

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Some years ago I was visited by the then American ambassador to the Court of St James, Philip Lader. He told me of a fascinating project he and his wife had initiated in 1981. They had come to realise that many of their contemporaries would find themselves in positions of influence and power in the not-too-distant future. He thought it would be useful and creative if they were to come together for a study retreat every so often to share ideas, listen to experts and form friendships, thinking through collectively the challenges they would face in the coming years. So they created what they called Renaissance Weekends. They still happen.

The most interesting thing he told me was that they discovered that the participants, all exceptionally gifted people, found one thing particularly difficult, namely, admitting that they made mistakes. The Laders understood that this was something important they had to learn. Leaders, above all, should be capable of acknowledging when and how they had erred, and how to put it right. They came up with a brilliant idea. They set aside a session at each Weekend for a talk given by a recognised star in some field, on the subject of "My biggest blooper." Being English, not American, I had to ask for a translation. I discovered that a blooper is an embarrassing mistake. A gaffe. A faux pas. A bungle. A boo-boo. A fashla. A balagan. Something you shouldn't have done and are ashamed to admit you did.

This, in essence, is what Yom Kippur is in Judaism. In Tabernacle and Temple times, it was the day when the holiest man in Israel, the High Priest, made atonement, first for his own sins, then for the sins of his "house," then for the sins of all Israel. From the day the Temple was destroyed, we have had no High Priest nor the rites he performed, but we still have the day, and the ability to confess and pray for forgiveness. It is so much easier to admit your sins, failings and mistakes when other people are doing likewise. If a

High Priest, or the other members of our congregation, can admit to sins, so can we.

I have argued elsewhere (in the Introduction to the Koren Yom Kippur Machzor) that the move from the first Yom Kippur to the second was one of the great transitions in Jewish spirituality. The first Yom Kippur was the culmination of Moses' efforts to secure forgiveness for the people after the sin of the Golden Calf (Ex. 32-34). The process, which began on 17th Tammuz, ended on the 10th of Tishri -- the day that later became Yom Kippur. That was the day when Moses descended the mountain with the second set of tablets, the visible sign that G-d had reaffirmed his covenant with the people. The second Yom Kippur, one year later, initiated the series of rites set out in this week's parsha (Lev. 16), conducted in the Mishkan by Aaron in his role as High priest.

The differences between the two were immense. Moses acted as a prophet. Aaron functioned as a priest. Moses was following his heart and mind, improvising in response to G-d's response to his words. Aaron was following a precisely choreographed ritual, every detail of which was set out in advance. Moses' encounter was ad hoc, a unique, unrepeatable drama between heaven and earth. Aaron's was the opposite. The rules he was following never changed throughout the generations, so long as the Temple stood.

Moses' prayers on behalf of the people were full of audacity, what the sages called chutzpah kelapei shemaya, "audacity toward heaven," reaching a climax in the astonishing words, "Now, please forgive their sin -- but if not, then blot me out of the book You have written." (Ex. 32: 32). Aaron's behavior by contrast was marked by obedience, humility, and confession. There were purification rituals, sin offerings and atonements, for his own sins and those of his "house" as well as those of the people.

The move from Yom Kippur 1 to Yom Kippur 2 was a classic instance of what Max Weber called the "routinization of charisma," that is, taking a unique moment and translating it into ritual, turning a "peak experience" into a regular part of life. Few moments in the Torah rival in intensity the dialogue between Moses and G-d after the Golden Calf. But the question thereafter was: how could we achieve forgiveness -- we who no longer have a Moses, or prophets, or direct access to G-d? Great moments change history. But what changes us is the unspectacular habit of doing



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certain acts again and again until they reconfigure the brain and change our habits of the heart. We are shaped by the rituals we repeatedly perform.

Besides which, Moses' intercession with G-d did not, in and of itself, induce a penitential mood among the people. Yes, he performed a series of dramatic acts to demonstrate to the people their guilt. But we have no evidence that they internalized it. Aaron's acts were different. They involved confession, atonement and a search for spiritual purification. They involved a candid acknowledgment of the sins and failures of the people, and they began with the High Priest himself.

The effect of Yom Kippur -- extended into the prayers of much of the rest of the year by way of tachanun (supplicatory prayers), vidui (confession), and selichot (prayers for forgiveness) -- was to create a culture in which people are not ashamed or embarrassed to say, "I got it wrong, I sinned, I made mistakes." That is what we do in the litany of wrongs we enumerate on Yom Kippur in two alphabetical lists, one beginning Ashamnu, bagadnu, the other beginning Al cheit shechatanu.

As Philip Lader discovered, the capacity to admit mistakes is anything but widespread. We rationalize. We justify. We deny. We blame others. There have been several powerful books on the subject in recent years, among them Matthew Syed, *Black Box Thinking: The Surprising Truth About Success (and Why Some People Never Learn from Their Mistakes)*; Kathryn Schulz, *Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margins of Error*, and Carol Tavis and Elliot Aronson, *Mistakes Were Made, But Not By Me*.

Politicians find it hard to admit mistakes. So do doctors: preventable medical error causes more than 400,000 deaths every year in the United States. So do bankers and economists. The financial crash of 2008 was predicted by Warren Buffett as early as 2002. It happened despite the warnings of several experts that the level of mortgage lending and the leveraging of debt was unsustainable. Tavis and Aronson tell a similar story about the police. Once they have identified a suspect, they are reluctant to admit evidence of his or her innocence. And so it goes.

The avoidance strategies are almost endless.

People say, It wasn't a mistake. Or, given the circumstances, it was the best that could have been done. Or it was a small mistake. Or it was unavoidable given what we knew at the time. Or someone else was to blame. We were given the wrong facts. We were faultily advised. So people bluff it out, or engage in denial, or see themselves as victims.

We have an almost infinite capacity for interpreting the facts to vindicate ourselves. As the sages said in the context of the laws of purity, "No one can see his own blemishes, his own impurities." (Bekhorot 38b) We are our own best advocates in the court of self-esteem. Rare is the individual with the courage to say, as the High Priest did, or as King David did after the prophet Nathan confronted him with his guilt in relation to Uriah and Batsheva, chatati, "I have sinned." (2 Samuel 12: 13)

Judaism helps us admit our mistakes in three ways. First is the knowledge that G-d forgives. He does not ask us never to sin. He knew in advance that His gift of freedom would sometimes be misused. All he asks of us is that we acknowledge our mistakes, learn from them, confess and resolve not to do them again.

Second is Judaism's clear separation between the sinner and the sin. We can condemn an act without losing faith in the agent.

Third is the aura Yom Kippur spreads over the rest of the year. It helps create a culture of honesty in which we are not ashamed to acknowledge the wrongs we have done. And despite the fact that, technically, Yom Kippur is focused on sins between us and G-d, a simple reading of the confessions in Ashamnu and Al Chet shows us that, actually, most of the sins we confess are about our dealings with other people.

What Philip Lader discovered about his high-flying contemporaries, Judaism internalized long ago. Seeing the best admit that they too make mistakes is deeply empowering for the rest of us. The first Jew to admit he made a mistake was Judah, who had wrongly accused Tamar of sexual misconduct, and then, realizing he had been wrong, said, "She is more righteous than I" (Gen. 38: 26).

It is surely more than mere coincidence that the name Judah comes from the same root as Vidui, "confession." In other words, the very fact that we are called Jews -- Yehudim -- means that we are the people who have the courage to admit our wrongs.

Honest self-criticism is one of the unmistakable marks of spiritual greatness. ©2016 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**F**or on this day He will forgive you to purify you from all your sins; before the Lord shall you be purified" (Leviticus 16:30). The major source for the awesome white fast known as Yom Kippur or

the Day of Forgiveness is to be found in this week's Torah portion of Acharei Mot.

It is fascinating to note that while Yom Kippur is the most ascetic day of the Hebrew calendar, a twenty-five – hour period wherein eating, drinking, bathing, sexual relations, bodily anointment and leather shoes are all forbidden, it is never the less considered a joyous festival, even more joyous than the Sabbath because it precludes mourning. The great Hassidic sage Rav Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev would often say, "Even had the Torah not commanded me to fast, I would be too mournfully sad to eat on Tisha B'Av and I would be too excitedly joyous to eat on Yom Kippur.

From whence the excitement and from whence the joy? It seems to me that Yom Kippur is our annual opportunity for a second chance, our possibility of becoming sinless and purified before G-d. On the Festival of Matzot we celebrate our birth as a nation; seven months later on the Festival of Yom Kippur we celebrate our rebirth as human beings. On Pesach we renew our homes and our dishes, routing out the leavening which symbolizes the excess materialism and physical appurtenances with which we generally surround ourselves; on the Day of Forgiveness we renew our deeds and our innermost personalities by means of repentance.

Despite the hard work entailed in pre Pesach cleaning and in due deference to the hardy Jewish men and women who spend so much quality time tracking down every trace of leavening and thoroughly destroying them, such a physical cleaning job is still much easier than a spiritual purification. Such a repentance is at least a two step process, the first of which is Kapparah (usually translated as forgiveness and literally meaning a covering over) and the second Taharah (usually translated as purification and literally meaning a cleansing). These two divine gifts of the day correspond to the two stages or results of transgression. The first is a stain or an imperfection in the world as a result of an act of theft or the expression of hateful words. The second is a stain on the individual soul as a result of his/her commitment of transgression. My revered teacher and mentor Rav Joseph Ber Soloveitchik zt"l believed that Kapparah – paying back the theft, asking for forgiveness by saying I am sorry, or bringing a sacrifice to the holy Temple – removes the first stage. Taharah – the repentance of the soul, the decision of the individual to change his personality and to be different to what it was before – removes the second. Kapparah is an act of restitution utilizing objects or words; Taharah is an act of reconstitution of self which requires a complete psychological and spiritual recast.

Clearly Kapparah – restitution – paying the debt, bringing the offering, beating one's breast in confession – is much easier to achieve than a reconstitution of personality. How does one pass the

second phase, acquire requisite spiritual energy and immense spiritual inspiration transform his/her inner being to be able to say – in the words of the Rambam "I am a different person; I am not the same one who committed those improper actions" (Laws of Repentance 2,4).

I believe the answer is to be found in the manner in which we celebrate Yom Kippur. It is a day when we separate ourselves from our animalistic physical drives in order to free our spiritual selves to commune with G-d; the purpose of this separation is not to make us suffer but rather to enable us to enjoy the eternal life of the spirit in the presence of G-d.

Undoubtedly such a day spent almost exclusively in the company of G-d can be a transforming experience. Let me give you an example by recounting a personal story which bears testimony as to how even a brief personal encounter with a great spiritual individual can be life transforming. In 1973 I was lecturing at the Caribbean Hotel in Miami Beach Florida on the life of Rav Yisrael Meir Kahan, known as the 'Hafetz 'Haim. I was telling my audience how, although very few individuals are capable of chastising others, this great Sage was the rare exception. I heard it said that a teenage student in the Yeshiva of Radin had been caught smoking on the Sabbath and was about to leave the Yeshiva. The 'Hafetz 'Haim met with him for a few minutes and the student not only became observant once again but went on to become ordained by the Hafetz Haim himself.

When I concluded an elderly gentleman in the audience came up to me visibly moved and literally shaking. "Where did you hear the story? He asked. I didn't know anyone knew about it, it happened to me!" We both went outside and after walking in silence for about ten minutes, I couldn't help but ask what it was that the 'Hafetz 'Haim said to him. "I was about to leave the Yeshiva. All of my bags were packed. And I even wanted to leave the Yeshiva and then this great Sage, shorter than I was, greatly respected by the entire world and always greeting even the youngest child, appeared out of nowhere and invited me to his home. Gently guided me holding my hand; both entered a two roomed hovel, the living room having not one piece of furniture that was whole. My hand was still in his, looked into my eyes and said but one word: 'Shabbos!' He then began to weep and if I live until 120 I will never stop feeling this scolding heat of these tears as they rested on my hand. He embraced me once again, repeated the word 'Shabbos' and took me to the door. At that moment I felt deeply in my soul that there was nothing more important than the Sabbath and this great Jew loved me and that I wished to be ordained by him...."

It is this kind of inspiration that Yom Kippur hopes to effectuate as we stand in G-d's presence for a full day, "Before the Lord shall you be purified" And this

is the message of Rabbi Akiva at the end of the Tractate Yoma.. “Fortunate are you Israel! Before Whom are you purified and who purifies you – our Father in Heaven ...” . The Lord is the Mikveh of Israel just as a mikveh purifies those who are impure so does the Holy One Blessed purify Israel. ©2016 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah has already described the tragedy of the family of Aaron, when his sons Nadav and Avihu died while performing incense burning on the day of the final dedication of the Mishkan/Tabernacle. So, why does the Torah return to the subject and mention it again in this week’s Torah reading? The commentators over the ages, from the time of the Talmud onwards, have derived many explanations, laws and moral ideas from the repetition of this incident here in this parsha.

Since the Torah is limitless, eternal and speaks to all generations, I take the liberty of suggesting another idea to help us understand the depths of the Torah’s sensitivity to the human psyche and condition.

In a subtle but important way the Torah emphasizes that from now on everything that Aaron and his sons will do in the service of G-d and Israel, inside the holy Mishkan/Tabernacle or outside of it, will always be influenced by the tragedy they witnessed and experienced on the day their sons and brothers died. Moshe’s comment that Nadav and Avihu were holy and sanctified people, close to G-d, so to speak, only amplifies the tragedy and makes it more difficult to comprehend and rationalize.

For the rest of their lives, Aaron, his surviving family and the entire Jewish nation will be haunted by this tragic event. It will hover over every occurrence that will befall them, personally or nationally, for all time. Everything will now be encapsulated in the time frame of “after the death of the two sons of Aaron.” And this idea is implicit in the message of the Torah to us this week.

In a very few days from now, Holocaust Remembrance Day will be upon us. The inexplicable iniquity of this tragedy haunts the Jewish people today, even seven decades after the fact. It seems that every accomplishment and shortcoming in Jewish life generally, and regarding the State of Israel particularly, is Holocaust driven. Everything is seen as being holy vengeance or justified retribution, as “remember and do not forget,” or “never again!”

There is no event that takes place in Jewish life today that does not have Holocaust overtones. We are always “achrei mot” - after the tragedy that brooks no explanation and constantly challenges our faith on one hand and our rationality on the other. It is as though the formal commemorations of Holocaust Remembrance Day are not that special and unique, hard as we try to

make them so, because every day and every occurrence now is still just another form of that memorial.

Naturally, the formal commemorations of Holocaust Remembrance Day invoke again the emotional connection to this enormous national tragedy. That is why such a national day of mourning is justified and necessary. And this only enhances our realization that we are all living in the time of “achrei mot.” And this explains a great deal of the mood and behavior of the Jewish people on our time. ©2016 *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 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. ©2016 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.

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Touching Food on Yom Kippur

Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

AIn our *Parsha* it states the words “*V'initen et Nafshosechem*” 17:31 (you shall afflict yourselves). This language “to afflict” appears four more times with relation to the holiday of Yom Kippur, in which our Rabbis derive the five activities that one must refrain from doing on Yom Kippur (eating, drinking, anointing, wearing leather shoes, and marital relations).

In the Jerusalem Talmud, law five, it states that the showbread which was usually divided by the *Kohanim* (priests) on Shabbat, if Yom Kippur falls on a Shabbat they would divide it after the completion of the Shabbat. It would seem that even touching this bread, hence even touching food would also be forbidden on Yom Kippur.

There are those who say however, that touching food on Yom Kippur is really not an issue since the severity of the day is upon the individual and one would never therefore eat food because one touches it (The *Imrat Chasidim* states that even if all the fast days were eliminated, people would still fast on Yom Kippur because of the seriousness of the day).

In order to explain the Jerusalem Talmud that was quoted earlier, one must say that it was sited not in the context of a law but rather according to the view that states that one may prepare from Yom Kippur (if it falls on a Shabbat) to after Shabbat, and in that setting even on Yom Kippur it would be forbidden because one might come to eat it by touching it. ©2016 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

"And from your descendants do not give to be passed before Molech” (Vayikra 18:21). “Molech is the name of a foreign deity, and this is how it is served: [the father] gives his son over to its priests, and they make two large fires and pass [the son] by his feet between them” (Rashi). There are

numerous details regarding Molech that are unclear (with different opinions about what was done, and by whom), but I would like to focus on Rashi including that the son is “passed by his feet” as part of the cultic ritual. This detail is problematic, since there is a dispute in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 64b) about what the ritual entails, and therefore qualifies for such a strict punishment (see Vayikra 20:1-5), with the difference between the two opinions being described as whether or not the child is “passed by his feet.” Since the Talmud concluding that if he is, it does not qualify as “serving Molech,” why does Rashi (and how could Rashi) explain the verse in a way that is ultimately rejected by the Talmud?

Before quoting some of the answers suggested (and giving my own), let’s take a closer look at the Talmudic discussion that lead to this conclusion. Abaye describes the cultic service as having a brick wall between two fires and walking the son on top of the bricks, from end to end, so that he passes between the fires. Rava rejects this, saying that rather than “passing by his feet,” the son “jumps as they do on Purim.” Rashi tells us that the custom was for children to build a large fire in a pit and then jump over it. (Thankfully, there is no indication that this Talmudic-era custom, attested to by some early commentators, is being reinstated in our communities.) Rava’s “correction” of Abaye’s description is unclear; is he merely saying that rather than walking, the movement past the fire must be more like jumping? Did he mean that rather than moving between two fires, serving Molech was done by passing over, or through, one fire? Does the fire have to be in a pit, which is jumped over, or can it be on the surface, where it can be either jumped over or through? Was Rava only objecting to the building of a wall between the fires? Was it a combination of any of these?

The Talmud brings a proof for Rava’s opinion from a Tosefta (10:3), which says that if the service includes “passing by his feet,” it does not qualify, strongly implying that the point Rava was trying to make is that the movement past (through/over/between) the fire(s) must be more than merely “passing.” And this is how Rashi (on the Talmud) explains it, “we see that the way it was served was by jumping.” With the Talmud bringing a textual proof that walking doesn’t qualify, and the Halacha following Rava’s opinion over Abaye’s in all cases but six (and this is not one of the six), it seems that walking between the two fires would not be considered “serving Molech.” Why does Rashi explain the verse according to Abaye’s opinion if the Talmud rejects it?

Mizrachi isn’t bothered by this question, based on his opinion that Rashi’s mission was to explain the verses in the most straightforward manner, even if we don’t follow that explanation halachically. Aside from the fact that this is not universally accepted (so we would expect Rashi to follow the Talmud’s

conclusions), Abaye's understanding of Molech does not really fit into the verses any better than Rava's, especially if the only difference between them is whether the child was being walked between the fires or had to jump or skip. [It should be noted that many understand Rava to be saying that Molech was served the way kids jump over fires on Purim, with one fire, not two, being jumped over; once the difference between their opinions is more than just how fast the son was moving, it could be perceived that the verses sound more like passing between two fires than jumping over one. Nevertheless, even if that were the case (and it's not clear that it is, by any means), it should still be more preferable to understand Rava as only disagreeing about the movement than to explain the verses like Abaye.]

Sefer Yosef Hallel quotes a manuscript of Rashi that takes out the word "by his feet," which matches what Rashi says in D'varim (18:10). Since the proof for Rava is based on the Tosefta saying that "passing by his feet" doesn't qualify as serving Molech, taking this word out allows us to say that Rashi understood the only real difference between Rava and Abaye to be the type of movement between the two fires, thereby allowing Rashi's explanation to follow Rava's opinion. However, this is only one manuscript, and when Rashi is quoted by the early commentators, the word "by his feet" is included, making it more likely that the word was purposely excised in that manuscript because of this issue than for it to be the only reliable manuscript.

Panim Yafos says that (according to Rashi) Abaye and Rava do not disagree about how Molech was served, only about what qualifies merely as a prohibition and what is punishable by death. Without getting into the details of what this dispute is based on, the bottom line is that Rava would agree that even "passing by feet" is prohibited, and since this verse is referring to the prohibition (and not what qualifies for the death penalty), that's how Rashi explained it. However, this "prohibition" is listed among a number of others, most of which are punishable by death, so there's no apparent reason for Rashi to limit the intent of the verse to a situation where there is no death penalty. Besides, in D'varim (18:10), where serving Molech is listed with prohibitions that do not have a death penalty, Rashi does not limit his explanation to "passing by foot," and if he wanted to make the point that there is a prohibition even when "passing by foot," that would seem to be a better place to make it.

Rabbeinu Y'honasan mi'Lunil, in his commentary on the Mishna, says the Talmud explains the way Molech was served to be "a fire on this side and a fire on that side with a floor made of bricks between them, and they cause [the son] to pass by his feet on that floor from east to west, and there are times he is burned and there are times he is saved." With one

exception, this sounds like Abaye's opinion, not Rava's, the difference being having a "brick floor" between the fires rather than a "brick wall." Since it would be difficult to say that Rabbeinu Y'honasan is ignoring Rava and only quoting Abaye, it is likely that he understood the difference between them to be based on whether the "passing by foot" was on ground level or on a wall.

Why this makes a difference, and how this was gleaned from Rava's words, needs an explanation. I think the key is his adding that sometimes the process causes death and other times it doesn't, with the implication being that if he moves quickly enough he can avoid being burned, while if it takes him too long, he cannot. [He may understand the ritual to be a sort of selection-process, whereby only those who are athletically agile survive. Rather than Molech being a deity to whom children were sacrificed (and Rabbeinu Y'honasan is among those who do not consider Molech a form of idol worship), it was a way to make sure only those most fit survived. This would explain why the Torah treats this ritual so seriously, as rather than valuing helping those in need, it is a form of eliminating those deemed less worthy. It would also explain why speed being necessary was the dividing line.] Rava's point was that the service had to be such that moving slowly was deadly (i.e. they need to have to move as quickly as those who jump through or over fire on Purim in order to avoid harm), and walking on a brick wall, higher than the ground upon which the fires are burning, does not qualify.

Based on this, the Tosefta's term "pass by foot" means "being able pass through leisurely," as opposed to having to move quickly to avoid being burned. It doesn't refer to the speed the child actually moves, but to the speed he has to move to not be injured or killed. Therefore, when Rabbeinu Y'honasan says the son actually does "pass by foot" on the brick floor, he doesn't mean that he necessarily walks slowly, but that we cause him to have to travel by foot between the fires so we can test how fast he can actually move.

Rashi and Rabbeinu Y'honasan aren't the only ones who use the term "pass by foot" despite the Talmud's implication that it disqualifies the ritual from being the way Molech is served (or, in Rabbeinu Y'honasan's case, from being the punishable action). Rambam (Hilchos Avodah Zarah 6:3-4) does as well, but since he says there is only one fire that is passed through (not two that are passed between), he was obviously following (his understanding of) Rava's opinion, not Abaye's. Nevertheless, his use of the term "pass by foot," which is associated with Abaye's (rejected) approach, is a major topic of discussion. Several commentators explain the Tosefta's term to refer to being able to walk leisurely without being harmed, with Rambam's usage of the term referring to something else (and therefore not contradicting the Talmud). According to Kesef Mishna, Rambam uses

the term to mean that the son must be in an upright position (as opposed to being carried through the fire horizontally or upside down). According to Radvaz, Rambam uses the term to teach us that the son must go through the fire, and cannot be lifted over it. Either way, the term means one thing in the Talmud/Tosefta, and something else when Ramban uses it.

It can therefore be suggested that when Rashi uses the term "pass by foot" in his commentary on Chumash, he does not mean the same thing as when it is used in the Talmud. Rava's disagreement with Abaye is only regarding whether the son has to have to move quickly to stay safe for it to qualify as serving Molech, while agreeing that there are two fires, not one. [It would seem from Rashi's commentary on Yirmiyah 7:31 that the fires were under the Molech statue's outstretched arms, one under each hand.] However, whereas in the Talmud the term "pass by foot" means to be able to walk at a leisurely pace without getting burned, in his commentary on Chumash he uses it to mean that the Molech priests cause the son to go between the fires on his own (as opposed to being carried). From the Talmud, we know that he must have to move quickly in order to avoid harm, but because Rashi does not mention Abaye's brick wall, he is following Rava's opinion, not Abaye's. ©2016 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

From a literal perspective, the names of Parshiot are nothing more than the first major word of the part of the Torah that is read during the week. It can, however, be argued that deep meaning actually lies within the names themselves. This week's Parsha, Acharei Mot, literally means "after death", and next week's Parsha, Kedoshim that means "holiness", are fine examples of this phenomenon.

Imagine walking into a dark room for the first time. Not knowing one's way or one's place, one trips over the furniture, unaware of which way to turn. However, after days and weeks and months and years, when one walks into that very same dark room, although the darkness still exists, with time we learn how to negotiate the furniture and we can make our way. This week's Parsha reminds us that after life ends (Acharei Mot), there can always be Kedoshim -- a sense of continuum that is expressed through holiness. How so? The challenge of death is to keep the person who has died alive in spirit. Indeed the Talmud says, there are some people who are actually living yet are not really alive -- they're only going through the motions. On the flip side, there are others who, although physically dead, continue to live through the teachings they left behind and through those whom they have touched in life. The goal is to live a life of character, purpose and meaning, and let those that

have passed live through our actions. ©2016 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Symbolism Over Substance

The entire Seder ceremony is replete with symbolic gestures. We drink four cups of wine to represent four Biblical expressions of redemption. We dip and lean like kings to represent freedom, and eat bitter herbs to remind us about the bitter slavery. We also eat other symbolic foods that portray our Egyptian bondage: salt water to remember tears, and charoses, a mixture of apples, nuts and wine that looks like mortar, to remind us of the laborious years in Egypt.

The service is truly filled with symbolism -- some direct, and some seemingly far-fetched -- and all the symbols are meant to remind us of the slavery we endured centuries ago. But, why not take a direct approach? There are overt ways to declare our gratitude, and there are more immediate ways to mark the celebration. Why don't we just recite the four expressions of redemption as part of the liturgy instead of drinking four cups of wine to symbolize them? Why don't we actually place mortar on the table (problem of muktzeh not withstanding) instead of making a concoction to represent it? And instead of reminding ourselves of backbreaking work by eating horseradish, why not lift heavy boxes?

A Jewish intellectual in post-war England approached Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky, who headed the London Beth Din, with a cynical question: "In reviewing our Hagadah service," he sniped, "I was shocked at the insertion of, 'Who Knows One', a childish nursery rhyme, at the end. Why would the sages put a silly rhyme -- 'One is Hashem, two are the Tablets, three are the fathers,' and so on, at the end of the solemn, intellectual Seder night service? It is very unbecoming!"

Rabbi Abramsky was not shaken. "If you really want to understand the depth of that song, then you must travel north to the town of Gateshead. There you will find a saintly Jew, Reb Elya Lopian. I want you to discuss the meaning of every aspect of life with him. Ask him what are the meaning of the sea and fish, ask him what is the meaning of the sun and the moon. Then ask him what is the meaning of one, of six, of eleven and so on."

The philosopher was very intrigued. He traveled to Gateshead and located the Yeshiva at which Reb Elya served as the Mashgiach (spiritual advisor). He was led into the room where a saintly looking man greeted him warmly.

"Rabbi, I have many questions," the skeptical philosopher began. "What is the meaning of life?" "What is the essence of the stars?"

Rabbi Lopian dealt with each question with patience, depth, and a remarkable clarity. Then the man threw out the baited question. "What is the meaning of the number one?"

Rabbi Lopian's face brightened, his eyes widened, and a broad smile spread across his face. "The meaning of one?" he repeated. "You would like to know the meaning of one? One is Hashem in the heaven and the earth!"

The man was shocked. "What about the depth of the numeral five?"

"Five?" repeated the sage. Why five has tremendous symbolism! It represents the foundation of Judaism -- the Five Books of Moses!" The rabbi then went on to explain the mystical connotations that are represented by the number five, and exactly how each Book of the Torah symbolizes a component of the sum.

The man left with a new approach and attitude toward the most simple of our rituals.

At the Seder, we train ourselves to find new meaning in the simple things in life. We teach ourselves to view the seemingly mundane with historical and even spiritual significance. We should remember that when Moshe saw a burning yet non-consumed bush, he realized that his nation is similar -- constantly persecuted and harassed, yet never consumed. At our Seder, we view horseradish not as a condiment for gefilte fish, but as representative of our suffering. The Matzoh is no longer a low-fat cracker, but symbolizes the hardships of exile and the speed of our redemption. In addition, we finish the Seder with a simple song that reminds everyone at the Seder, next time you ask, "who's number one?" don't accept the answer: the New York Yankees or the Chicago Bulls -- think on a higher plane! One is Hashem in the heaven and the earth!
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SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

Aharon shall lean his two hands upon the head of the living he-goat and confess upon it all the iniquities of Bnei Yisrael,... and send it with a designated man to the desert. The he-goat will bear upon itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land, and he [the messenger] should send the he-goat to the desert." (16:21-22)

The Mishnah (Yoma 66a) teaches that, even though it was Yom Kippur, there were way-stations where food and drink were offered to the man taking the se'ir lazazel to the desert. However, says the Gemara (Yoma 67a), the person never needed the food or drink. This illustrates the principle that "one who has bread in his basket is not like one who does not have bread in his basket," i.e., a person who has the ability to fulfill a particular desire generally does not desire that thing as strongly as does one who does not have the ability to fulfill that desire.

Rabbeinu Nissim z"l ("Ran"; 14th century; Barcelona, Spain) writes that this is the same principle which states that a mitzvah performed by one who is obligated to perform that mitzvah merits greater reward than does the same mitzvah performed by one who is not obligated to perform that mitzvah. When one is obligated to do a certain mitzvah, the yetzer hara resists. One who is not obligated does not experience that resistance, just as someone "who has bread in his basket" is immune from the whiles of the yetzer hara.

Ran continues: There is another reason why a mitzvah performed by one who is obligated earns greater reward than does the same mitzvah performed by one who is not obligated. If G-d commands that a certain mitzvah be done by a certain category of people or in certain circumstances, and not others, it is because that is the only way the "secret" behind that mitzvah can be actualized. Even though a person who is not commanded may still be permitted to do that particular mitzvah, his actions do not accomplish the tikkun / spiritual rectification that that mitzvah was designed to accomplish. (Derashot Ha'Ran: drush chamishi, nusach bet)

Elsewhere, Ran offers a third reason for why a mitzvah performed by one who is obligated merits greater reward than does the same mitzvah performed by one who is not obligated. If G-d needed our mitzvot, then there would be no difference between one who is commanded and one who is not, for each would have given G-d exactly the same thing. In fact, however, G-d does not need our mitzvot; rather, they were given to us in order bring us merit. That merit, however, can come about only by following G-d's instructions, not by doing things He did not command. (Derashot Ha'Ran: drush shevi'i) © 2014 S. Katz & torah.org

