storr, in the book mentioned above, offers some compelling psychological insights. But at the simplest level we see certain common features, at least among the biblical prophets: a passionate drive to change the world, combined with a deep sense of personal inadequacy. Moses says, "Who am I... that I should lead the Israelites out of Egypt?" (Ex. 3:11). Jeremiah says: "I cannot speak: I am only a child" (Jer. 1:6). Jonah tries to flee from his mission. The very sense of responsibility that leads a prophet to heed the call of G-d can lead him to blame himself when the people around him do not heed the same call.

Yet it is that same inner voice that ultimately holds the cure. The prophet does not believe in himself: he believes in G-d. He does not undertake to lead because he sees himself as a leader, but because he sees a task to be done and no one else willing to do it. His greatness lies not within himself but beyond himself: in his sense of being summoned to a task that must be done however inadequate he knows himself to be.

Despair can be part of leadership itself. For when the prophet sees himself reviled, rebuked, criticized; when his words fall on stony ground; when he sees people listening to what they want to hear, not what they need to hear -- that is when the last layers of self are burned away, leaving only the task, the mission, the call. When that happens, a new greatness is born. It

now no longer matters that the prophet is unpopular and unheeded. All that matters is the work and the One who has summoned him to it. That is when the prophet arrives at the truth stated by Rabbi Tarfon: "It is not for you to complete the task, but neither are you free to stand aside from it" (Avot 2:16).

Again without seeking to equate the sacred and the secular, I end with some words spoken by Theodore Roosevelt (in a speech to students at the Sorbonne, Paris, 23 April 1910), which sum up both the challenge and the consolation of leadership in cadences of timeless eloquence: "It is not the critic who counts, Not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, Or where the doer of deeds could actually have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, Whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, Who strives valiantly, Who errs and comes short again and again -- Because there is no effort without error and shortcomings -- But who does actually strive to do the deed, Who knows great enthusiasm, great devotion, Who spends himself in a worthy cause, Who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement And who, at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly -- So that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls Who know neither victory nor defeat."

Leadership in a noble cause can bring despair. But it also is the cure. © 2013 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“In the second month [Iyar] on the afternoon of the fourteenth day, he shall prepare it [the second Passover Sacrifice].” (Numbers 9:11) One of the many injunctions in this week's portion is that of Pesach Sheni - "second Passover" - a "second chance" for anyone who was ritually impure on Passover to bring the festival sacrifice four weeks later and eat it then. At this time, though there would be no festival and no prohibition of hametz (leaven), one could partake in this delayed Passover sacrificial meal with matza and bitter herbs. Although the analogy is not completely apt, this strange combination of Passover, hametz and matza sparked within me some significant childhood memories which may contain important lessons regarding our attitude toward different kinds of "religious" observances.

Throughout his life, my paternal grandfather, Shmuel, was a communist. In Czarist Belorussia, he organized the workers in his father's factory to protest against their boss. In 1906, he escaped from Siberia to New York and opened a woodworking business, which he handed over to the workers as soon as it became profitable. He was a Yiddishist - an atheist who wrote a regular column for the Freiheit (the New York Yiddish

communist newspaper) - and he truly believed that "religion was the opium of the masses."

When I was about three years old, he crafted for me a miniature "stool and table" set as a special gift; it remains in our family until this very day. He then asked me to try to place my fingers in the manner of the kohanim during the priestly benediction; when I did it successfully, he kissed me on the forehead and admonished me: "Remember, we are kohanim, Jewish aristocracy. Always be a proud Jew."

As he left the house, I remember asking my mother what "Jew" and "aristocracy" meant.

Another childhood memory is of a train ride we took together from Bedford-Stuyvesant, where I lived, to Kings Highway, where he lived. Two elderly hassidim boarded the train and sat directly opposite us; three neighborhood toughs began taunting the hassidim and pulling at their beards.

My grandfather interrupted his conversation with me and looked intently at the drama unfolding in front of us. As soon as the train came to a stop, he lunged forward, grabbed the three hoodlums, and literally threw them out of the compartment. Trembling with fear, as the doors closed with the toughs outside, I asked my grandfather, "Why did you protect those hassidim? You aren't even religious."

Nonchalantly, he responded, "They are part of our Jewish family. And you must always protect the underdog. That's what Judaism teaches."

And now the point of my reminiscences. In the Brooklyn of my childhood, there were two Passover Sedarim; the first we celebrated at the home of my religious maternal grandmother, and the second with my communist grandfather. On his dining room wall hung two pictures, one of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (who he thought was bringing communism to America) and the other of Joseph Stalin.

On the beautifully set table were all the accouterments - matza, maror (bitter herbs), haroset, the egg and the shank bone - but on the side were fresh rolls for family members who preferred pumpernickel to the "bread of affliction." We read from the Haggada and my grandfather read passages from Marx, Engels and Shalom Aleichem about communist idealism and our obligations to the poor. For an 11-year-old who adored his intellectual and idealistic grandfather, there seemed to be no contradiction between the different foods and the various and variegated readings.

When I came upon the fascinating law of Pesach Sheni, the "second chance" Passover sacrifice that features the roasted meat, the matza, maror and haroset together with the hametz and without the usual festival prohibitions, this was the closest thing I could imagine to my grandfather's Seder. An evening that featured the "peoplehood" and familial aspects of a celebration which taught us to identify with the slave, the stranger, the downtrodden, but without fealty to G-d who placed restrictions upon our diet and our activities.

My grandfather was "far away" from the traditional definitions of observance; he was even "defiled by death" - the spiritual death of communism that had captivated his intellectual world like an evil, seductive slave woman. (Rav A.Y. Kook, Iggarot R'eya 137).

Such a Seder has no staying power; to the best of my knowledge, none of my Riskin cousins have Jewish spouses or attend Passover Sedarim. By the end of his life, my grandfather himself understood this. In our last discussion before his fatal heart attack, while reclining on the bed of a Turkish bath, he told me of his great disillusionment with communism after reading of Stalin's anti-Semitic plots against Jewish doctors and Yiddish writers of the Soviet Union.

"I gave up too much too soon for a false god. I yearn for the Sabbaths of my parents' home. I now understand that all of communist idealism is expressed in the words of our Prophets and experienced in the Passover Seder. You are following the right path..."

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The association of Aharon, and of all later High Priests of Israel, with the task of the daily lighting of the menorah/candelabra in the Temple is significant. In our current technologically advanced era, turning on the lights in a home or a room is hardly considered to be a difficult or especially meaningful event. The flick of a switch floods the area with light and illumination.

However, when light is sourced from candles, wicks and oil it is a more complicated matter. To produce this type of light requires a modicum of motor skills, patience and great attention to detail. Many problems, even fatalities, may be caused by improperly lighting the candelabra such as the one in the Temple, with its imposing size and dimension.

Because of the care and attention that was needed to light the candelabra in the Temple, and to emphasize the holy nature of the task and of the candelabra itself, caring for it and kindling it was assigned to the highest priest of Israel, Aharon. He and his successors symbolized light. They represented hope, optimism, holiness, purpose and peace. This physical representation of Aharon's general role in Jewish society served to remind all of the purpose of the Temple, its laws and rituals and infused the G-dly spirit into Jewish society generally.

The Torah characterizes itself as light and radiance. The commandments are the candles and the kindling, and the Torah - its study and its observance - becomes the source of light itself for all generations of Jews. It became the personal task of each and every High Priest of Israel to see to it that this light was kept eternally burning and refreshed daily.

It is interesting to note that the light of the menorah was not seen generally by the public, as not everyone had access to the area of the Temple where the menorah stood. But, it was seen daily by the High Priest himself and the radiance emanating from the menorah inspired him to be the constant disseminator of light, Torah, social justice and tranquility within Jewish society.

This essential societal task naturally entailed the same type of precision, persistence and attention to detail, coupled with loving care and innate skills that was present when the High Priest serviced the physical lighting of the menorah in the Temple daily. The Talmud teaches us that the clothing of the High Priest was not to be soiled when he appeared in public view. Lighting the menorah can be a dirty job if one is not careful, as can any societal activity, no matter how well intentioned it may have been at the outset.

The process and commandment of lighting the menorah served as a constant reminder to the High Priest of the important role that he was to always play in the furtherance of Torah and holiness in Jewish society. © 2013 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

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd the Children of Israel traveled” (Bamidbar 10:12). The procedure for breaking camp and starting to travel is described at length, including the order in which each Degel (set of three Tribes) started to move and when the Levi'im, who were responsible for transporting the Mishkan, did so as well. The following is a summary of that procedure:

First, the "Yehuda Degel" started out (10:14). The Mishkan was disassembled, and two of the three families of Levi'im started traveling, carrying it (10:17). Next, the "R'uvain Degel" traveled (10:18), followed by the third family of Levi'im (10:21), carrying the holiest parts of the Mishkan (the Aron, Shulchan, Menorah and both Mizbachos; see Rashi). The third Degel to travel was the "Efrayim Degel" (10:22), followed by the "Dun Degel" (10:25). The procedure seems pretty straightforward, putting aside whether they traveled in the same "box" formation they camped in, or traveled in a straight line, like "beam" (see Yerushalmi Eiruvin 5:1). Rashi (Bamidbar 2:9/17) says it was the former, and even though this raises numerous issues, we will leave them on the side for now, and focus on another issue raised by Rashi's comment (on 10:21), where he says that the time frame between the two groups of Levi'im, which had to be long enough for the first to be able to set up the Mishkan before the second one arrived, was "the travel time of two Degalim." Since the first group of Levi'im left after the first Degel and the second group

left after the second Degel, how could Rashi say they were separated by the travel time of two Degalim?

Sifsay Chachamim (30, on Rashi's commentary on 10:21) quotes Mizrachi (on Bamidbar 10:17), who explains the verse "and the Degel of Yehuda traveled" to mean "got ready to travel," so that the description of the first group of Levi'im packing up and leaving afterwards doesn't mean that they left after the first Degel had already left. Rather, the first group of Levi'im left at the same time that the first Degel did. Therefore, by the time the second group of Levi'im started traveling, which was after the second Degel did, two Degalim had left. [The expression used for the first Degel ("vayisa") is different than what is used for the other Degalim ("v'nusa") and for the two groups of Levi'im ("v'nus'u"), with the former indicating that what follows happened concurrently while the latter means it had already happened.] Nevertheless, this would not make a two-Degel time lag between the two groups of Levi'im. It was more than one (since the first group of Levi'im left with the first Degel), but it was not a full two either. [Some point out that on Z'vachim 61a Rashi says explicitly that the first group of Levi'im left after the first Degel, but it is unclear what Rashi's wording really was, and whether that was what he meant.] Additionally, Rashi says that the second group of Levi'im arrived with the last two Degalim; according to this, they would have arrived before the third Degel, not "with the last two."

Nachalas Yaakov (on 10:17) takes it a step further, saying that the first group of Levi'im left before the first Degel did, so there were a full two Degalim between the two groups of Levi'im. However, this goes against what Rashi had written on 2:9 (that the Levi'im were in the middle). Maskil L'Dovid understands Mizrachi and Sifsay Chachamim to mean that the first group of Levi'im left before the first Degel (not with it), and then explains why that can't be what Rashi meant. It is unclear what his approach is; it sounds like he is saying that the first group of Levi'im left after the first Degel and the second group left after the third Degel, so that there is a two-Degel time lag between the two groups. However, the Torah seems pretty clear that the second group of Levi'im left before the third Degel, not after it. B'er Basadeh also understands Mizrachi and Sifsay Chachamim the way his rebbe, Maskil L'Dovid, did, and likewise explains why it can't be what Rashi meant. His understanding of his rebbe's approach (based on his drawing), is that the second group of Levi'im left after the fourth Degel (see L'vush's approach below). The approach he prefers is the way I explained Mizrachi/Sifsay Chachamim above; I'm not sure why he didn't think this is what they were saying.

Chizkuni adds a "period" in Rashi's commentary after the words "the sons of Gershon and the sons of Merari" (who were the first group of Levi'im), and says that the next words, "for two Degalim had previously traveled" is a separate thought. Rashi is therefore not telling us there were two Deglim that traveled between

the two groups of Levi'im, only that the second group of Levi'im was preceded by two Degalim. However, since this was told to us in order to explain how there was enough time for the first group of Levi'im to reassemble the Mishkan before the second one arrived, telling us how many Degalim had traveled before the second group left (rather than who left in-between) is a pretty indirect way of telling us about the time lag between them. Besides, the first group of Levi'im is referenced again in the "new thought;" separating Rashi's thought into two comments doesn't seem to alleviate the issue. [It should be noted Chizkuni also says that the first group of Levi'im traveled "with" the first Degel (not "after" them), but he does not use this to explain Rashi seeming to say that there were two Degalim that traveled between the two groups of Levi'im.]

L'vush (on 2:17, quoted in its entirety by Tzaida Laderech and referenced again on 10:21 after quoting Chizkuni) says that the first group of Levi'im left after the second Degel, while the second group left after the fourth Degel started traveling and reached where they were (what had been the center of the encampment). Since the area of the encampment was large (12 mil), it took time for the fourth Degel to reach where the Levi'im were. Therefore, even though the second group of Levi'im were in front of, or parallel to, the fourth Degel, they didn't start moving until it had reached them. The bottom line (for our issue) is that the first group of Levi'im left after the second Degel while the second group left after the fourth Degel had started traveling, which created the time lag of two Degalim described by Rashi. The obvious problem with this approach is that the Torah is rather explicit that the second group of Levi'im left before the third Degel started traveling, let alone before the fourth one did.

This issue is compounded by how the procedure is described in B'raisa d'M'leches HaMishkan (13), where the first group of Levi'im didn't start to pack up and leave until after the second Degel had left and the second group of Levi'im didn't pack up and leave until after the third Degel left. Besides also having a one-Degel time lag between the two groups of Levi'im (not the two Rashi describes), the order doesn't seem to jibe with the Torah's description. Ramban (Bamidbar 10:17) suggests that the B'raisa doesn't mean that the Levi'im left after the second and third Degalim did, but that they started to pack up when those Degalim started to prepare to leave; they actually left before the corresponding Degel started to travel, closely followed by that Degel. However, the B'raisa concludes by saying that the two groups of Levi'im traveled in-between the first two Degalim and the last two; according to Ramban, the third Degel traveled between the two groups of Levi'im.

Rav Chaim Kanievsky, sh'lita, in his commentary on the B'raisa, suggests that each group of Levi'im left at the same time as the Degel described as packing up and leaving before they did, so that the first

group traveled concurrently with the second Degel and the second with the third Degel. While the B'raisa mentions the Levi'im after the Degel they traveled with, the Torah mentions them before their travel "partner," allowing them to be describing the same procedure. If each group of Levi'im left together with a Degel, there's no reason why the first group couldn't be traveling behind the second Degel while the second group traveled in front of the third Degel, allowing both groups to be traveling in-between the first two and last two Degalim.

Getting back to Rashi, the question discussed by the commentators was based on the assumption that when Rashi discussed the first group of Levi'im arriving at the next encampment with enough time to set up the structure before the holy vessels arrived, the words "travel of two Degalim" referred to how much earlier. However, based on Rav Kanievky's explanation, it can be suggested that Rashi really meant that the first group of Levi'im traveled after the first two Degalim, while the second group of Levi'im traveled with the last two Degalim, giving the first group enough of a head start to be able to set the Mishkan up before the second group arrived. As previously mentioned, Rashi not only mentions the first two Degalim with the first group ("who were preceded by two Degalim traveling"), but he also mentions the last two Degalim with the second group ("who came after them with the last two Degalim").

If Rashi didn't mean that there was a time lag of two Degalim between the two groups of Levi'im, but that the first group traveled after the first two Degalim (leaving at the same time as the second Degel) and the second group traveled in front of the last two Degalim (leaving at the same time as the third Degel), the fact that the time lag between the two groups of Levi'im was only one Degel (not two) isn't an issue at all. © 2013 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Fishful Thinking

This week the Torah tells us that the Children of Israel once again complain. This time they want meat in the desert. They recall what they now consider a better time in a better place. Like many of us who are discontented with the world we live in, they talked about the good old days-in Egypt of all places!

"The rabble that was among them cultivated a craving, and the Children of Israel also wept once more, and said, "Who will feed us meat? We remember the fish that we will eat in Egypt free of charge; and the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. But now, our life is parched, there is nothing; we have nothing to anticipate but the manna!" (Numbers 11:4-6) The commentators are bothered by two simple questions; the first a grammatical, the second an historical one.

The words that the complainers used was "zacharnu es hadagah asher naochal we remember the

fish we would eat or actually will eat." They did not use the pure past tense "achalnu, we remember the fish that we ate." Why do they complain of remember fish that was to be eaten in the future, instead of fish to be eaten in the past?

Second, the Talmud and later commentaries ask, "Straw for bricks was not given to them, how was it possible that they had free fish?" The Talmud indeed implies that there was no fish, and the implied freedom refers to freedom of the yoke of mitzvos. So, if that was the case, what were they truly complaining about? Why mention non-existent fish? Yankel would spend a few of his precious kopeks each week to buy a lottery ticket. And every week he would come home from work that much poorer. When his wife got wind of his habit, she repeatedly implored him to stop. She said his efforts were futile and it would be impossible for him to win. It was, however, to no avail. Yankel would keep on betting the almost impossible odds that one day he would win.

One day she could take it no longer. She shlepped him to the rabbi who was going to make him assure them that he would no longer waste his money on the lottery.

When he finally acquiesced, his wife put her hands on her hips and reminded him of her predictions. "For the last five years, you did nothing but lose the lottery. What a waste!"

Poor Yankel shrugged. "My dear wife he sighed, you don't understand. Every night before the big lottery drawing, I went to sleep winning the lottery! And that my dear was surely no waste!"

The Sefer Shalal Rav brings quote the following interpretation: Sometimes, it seems, people think that it is better to think of the world that would be instead of the world that is. They refuse to revel in the good realities of life and instead would rather fantasize about a better world that was not to be. The Jews in the desert, talked about the fish they dreamt of in Egypt. To them, like to many of us, the imaginary fish was more appealing than real Manna. In the world of wishful thinking, it seems that obsessing about imaginary dreams may be more appealing than reveling in the real good that G-d has given us and the mitzvos that we are able to relish. And that is more than fishy. It's scary. © 2002 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and Project Genesis, Inc.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Complaining to Moshe (Moses), the Israelites cry out that they remember the fish served to them in Egypt that they received without price, "hinam." (Numbers 11:5)

Could they really have received food with no strings attached? After all, these are the same Egyptians who refused to even give the Jewish slaves straw for bricks. As the Midrash asks: "If they wouldn't

give them straw for naught, would they have given them fish for naught?"

Nachmanides believes that this is certainly possible because at the riverside, the Jews would be given small fish that had no value in the eyes of the Egyptians.

Ibn Ezra reflects this line of reasoning but adds that the term "hinam" should not be taken literally - it should be understood to mean inexpensive. They received fish at bargain basement prices.

Rashi offers a most insightful answer to this question. "Hinam," says Rashi, means "free of mitzvot (commandments)." In Egypt, without the commandments the Jews felt unencumbered; as they were free to do as they pleased. Here, after the giving of the Torah at Sinai, with all of its prohibitive laws, the Jews felt that there were strings attached as they felt restricted by the commandments. This seems to make sense. Freedom and limitation are antithetical. If, for example, I'm not allowed to eat a particular food my options are severely narrowed and no longer am I feeling "hinam" or free.

However, there is another way of understanding the presence of the commandments. The mitzvot, even the laws that seem to be the most restrictive, can often teach self-discipline. Self discipline is a passageway to freedom. Limitation is, therefore, a conduit to freedom.

Additionally, we commonly associate freedom with the ability to do whatever we want, whenever we want. Freedom is not only the right to say yes, it is the ability to say no. If I cannot push away a particular food-my physical urges may have unbridled freedom, but my mind is enslaved. What appears to be a clear green light, can sometimes turn out to be the greatest of burdens.

The opposite is also true. What appears to be a burden, can often lead to unlimited freedom. A story illustrates this point. When G-d first created the world, the birds were formed without wings. They complained to G-d: "we're small, and feel overpowered by the larger animals." G-d responds: "Have patience, you'll see."

In time, G-d gave the birds wings. The complaining even intensified. "It's worse than ever," cried the birds. "Until now we were all small, but still quick enough to elude the animals of prey. Now we have these appendages by our side and we feel weighed down.

G-d gently took the birds and taught them how to fly high and then higher. They were able to reach above the clouds and escape all threats from their animal adversaries.

The mitzvot are like the wings of the Jew. When not understood fully, they can make us feel stifled and weighed down. Yet, when explored deeply and given significance they give us new ways of looking at the world, and looking at our selves. They teach us meaning and self-discipline. With these gifts we then can truly fly high and far---we then can truly be free -

"hinam." © 2007 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 MICHA BERGER

Aspaqlaria

Hashem chose Aharon and his descendants to serve Him as Kohanim. It seems strange. If anyone should be chosen to be the first Kohen wouldn't it be Moshe? Wasn't he the Eved Hashem—the greatest servant of the Almighty?

The Gemara attributes to Moshe the attitude of "let the law uproot mountains." He lived to the ideal, teaching by setting an example of what man can become. He was able to separate himself from everything earthly, and single-mindedly pursue the higher ideal. Moshe begins his final speech to his people with the words "Hear O skies and I shall speak; listen O earth to the words of my mouth." Rashi comments that Moshe had to use a stronger language in speaking to the earth, as he was a man who was more heavenly than earthly. He was further from the earth, so it had to listen more carefully.

In contrast, Hillel (Mishnah Avos 1:12) enjoins us to learn from Aharon, who he describes as as a "lover of peace and a pursuer of peace. A lover of Mankind who brought them close to Torah." Aharon represents another kind of teacher, one who is part of the people, and works from within the community.

Though society needs both a Moshe, an ideal to aspire to, and an Aharon, it is the Aharon who is chosen for the Kehunah, the priesthood. In order to represent the masses in the Avodah, you must be part of them.

In this week's parashah, Hashem tells Moshe to instruct Aharon "Biha'aloschah es haneiros—when you cause the candles to go up". This is a very odd way to phrase it. More straightforward would be bihadlikchah—when you light the candles.

One of the explanations Rashi offers for this strange terminology is that it refers to a law about how the menorah is lit. One may not light the menorah directly, by letting a fire touch the wick. Instead the Kohen holds a fire close to the lamp, and the wick bursts into flame from the heat.

This is a beautiful metaphor for how the Kohen teaches. He doesn't instruct directly. Instead, he loves mankind, and by bringing the light of his example close to the masses, brings them to emulate.

The same is even more true of the Jewish People's job to be a Mamleches Kohanim viGoy Kadosh—a Kingdom of Priests and A Holy Nation. We do not spread the truths of ethical monotheism to the world by prosletization, in fact it is asur to teach Torah to non-Jews. Rather, by striving for kedushah in the midst of the nations, we can teach by example. © 1995 Rabbi M. Berger and The AishDas Society

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah gives us a profound insight into the spiritual direction of our present exile and final redemption. The haftorah begins with the prophet Zecharya experiencing a vision wherein the ordained High Priest, Yehoshua, was brought to a critical trial regarding his pending esteemed position. Zecharya says, "And I was shown the High Priest Yehoshua standing before Hashem's prosecuting angel." (3:1) The reason for this prosecution is stated shortly thereafter in the following words, "And Yehoshua was clothed with soiled garments." (3:3) Our Chazal explain that these garments refer to the wives of Yehoshua's descendants. Although Yehoshua was personally a very pious individual some of his children were adversely affected by the foreign environment of Babylonia. They strayed from their rich heritage of priesthood and married women prohibited to them due to their lofty ritual status. Because of this offense to the priesthood, Yehoshua's personal status of the High Priest was under severe scrutiny.

Suddenly, an angel of Hashem interceded on behalf of Yehoshua and defeated the prosecuting angel with the following statement of defense. "Is Yehoshua not an ember rescued from the fire!? (3:2) This response of defense was quite favorable in the eyes of Hashem and Yehoshua was immediately restored to his lofty position. The angel responded and said, "Remove the soiled garments from upon Yehoshua... See that I have removed his sin from him... Dress him with new garments." The prophet continues, "And they placed the pure priestly turban on his head." (3:4) Rashi (ad loc.) explains that Yehoshua was granted the opportunity of rectifying his children's behavior and he successfully influenced them to divorce their wives and marry more appropriate ones. Once Yehoshua's garments - referring to his children's inappropriate spouses - were cleansed Hashem clothed Yehoshua with the priestly garb and restored him to the position of Kohain Gadol.

What was the angel's powerful defense that produced such immediate favorable results? After his sons' disgrace to the priesthood, what outstanding merit could Yehoshua have possessed that secured his lofty position? The Radak explains that the angel argued that Yehoshua was "an ember rescued from fire." Radak understands this to mean that Yehoshua had been previously thrown into a fiery furnace. He sacrificed his life for the sake of Hashem and was miraculously spared from the fire. Through this heroic act, Yehoshua demonstrated total submission for the sake of Heaven offering his life for Hashem's glory. Such individuals deserve to prominently serve Hashem and His people. Such devotion and commitment must be inculcated into the blood stream of the Jewish people. Although

Yehoshua's children veered from the straight path there remained much hope for them.

The shining example of their father could surely inspire them to return from their inappropriate ways. They too could eventually become devout servants of Hashem and attain lofty levels of priesthood. Through their father's guidance they could also rise above their physical and mundane pursuits and develop the purest qualities. In fact, Yehoshua was told that his children could potentially perfect themselves beyond normal levels of human achievement. Hashem said, "I will establish them superior to these angels standing here." (3:7) Yes, Yehoshua's submissiveness could produce untold results and certainly lead his children back to perfect spirituality.

This same lesson is taught to us in this week's parsha regarding the newly appointed judges. We read about the masses of Jewish people straying from the perfect path demonstrating serious leanings towards certain physical and inappropriate dimensions of life. They disgraced the Heavenly manna bread which Hashem sent them on a daily basis and expressed their physical cravings for substitute foods such as; melons, onions and garlic. They even complained about the Torah's strict standards of morality and sought freedom from its taxing and demanding life. Hashem responded with a severe punishment which ended the lives of many thousands of Jewish people. But at the same time Hashem responded to a plea from Moshe Rabbeinu and instituted a structure of seventy elders to share the judicial responsibilities. During this process these hand-picked judges experienced an incredible transition. The Torah states, "And Hashem intensified the Heavenly Spirit which rested upon Moshe Rabbeinu and shared it with the seventy elders." (Bamidbar 11:25) In addition to their new position as judges, these elders received prophecy and merited for a short time, to actually serve as a sanctuary for the Divine Presence.

Rashi comments on this incident and reveals the secret identity of these seventy elders. He quotes Chazal who explain, "These were the Jewish policemen in Egypt who were beaten mercilessly instead of their Jewish brethren." (Rashi to Bamidbar 11:16) These elders refused to enforce upon their brethren the unreasonable Egyptian demands and opted to accept torturous Egyptian blows on behalf of their brethren. This previous heroic act of self negation now served as a meaningful merit and lesson for the Jewish people. The recent outburst of the Jewish people revealed that they were embarking upon an immoral path, focusing on pleasure and self pursuit. Hashem responded to this by elevating a host of their own peers to the lofty position of leadership. These elders were not ensnared by self pursuit but were instead perfect role models of self negation. Their interest lay in spiritual association with Hashem and their selfless efforts brought them to the lofty achievement of personal sanctuaries for the presence of Hashem. With such personalities at the

head of the Jewish people their direction could be effectively reversed. Their self sacrifice could secure the Jewish survival and hopefully remind the Jewish people never to plunge into self pursuit and immorality.

In our present times we hear repeated vibes of similar physical calls to immorality. We realize that our predecessors were also embers rescued from the fiery furnace - the fires of Europe - and their self sacrifice for the sake of Hashem surely serves as an everlasting merit for us. Our recollections of their total devotion to Hashem is a significant factor in the incredible transition for many of us from total physical pursuits to a sincere yearning to become sanctuaries of Hashem. May this new development continue to flourish and contribute to the hastening of Mashiach we so anxiously await.
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SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

Our parashah opens with the command to Aharon to light the Menorah in the Mishkan. The third verse relates: "Aharon did so; toward the face of the Menorah he kindled its lamps, as Hashem had commanded Moshe." What is this pasuk teaching? Rashi writes: "Aharon did so-the verse speaks Aharon's praise, i.e., that he changed nothing."

How are we to understand this? asks R' Yaakov Kranz z"l (the Dubno Maggid; died 1805). Is there anyone who would deviate from what G-d had commanded him?

He explains with a parable: Three patients came to one doctor with the same serious illness, and the doctor gave each of them the same prescription. One of the patients was a simple fellow who understood nothing about his illness. He followed the doctor's instructions to the letter and was soon healed.

The second patient thought he knew something about medicine. He altered the doctor's instructions, taking only some of the medicines that had been prescribed. He did not recover from his illness.

The third patient also was knowledgeable about medicine, but he nevertheless followed the doctor's instructions. He also was healed.

The Torah is our prescription against the spiritual illness brought on by the yetzer hara, says the Dubno Maggid. And, the same three types of people can be found among Mitzvah-observing Jews. Some understand nothing and simply do the mitzvot. Others think they understand, and they pick and choose among the mitzvot. Finally, there are the scholars who do have some understanding of what lies behind the commandments, but they nevertheless do not try to "improve" on the mitzvot. This is the Torah's praise of Aharon-whether he thought he understood the commandments or not, he fulfilled them to the letter. (Quoted in Ve'karata La'Shabbat Oneg) © 2011 S. Katz & torah.org