

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

The strangest and most dramatic element of the service on Yom Kippur, set out in Acharei Mot (Lev. 16: 7-22), was the ritual of the two goats, one offered as a sacrifice, the other sent away into the desert “to Azazel.” They were to all intents and purposes indistinguishable from one another: they were chosen to be as similar as possible in size and appearance. They were brought before the High Priest and lots were drawn, one bearing the words “To the Lord,” the other, “To Azazel.” The one on which the lot “To the Lord” fell was offered as a sacrifice. Over the other the High Priest confessed the sins of the nation and it was then taken away into the desert hills outside Jerusalem where it plunged to its death. Tradition tells us that a red thread would be attached to its horns, half of which was removed before the animal was sent away. If the rite had been effective, the red thread would turn to white.

Much is puzzling about the ritual. First, what is the meaning of “to Azazel,” to which the second goat was sent? It appears nowhere else in Scripture. Three major theories emerged as to its meaning. According to the sages and Rashi it meant “a steep, rocky or hard place,” in other words a description of its destination. According to the Torah the goat was sent “to a desolate area” (el erez gezerah, Lev. 16: 22). According to the sages it was taken to a steep ravine where it fell to its death. That, according to the first explanation, is the meaning of Azazel.

The second, suggested cryptically by Ibn Ezra and explicitly by Nahmanides, is that Azazel was the name of a spirit or demon, one of the fallen angels referred to in Genesis 6:2, similar to the goat-spirit called Pan in Greek mythology, Faunus in Latin. This is a difficult idea, which is why Ibn Ezra alluded to it, as he did in similar cases, by way of a riddle, a puzzle, that only the wise would be able to decipher. He writes: “I will reveal to you part of the secret by hint: when you reach thirty-three you will know it.” Nahmanides reveals the secret. Thirty three verses later on, the Torah commands: “They must no longer offer any of their sacrifices to the goat idols [seirim] after whom they go astray” (Lev. 17: 7).

Azazel, on this reading, is the name of a demon or hostile force, sometimes called Satan or Samael.

The Israelites were categorically forbidden to worship such a force. Indeed the belief that there are powers at work in the universe distinct from, or even hostile to, G-d, is incompatible with Judaic monotheism. Nonetheless, some sages did believe that there were negative forces that were part of the heavenly retinue, like Satan, who brought accusations against humans or tempted them into sin. The goat sent into the wilderness to Azazel was a way of conciliating or propitiating such forces so that the prayers of Israel could rise to heaven without, as it were, any dissenting voices. This way of understanding the rite is similar to the saying on the part of the sages that we blow shofar in a double cycle on Rosh Hashanah “to confuse Satan.”<sup>1</sup>

The third interpretation and the simplest is that Azazel is a compound noun meaning “the goat [ez] that was sent away [azal].” This led to the addition of a new word to the English language. In 1530 William Tyndale produced the first English translation of the Hebrew Bible, an act then illegal and for which he paid with his life. Seeking to translate Azazel into English, he called it “the escapegoat,” i.e. the goat that was sent away and released. In the course of time the first letter was dropped, and the word “scapegoat” was born.

The real question though is: what was the ritual actually about? It was unique. Sin and guilt offerings are familiar features of the Torah and a normal part of the service of the Temple. The service of Yom Kippur was different in one salient respect. In every other case the sin was confessed over the animal that was sacrificed. On Yom Kippur, the High Priest confessed the sins of the people over the animal that was not sacrificed, the scapegoat that was sent away, “carrying on it all their iniquities” (Lev. 16: 21-22).

The simplest and most compelling answer was given by Maimonides in The Guide for the Perplexed:

There is no doubt that sins cannot be carried like a burden, and taken off the shoulder of one being to be laid on that of another being. But these ceremonies are of a symbolic character, and serve to impress people with a certain idea, and to induce them to repent – as if to say, we have freed ourselves of our previous deeds, have cast them behind our backs, and removed them from us as far as possible.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Rosh Hashanah 16b.

<sup>2</sup> The Guide for the Perplexed, III: 46.

**TORAS AISH IS A WEEKLY PARSHA  
NEWSLETTER DISTRIBUTED VIA EMAIL  
AND THE WEB AT WWW.AISHDAS.ORG/TA.  
FOR MORE INFO EMAIL YITZW1@GMAIL.COM**

The material presented in this publication was collected from email subscriptions, computer archives and various websites. It is being presented with the permission of the respective authors. Toras Aish is an independent publication, and does not necessarily reflect the views of any synagogue or organization.

**TO DEDICATE THIS NEWSLETTER PLEASE CALL  
(973) 277-9062 OR EMAIL YITZW1@GMAIL.COM**

Expiation demands a ritual, some dramatic representation of the removal of sin and the wiping-clean of the past. That is clear. Yet Maimonides does not explain why Yom Kippur demanded a rite not used on other days of the year when sin or guilt offerings were brought. Why was the first goat, the one of which the lot "To the Lord" fell and which was offered as a sin offering (Lev. 16: 9) not sufficient?

The answer lies in the dual character of the day. The Torah states: This shall be an eternal law for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month you must fast and not do any work ... This is because on this day you shall have all your sins atoned [yechaper], so that you will be cleansed [le-taher]. Before G-d you will be cleansed of all your sins. (Lev. 16: 29-30)

Two quite distinct processes were involved on Yom Kippur. First there was kapparah, atonement. This is the normal function of a sin offering. Second, there was teharah, purification, something normally done in a different context altogether, namely the removal of tumah, ritual defilement, which could arise from a number of different causes, among them contact with a dead body, skin disease, or nocturnal discharge. Atonement has to do with guilt. Purification has to do with contamination or pollution. These are usually<sup>3</sup> two separate worlds. On Yom Kippur they were brought together. Why?

We owe to anthropologists like Ruth Benedict<sup>4</sup> the distinction between shame cultures and guilt cultures. Shame is a social phenomenon. It is what we feel when our wrongdoing is exposed to others. It may even be something we feel when we merely imagine other people knowing or seeing what we have done. Shame is the feeling of being found out, and our first instinct is to hide. That is what Adam and Eve did in the garden of Eden after they had eaten the forbidden fruit. They were ashamed of their nakedness and they hid.

Guilt is a personal phenomenon. It has nothing

<sup>3</sup> There were exceptions. A leper – or more precisely someone suffering from the skin disease known in the torah as tsara'at – had to bring a guilt offering [asham] in addition to undergoing rites of purification (Lev. 14: 12-20).

<sup>4</sup> Ruth Benedict, *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, London, Secker & Warburg, 1947.

to do with what others might say if they knew what we have done, and everything to do with what we say to ourselves. Guilt is the voice of conscience, and it is inescapable. You may be able to avoid shame by hiding or not being found out, but you cannot avoid guilt. Guilt is self-knowledge.

There is another difference, which explains why Judaism is overwhelmingly a guilt rather than a shame culture. Shame attaches to the person. Guilt attaches to the act. It is almost impossible to remove shame once you have been publicly disgraced. It is like an indelible stain on your skin. Shakespeare has Lady Macbeth say, after her crime, "Will these hands ne'er be clean?" In shame cultures, wrongdoers tend either to go into exile, where no one knows their past, or to commit suicide. Playwrights have them die.

Guilt makes a clear distinction between the act of wrongdoing and the person of the wrongdoer. The act was wrong, but the agent remains, in principle, intact. That is why guilt can be removed, "atoned for," by confession, remorse and restitution. "Hate not the sinner but the sin," is the basic axiom of a guilt culture.

Normally sin and guilt offerings, as their names imply, are about guilt. They atone. But Yom Kippur deals not only with our sins as individuals. It also confronts our sins as a community bound by mutual responsibility. It deals, in other words, with the social as well as the personal dimension of wrongdoing. Yom Kippur is about shame as well as guilt. Hence there has to be purification (the removal of the stain) as well as atonement.

The psychology of shame is quite different to that of guilt. We can discharge guilt by achieving forgiveness – and forgiveness can only be granted by the object of our wrongdoing, which is why Yom Kippur only atones for sins against G-d. Even G-d cannot – logically cannot – forgive sins committed against our fellow humans until they themselves have forgiven us.

Shame cannot be removed by forgiveness. The victim of our crime may have forgiven us, but we still feel defiled by the knowledge that our name has been disgraced, our reputation harmed, our standing damaged. We still feel the stigma, the dishonour, the degradation. That is why an immensely powerful and dramatic ceremony had to take place during which people could feel and symbolically see their sins carried away to the desert, to no-man's-land. A similar ceremony took place when a leper was cleansed. The priest took two birds, killed one, and released the other to fly away across the open fields (Lev. 14: 4-7). Again the act was one of cleansing, not atoning, and had to do with shame, not guilt.

Judaism is a religion of hope, and its great rituals of repentance and atonement are part of that hope. We are not condemned to live endlessly with the mistakes and errors of our past. That is the great difference between a guilt culture and a shame culture.

But Judaism also acknowledges the existence of shame. Hence the elaborate ritual of the scapegoat that seemed to carry away the tumah, the defilement that is the mark of shame. It could only be done on Yom Kippur because that was the one day of the year in which everyone shared at least vicariously in the process of confession, repentance, atonement and purification. When a whole society confesses its guilt, individuals can be redeemed from shame. ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

**"Y**ou must surely instruct your colleague, so that you not bear the brunt of his sin" (Leviticus 19:17) Judaism teaches us that "every Israelite is responsible for the other." Except for the State of Israel, where the Jewish population continues to grow, Jews in the rest of the world suffer from internal "hemorrhaging."

How do we "inspire" our Jewish siblings so that they remain within—or return to—our Jewish peoplehood? We have recently celebrated the festival of Passover, and we are "counting" each day towards the festival of Shavuot. The Hebrew term for the counting is *sefirah*, a word pregnant with meaning. Its root noun is the Hebrew *sappir*, which is the dazzling blue—as the Bible records immediately following the Revelation at Sinai: "Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and the seventy elders of Israel then went up. And they saw the G-d of Israel, beneath whose 'feet' was something akin to the creation of a sapphire stone, like the essence of the heavens as to its purity" (Exodus 24: 9-10).

From this perspective, the days of our counting are a period of spiritual growth and development, of a connection between Passover and Shavuot. But when and how does this spiritual journey begin? It begins with Passover, G-d's encounter with His nation Israel at its conception. And the Hebrew *sefirah* (counting/sapphire) is also based on the Hebrew noun *sippur*, a tale, a story, a re-counting – the very essence of the Passover Seder evening experience: "And you shall tell (haggada, telling a story) your child on that day saying..." (Exodus 13:8) The Israelites came into Egypt as a family, the seventy descendants of Jacob. Hence the recounting of the story of our enslavement and eventual redemption is the recounting of family history. A nation is a family writ large: in a family, there are familial memories of origins; in a family there is a sense of commonality and community togetherness; in a family there are special foods and customs, special holidays and celebrations; in a family there are mandated values and ideals, that which is acceptable and that which is unacceptable "in our family"; and in a family there is a heightened sense of a shared fate and shared destiny.

Eda is the biblical word for community (literally "witness"), and every community attempts to recreate a familial collegiality. The relationship within the family is largely horizontal (towards each other) rather than vertical (connected to a transcendent G-d). And familial rites of togetherness are largely governed by family customs rather than by a Divinely ordained legal code.

Most importantly in families – as well as communities – every individual counts (once again, *sefirah*).

Passover is our family-centered, communal festival, at the beginning of our calendar, at the very outset of our history, at the early steps towards our *sefirah* march. On that first Passover we had not yet received our Torah from G-d, and we had not yet entered our Promised Land.

The Passover Sacrifice (Ex. 12) emphasizes our willingness to sacrifice for our freedom from slavery—our sacrifice of the lamb which was a defiant act of rebellion against the idolatrous Egyptian slave-society—and it attests to our uncompromising belief in human freedom and redemption even before we became a faith ordained at Mount Sinai. In order for every person/community to really count, large communities must be subdivided into smaller—and more manageable—familial and extra-familial units, "a lamb for each household" or several households together.

Special foods, special stories and special songs define and punctuate the close-knit nature of the event.

The ticket of admission is that you consider yourself a member of the family and wish to be counted as such; this entitles you to an unconditional embrace of love and acceptance, to inclusion in the family of Israel.

The *rasha* (wicked child) of the Haggadah is the one who seems to exclude himself from the family – and even s/he is to be invited and included! How do we engage our unaffiliated Jews so that they do not defect and fall away from us? We must embrace them as part of our family, love them because we are part of them and they are part of us, regale them with the stories, songs and special foods which are expressed in our biblical and national literature that emerged from our challenging fate and our unique destiny, share with them our vision and dreams of human freedom and peace, and accept them wholeheartedly no matter what.

A personal family postscript: My paternal grandfather was an idealistic and intellectual communist. He ate on Yom Kippur and truly believed that religion "was the opiate of the masses." Nevertheless, he conducted a Passover Seder each year—which I attended as a young child—with matza, maror, haroset, and the first part of the Haggada. He would add passages from the Prophets, the Talmud

and Shalom Aleichem which dealt with consideration for the poor and underprivileged, and checked that I could space my fingers properly for the Priestly Benediction, cautioning me to understand that the blessing was for world peace.

Despite my tender years, I noticed that there were still bread and rolls in the house which, if a grandchild wished, he received. I couldn't understand the contradiction.

And then I was riding on a train with my grandfather, and there were two elderly ultra-Orthodox Jews sitting opposite us, speaking Yiddish. Two young toughs walked into our compartment and began taunting the hassidim.

At the next stop my grandfather – who was fairly tall and strong – lunged forward, grabbed the toughs, and literally threw them out the open door. When he returned to his seat, I asked, "But grandpa, you're not at all religious!" He looked at me in dismay. "What difference does that make? They are part of our family—and I am part of their family!" Then I understood...©2015 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

In this week's portion, the Torah tells us that Aharon (Aaron) the High Priest, cast lots upon two goats, "one lot for the Lord, and the other lot for Azazel." (Leviticus 16:8)

Rashi explains the procedure as follows: "One goat he (Aharon) placed on his right hand, the other on his left. He then put both hands in the urn, took one lot in each hand and placed it upon the corresponding goat. One of the lots was inscribed 'for the Lord' and the other 'for Azazel.'" Ibn Ezra explains that Azazel was a height from which the goat was hurled.

Sforno argues that the goat inscribed "for the Lord" was sacrificed as an offering to atone for sins committed in connection with the Sanctuary. The goat sent away was meant to expiate the sins of the community. (Sforno, Leviticus 16:5)

Other explanations come to mind. It can be suggested that the lots teach us that there are aspects of life that are based purely on mazal. This doesn't mean that we do not have the power to precipitate change. What it does teach however, is that in life we all face a certain fate over which we have no control. The Talmud says it this way "life, children and sustenance are not dependant upon merit but on mazal." (Moed Katan 28a) No wonder we read about the lots on Yom Kippur, the day in which we recognize that there are elements of life that are only in the hands of G-d.

The Talmud also notes that the goats were similar in appearance, height, size and value (Yoma 62 a, b). Yet, a slight shift of Aharon's hand brought about

different destinies for the goats—one to the Lord, the other to Azazel.

It has been noted that life is a game of inches. This is even true in the world of sports. For example, a hard ground ball to the short stop could result in a double play. Had the ball gone an inch to the left or right, the winning run could have been driven in. So, too, in worldly affairs. It is often the case that an infinitesimal amount can be the difference between life and death, between belief and heresy, between doing the right and wrong thing.

This may be the deepest message of the lots. The slightest movement could make the difference between heaven and earth, between being sent to the Lord and being cast to Azazel.©2012 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

Although the entire gamut of Torah commandments is discussed in this week's Torah reading, it is obvious that the major emphasis is on the subject of sexual morality. It is almost impossible to discuss this subject in the current climate of politically correct Western liberalism. Even a discussion of this situation brings upon one the approbation of being bigoted and intolerant.

Yet in the long run of human history, the current acceptance of unrestricted sexual freedom has had many precedents. The power of the sexual drive in human beings is not a recent phenomenon. Psychiatrists and psychologists all recognize it as being one of the primary physical drives of all human behavior.

The Torah certainly recognized the primacy of this physical drive in our lives. In fact, the Torah devoted much detail and instruction in this matter in order to achieve a balanced and positive channeling of this drive, as it is the one that preserves human continuity and generational existence. The Talmud points out to us that without the existence of this drive, in nature generally, no hen would lay an egg and life as we know it would disappear.

Judaism never denied or even denigrated the necessary existence of the sexual drive in nature. It never preached celibacy; on the contrary it always promoted the concept of marriage and physical union between spouses. What it did oppose, and still opposes is the wanton "everything goes" attitude toward sexual behavior. Eventually all of society pays a heavy price for unrestricted sexual behavior.

The Torah speaks to us in terms of being kedoshim. This word is usually translated and used as a term for holiness. This is undoubtedly correct. But like

most Hebrew words, the word also conveys a different and perhaps more subtle meaning. It also means "dedicated." In fact, one can say that the primary thrust of Judaism is that one should live a life dedicated to service of G-d and man, with vision and appreciation of the true meaning of life and its gifts.

Being dedicated in terms of Jewish life means valuing the concept of family, the necessity of the continuity of generations and the primacy of proper behavior regarding others particularly and in society generally. It is the dedication to these goals that translates itself into the idea of holiness. The lack of any code of sexual morality makes any such dedication impossible.

Unfortunately we live in an age where holiness is at best a curiosity and certainly not the goal of most people. But the Torah in its eternal vision demands from us holiness in all ages and societies. The ancient classical world of Persia, Egypt, Greece and Rome, mighty as these empires were, nevertheless disappeared because of their inability to maintain a society based on paganism and sexual freedom.

No high sounding slogans about tolerance and acceptance of everything will eventually save Western society from such a fate as well. The Torah cautioned us regarding this inevitable rule of human society and we are bidden to maintain the traditional standards of Jewish behavior in this matter... no matter what. ©2015 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### **RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY**

### **Honorable Mentshen**

**T**his week the Torah tells us about loving every Jew. It adds a special verse exhorting us to be especially sensitive to a special type of Jew the convert. "When a proselyte dwells among you in your land, do not taunt him. The proselyte who dwells with you shall be like a native among you, and you shall love him like yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt -- I am Hashem, your G-d" (Leviticus 19:33-34)

A person who converts has the status of a Jew. He is a full-fledged member of the community and every social, moral and ethical tenet applies to him. Though he may be exempt from particular laws concerning "kahal" (which would have implications in marital law), he is otherwise as equal as any Jew. And that's why this verse troubles me. After all, if the convert is a Jew, why do we need a special command telling us not to inflict any discomfort upon him? Hadn't the Torah told us in verse 18, "Love your neighbor as yourself?" Why implore born-Jews to be nice to the newcomers through a series of commands that seem to use a moral approach: "You were once a stranger, so you

know how it feels?" A convert is a Jew. And a Jew is a Jew is a Jew! All rules apply!

When my grandfather Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, of blessed memory, was dean of Mesivta Torah Voda'ath back in the 1950s, he developed a professional relationship with a psychotherapist who worked with some of the students. The doctor would often call Rabbi Kamenetzky to discuss his treatment of some of the students under his care. They also would have discussions on psychology and education. The doctor was a student of the famed psychotherapist, Dr. Sigmund Freud, and despite Freud's attitude toward religion, this particular doctor was always respectful and never attributed any of the students' problems to observance or religious commitment.

Years later, when Rav Yaakov was informed that the doctor had passed away, he felt it incumbent to attend his funeral. He assumed it would not be the type of service he was used to, and even understood that he, a frocked and bearded sage, would appear out of place among a medical community of his distinguished colleagues, assimilated German and Austrian psychotherapists and mental health professionals. However, Rav Yaakov's gratitude overruled his hesitation.

When entering the Riverside Chapel, Rav Yaakov was shocked to see that a distinguished Rav, a friend of his, was performing the funeral and that scores of Torah observant Jews were participating. After the service which was done in total compliance with halacha, Rav Yaakov approached his friend who had officiated.

How do you know the doctor? What connection do you have with him? "What do you mean," answered the Rav. "Of course I knew him. The doctor davened in my shul three times a day!"

My grandfather had never discussed religion with the man, he just respected him for his professionalism and abilities.

The Torah tells us that even though there is a universal command to love every Jew as yourself, an additional concept applies specifically to a convert. We must be kind to him as part of the overall moral obligation of a nation that also endured the trauma of being strangers. In addition to loving Jews as their inherent birthright, it is also imperative to display love to them when our moral obligation demands it. The Torah is teaching us not only to act with affection as born Jews but as honorable *mentshen*. ©2015 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

#### **RABBI DOVID SIEGEL**

### **Haftorah**

**T**his week's haftorah presents the Jewish nation in a most unique context. In his last words of prophecy the prophet Amos describes the Jewish people in a very peculiar manner. He says in the name of

Hashem, "Aren't you likened to the Kushites, to be Mine?" (9:7) Who are Kushites and in what way are the Jewish people compared to them? Chazal in the Yalkut Shimoni(157) interpret the term Kushites to refer to the Ethiopian community whose skin color is distinctly different than all other nations. This physical distinction renders it virtually impossible for the Kushites to intermingle with anyone without maintaining their national identity. Chazal continue that in this same manner the Jewish people are distinctly different than all other nations. The moral and ethical code of the observant Jewish people inhibits them from intermingling with the nations of the world. The drastic skin color contrast of the Ethiopians serves as a striking analogy to the drastic ethical contrast between the Jewish people and all other nations.

The prophet continues and reminds the Jewish people that it is this distinct ethical conduct which renders them Hashem's chosen people. After likening the Jewish people to the Kushites, the prophet completes his analogy with the profound words, "to be Mine". The Metzudos Dovid (9:7) explains this to mean that we are Hashem's people exclusively because of our distinguished ethical conduct. He adds that we will remain Hashem's special nation as long as we possess elevated ethical standards. The prophet then draws our attention to our earliest origins and says, "Didn't Hashem bring you up from the land of Egypt?" (ad loc.) Malbim explains that these words allude to the distinguished qualities of the Jewish people in whose merit they were liberated from Egypt. Although they existed for two hundred years in the corrupt and immoral Egyptian environment they remained a distinct and distinguished entity. Their moral code of dress and speech reflected their pure attitudes about life which made intermingling with the Egyptians a virtual impossibility. For the most part, their Jewish values were not corrupted or distorted which allowed the Jews to remain distinguished and elevated.

The prophet concludes our haftorah with this theme and promises our ultimate redemption from our extended exile. Amos says, "On that day I will establish the kingdom of Dovid.... so that you, upon whom My name rests, will inherit Edom and all nations." (9:11,12) Our identity with Hashem as a nation upon whom His name rests, will play a significant role in our final redemption. The Jewish people will inherit their archenemy Edom solely because of their identity with Hashem. Our elevated standards of morality will truly earn us the title of His people and in this merit we will be finally liberated from the world's corrupt influence and environment.

This special lesson reflects the essence of this week's parsha, Kedoshim, which embodies Hashem's lofty call to us for spiritual elevation. The Torah begins and says, "Be holy for I, Hashem, am Holy." (Vayikra 19:2) Nachmanides (ad loc.) shares with us his classic

insight into this mitzva. "Be holy", says the Ramban, "refers to the introduction of sanctity and spirituality into every dimension of our lives." Even our physical and mundane activities should be directed towards Hashem. We are forbidden to excessively indulge in worldly pleasures and are expected to limit our passions and pleasures to productive and accomplishing acts. Morality and spirituality should encompass our entire being and our every action should ultimately become the service of Hashem. This philosophy is diametrically opposed to that of the nations of the world. To them physical pleasure and enjoyment have no restrictions or limitations and religion does not govern their passions or cravings. As said, our standards of morality are truly unique and it is this factor that elevates us and distinguishes us from amongst the nations of the world.

The parsha concludes with this message and says, "And you shall be holy unto Me for I am holy and I have separated you from the nations to be Mine." As stated, we are Hashem's people because of our holiness -- elevated moral and ethical standards -- which truly separate us from the nations of the world. And in this merit we will soon experience our final redemption and be a nation unto Him, privileged to remain in His presence for eternity. ©2015 Rabbi D. Siegel and torah.org

#### **RABBI DOV KRAMER**

### **Taking a Closer Look**

**"T**raditional scribal cues are a protection for the Torah; tithing is a protection for wealth; vows are a protection for separation [from physical matters]; protection for wisdom is keeping silent" (Avos 3:13/17). Aside from trying to understand what each of these four things mean, it is a bit curious that the fourth is taught slightly differently, with the subject being protected (wisdom) being mentioned before what provides the protection. Let's discuss how each of these four things are understood, including what issues may arise from them, and then try to figure out why the last one was taught differently.

"Traditional scribal cues" are commonly understood to be the way we read the words (since there are no vowels in a Torah scroll), especially when a word seems to be written somewhat differently than tradition teaches us to pronounce it. Bartenura says it refers to the laws we learn from extra or missing letters; since fulfilling the Torah's mitzvos incorrectly undermines its intent, and we need the traditions that were handed down in order to properly keep it, the traditional explanations of the mitzvos (and how they are learned from the words of the Torah) are a necessary protection for the Torah. Rabbeinu Yonah understands it to mean that our careful tradition as to how to read the words of the Torah have protected it from developing any major difference in the text, as

opposed to the Talmud, which has a different reading in multiple places. Rabbeinu Bachye combines these two approaches; since we have a rock-solid tradition regarding precisely how each word is written and read, each extra (or missing) letter/word can be used as the basis for many of the Torah's laws. Other approaches say the oral law, or our oral traditions, or the idea of basing everything on the traditions of previous generations, protect the integrity of the Torah (see Midrash Sh'muel).

It is fairly well known that we are told to "tithing in order to become wealthy" (Ta'anis 9a), an expression based on the words "tithing" and "wealth" having the same letters (ayin-sin/shin-reish). Bartenura, Rashi and Rabbeinu Yonah are among the commentators who use this concept to explain our Mishna. Although this may not seem to fit with the statement that "tithing is a protection for wealth," as we are being told to tithing in order to become rich rather than in order to stay rich, Rashi (and others) understand the word usually translated as "a fence" or "protection" to also mean "strengthen." According to this, the expression should be translated as "tithing strengthens wealth" rather than "is a protection" for it. Nevertheless, if tithing increases wealth, it certainly protects it (as it not only helps keep the wealth one has intact, but adds onto what one already has); Midrash Tanchuma (R'ay 18) actually continues the statement echoed in the Talmud by adding "tithing in order that you do not have a decrease," making tithing a "protection" in the usual sense.

Meiri changes the connotation of the expression from tithing protecting wealth to protecting the wealthy person; by giving of one's accumulated wealth to those in need, sharing it with others, it is far less likely for accumulating wealth take over one's whole persona. If we are to be consistent, the other three protections listed would also be for the person rather than the item; when Meiri explains "tradition protecting the Torah" as the notes kept to make sure the meaning of the text stays intact, it would then refer to the person who already understands the text not forgetting what it means because he has notes to remind him. [See Tiferes Yisroel, who also explains each of the four to be referring to the person, thereby allowing him to be protected without having to expand the meaning to "strengthen."]

Vows "protecting" separation from something is rather straightforward; the consequences of breaking the vow provides additional motivation to stay away from the item or activity one wants to avoid.

How silence protects (or strengthens) wisdom depends on (a) what would have otherwise been said, and (b) how "wisdom" is understood. Bartenura first discounts the possibility that we should be silent rather than speaking about Torah, bringing a scriptural proof that we have to speak about Torah. He then discounts the possibility that it refers to forbidden speech, as that

is already prohibited. The only thing left is speech that is permitted, but doesn't qualify as Torah. He does not explain how refraining from such speech "protects" wisdom (or what kind of wisdom it protects), but brings a proof that it does because Sh'lomo HaMelech tells us that a fool who is silent is thought to be wise (Mishlay 17:28); it is the fact that wise people remain silent that foolish people can fool us into thinking they are wise by being similarly silent. It is also possible that he means that being quiet is in and of itself a manifestation of wisdom (see Vilna Ga'on on Mishlay 10:17), and therefore "strengthens" the wisdom one already possesses. [It should be noted that Rambam, Hilchos Dayos 2:4, says that silence is beneficial for words of Torah too, and not just regarding permissible speech, although he defines "silence" as speaking fewer words, and speaking less often, as opposed to Bartenura, who seems to define it as complete silence, which can't apply to words of Torah.]

Rambam (ibid, 2:5) explains the words "protection for wisdom is silence" as waiting before responding and not speaking often. [That he means not speaking often rather than not using many words is evident from having already told us (in the previous law) to use as few words as possible.] Rabbeinu Yonah says that by waiting before responding we can hear what the other person (especially a teacher) is trying to say more fully before (possibly) formulating a different approach. It also gives us more time to formulate a more complete response (see Rivash). Aside from "silence" not meaning complete silence (but initial silence in order to think things through first), this approach also seems to work better if silence "strengthens" wisdom rather than protecting it. Nevertheless, since subjectivity might impact how we respond, by waiting before responding we can "protect" the wisdom we have by not letting an emotional response undermine it.

Even the wisest of people have ideas on some subjects that are not (yet) fully developed (most likely because they didn't have the need to develop them), and sharing their thoughts on such matters prematurely would expose their lack of wisdom in these areas. Therefore, silence is recommended in all areas, since one cannot know for sure which areas they are really experts in and which areas sharing their thoughts about risks exposing their lack of expertise. There are times when expertise (or having a stronger knowledge base) must be shared, as paralysis can lead to a worse situation than going with the best available opinion. And if people don't share what they know with others, everyone's knowledge will remain in a vacuum rather than helping each other's knowledge base and grasp of concepts continually improve. Nevertheless, if such action is not necessary, and it's not a matter of "group think," speaking as an authority on a matter risks being exposed not only of not being one, but of

inappropriately presenting oneself as one.

Getting back to why the order was changed for the last item, Midrash Sh'muel suggests that for the others, those aren't the only things that provide "protection," so it's phrased as being a protection as opposed to being "the" protection. For wisdom, on the other hand, silence is the only thing that provides real protection, so we are told that "the protection for wisdom is silence." However, it would be difficult to say that reviewing what one has learned isn't also a protection, or that delving deeper into a concept does not protect the wisdom gained during the initial stages of study. Others suggest that the change is merely one of style; since this is the last item in the series, it was taught slightly differently. I would like to suggest that there is something more substantive behind the change.

For the first three things, something must be done for it to have any effect. Notes had to be made regarding how to read the words of the Torah, or a tradition transmitted, for it to provide protection. Similarly, the tithing had to be done for it to affect wealth, and vows had to have been made in order to provide the increased motivation to attain, or maintain, separation. Silence, on the other hand, is not an action done, but a refraining from doing something. Therefore, when teaching us about the benefit of silence for wisdom, a lack of action is signified by not mentioning until afterwards. This works even better according to Rambam and Rabbeinu Yonah's approach, as just as we should wait before speaking, the Mishna waited before telling us what protects wisdom. © 2015 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### **RABBI YISROEL CINER**

### **Parsha Insights**

**T**his week we read the double parsha of Acharei Mos-Kedoshim. Kedoshim begins: "And Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Speak to the entire congregation of Bnei Yisroel {the Children of Israel} and say to them: You shall be holy, because I, Hashem your G-d, am holy." [19:1-2] This concept is reiterated again later in the parsha: "Sanctify yourselves and you shall be holy because I am Hashem your G-d." [20:7]

The Medrash [Rabbah 24:8] compares this to a king's subjects who presented three crowns to their king. The king placed one crown on his head and placed the other two onto the heads of his sons. So too, in the heavenly kingdom, the angels cry out "Holy, Holy, Holy," [Yishayahu 6:3] and thus crown Hashem with three crowns. Hashem places one on His head and the other two are placed onto the heads of Bnei Yisroel as it says: "You shall be holy," [19:2] and "you shall be holy." [20:7]

The Targum Yonasan explains the nature of these three 'Holies' that Hashem is crowned with. (This is included in the Uva L'Zion portion of the morning

prayers.) Hashem is holy in the heights of the heavens above, He is holy on the earth where He displays his power and He is holy for all eternity.

The Ohr Gedalyahu elucidates each of these 'Holies' further and shows which two the King, Hashem, gave to His children, Bnei Yisroel. "Hashem is holy in the heights of the heavens above." He is totally above and beyond our comprehension. Our only inkling of Hashem is through His Middos--the way that He interacts with this world. But knowledge of Hashem Himself, what is called Atzmuso Yisborach, of that we have absolutely no idea.

"He is holy on the earth where He displays his power." Hashem's power here on earth is abundantly clear. The miracles of life that are all around us, the majestic beauty of nature and the individual providence that guides each individual all testify to the awesome power of Hashem. Yet, with all of these myriad differences that course their way in and around each person, Hashem Himself remains separate, removed and unchanged.

"He is holy for all eternity." He was, is and will be. Totally beyond that parameter of time that has such a strong hold on us that we can't even imagine existence beyond it. Two of these crowns were given to Hashem's children, enabling us to share His holiness.

We too have the capacity to be holy here on earth. While involving ourselves in this world we must retain our focus that our primary accomplishments take place in a world that is totally separate and removed from our daily grind and grime. We must act in an honest and uplifted manner, thereby bringing holiness and Kiddush Hashem {Sanctification of Hashem's name} wherever we go. By living in such a manner we can access that third crown and also attain eternity. When the Torah's eternal light illuminates the person who lives according to its teachings, that person becomes a part of that eternity.

We here in Israel and Jews all over the world are living through an amazing time. The anti-Semitism in the world has reached levels that I believe haven't been seen since the pre-Holocaust days. At the same time, this situation has caused an unprecedented level of achdus {unity} in Yisroel. I imagine that the heavenly goal in all that we're experiencing is this achdus. The Temple was destroyed because of sinas chinam {baseless animosity} and it will be achdus that will ultimately bring about the redemption.

This places an incredible responsibility upon us to be holy here on earth. On one level, in order to not give grounds for any accusations against us. On another level, to help promote this achdus amongst us. And most importantly, in order to rouse Hashem's powerful protection and deliverance. This will enable the world to reach its ultimate state of full redemption, becoming one with that third crown, the crown of eternity. © 2015 Rabbi Y. Ciner & torah.org