

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L

Covenant & Conversation

Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.

As we have discussed so many times already this year, leaders make mistakes. That is inevitable. So, strikingly, our parsha of Vayikra implies. The real issue is how leaders respond to their mistakes.

The point is made by the Torah in a very subtle way. Our parsha deals with sin offerings to be brought when people have made mistakes. The technical term for this is sheggagah, meaning inadvertent wrongdoing (Lev. 4:1-35). You did something, not knowing it was forbidden, either because you forgot or did not know the law, or because you were unaware of certain facts. You may, for instance, have carried something in a public place on Shabbat, perhaps because you did not know it was forbidden to carry, or you forgot what was in your pocket, or because you forgot it was Shabbat.

The Torah prescribes different sin offerings depending on who made the mistake. It enumerates four categories. First is the High Priest, second is "the whole community" (understood to mean the Great Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court), a third is "the leader" (Nasi), and the fourth is an ordinary individual.

In three of the four cases, the law is introduced by the word im, "if" -- if such a person commits a sin. In the case of the leader, however, the law is prefaced by the word asher, "when" (Lev. 4:22). It is possible that a High Priest, the Supreme Court or an individual may err. But in the case of a leader, it is probable or even certain. Leaders make mistakes. It is unavoidable, the occupational hazard of their role. Talking about the sin of a Nasi, the Torah uses the word "when," not "if."

Nasi is the generic word for a leader: a ruler, king, judge, elder or prince. Usually it refers to the holder of political power. In Mishnaic times, the Nasi, the most famous of whom were leaders from the family of Hillel, had a quasi-governmental role as representative of the Jewish people to the Roman government. Rabbi Moses Sofer (Bratislava, 1762-1839) in one of his responsa (Orach Chayyim, 12) examines the question of why, when positions of Torah

leadership are never dynastic (never passed from father to son), the role of Nasi was an exception. Often this role did pass from father to son. The answer he gives, and it is historically insightful, is that with the decline of monarchy in the Second Temple period and thereafter, the Nasi took on many of the responsibilities of a king. His role, internally and externally, was as much political and diplomatic as religious. That in general is what is meant by the word Nasi.

Why does the Torah consider this type of leadership particularly prone to error? The commentators offer three possible explanations. R. Ovadiah Sforno (to Lev. 4:21-22) cites the phrase "But Yeshurun waxed fat, and kicked" (Deut. 32:15). Those who have advantages over others, whether of wealth or power, can lose their moral sense. Rabbeinu Bachya agrees, suggesting that rulers tend to become arrogant and haughty. Implicit in these comments -- it is in fact a major theme of Tanach as a whole -- is the idea later stated by Lord Acton in the aphorism, "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely." (Letter written by Lord Acton in 1887)

Elie Munk, citing the Zohar, offers a second explanation. The High Priest and the Sanhedrin were in constant contact with that which was holy. They lived in a world of ideals. The king or political ruler, by contrast, was involved in secular affairs: war and peace, the administration of government, and international relations. They were more likely to sin because their day-to-day concerns were not religious but pragmatic. (The Call of the Torah pg. 33)

Meir Simcha ha-Cohen of Dvinsk (Meshech Chochmah to Lev. 4:21-22) points out that a King was especially vulnerable to being led astray by popular sentiment. Neither a Priest nor a Judge in the Sanhedrin were answerable to the people. The King, however, relied on popular support. Without that he could be deposed. But this is laden with risk. Doing what the people want is not always doing what God wants. That, R. Meir Simcha argues, is what led David to order a census (2 Sam. 24), and Zedekiah to ignore the advice of Jeremiah and rebel against the King of Babylon (2 Chr. 36). Thus, for a whole series of reasons, a political leader is more exposed to temptation and error than a Priest or Judge.

There are further reasons. One is that politics is an arena of conflict. It deals in matters -- specifically wealth and power -- that are in the short-term, zero-

sum games. 'The more I have, the less you have. Seeking to maximise the benefits to myself or my group, I come into conflict with others who seek to maximise benefits to themselves or their group.' The politics of free societies is always conflict-ridden. The only societies where there is no conflict are tyrannical or totalitarian ones in which dissenting voices are suppressed -- and Judaism is a standing protest against tyranny. So in a free society, whatever course a politician takes will please some and anger others. From this, there is no escape. (This, needless to say, is not the plain sense of the text. The sins for which leaders brought an offering were spiritual offences, not errors of political judgment.)

Politics involves difficult judgements. A leader must balance competing claims and will sometimes get it wrong. One example -- one of the most fateful in Jewish history -- occurred after the death of King Solomon. People came to his son and successor, Rehoboam, complaining that Solomon had imposed unsustainable burdens on the population, particularly during the building of the Temple. Led by Jeroboam, they asked the new King to reduce the burden. Rehoboam asked his father's counsellors for advice. They told him to concede to the people's demand. Serve them, they said, and they will serve you. Rehoboam then turned to his own friends, who told him the opposite: Reject the request. Show the people you are a strong leader who cannot be intimidated (1 Kings 12:1-15).

It was disastrous advice, and the result was tragic. The kingdom split in two, the ten northern tribes following Jeroboam, leaving only the southern tribes, generically known as "Judah," loyal to the king. For Israel as a people in its own land, it was the beginning of the end. Always a small people surrounded by large and powerful empires, it needed unity, high morale and a strong sense of destiny to survive. Divided, it was only a matter of time before both nations, Israel in the north, Judah in the south, fell to other powers.

The reason leaders -- as opposed to Judges and Priests -- cannot avoid making mistakes is that there is no textbook that infallibly teaches you how to lead. Priests and Judges follow laws. For leadership there are no laws because every situation is unique. As Isaiah Berlin put it in his essay, 'Political Judgement,' (pg. 40-53) in the realm of political action, there are few laws and what is needed instead is skill in reading a situation. Successful statesmen "grasp the unique combination of characteristics that constitute this particular situation -- this and no other." Berlin compares this to the gift possessed by great novelists like Tolstoy and Proust.

(Incidentally, this answers the point made by political philosopher Michael Walzer in his book on the politics of the Bible, *In God's Shadow*. He is undeniably right to point out that political theory, so significant in

ancient Greece, is almost completely absent from the Hebrew Bible. I would argue, and so surely would Isaiah Berlin, that there is a reason for this. In politics there are few general laws, and the Hebrew Bible is interested in laws. But when it comes to politics -- to Israel's Kings for example -- it does not give laws but instead tells stories.)

Applying inflexible rules to a constantly shifting political landscape destroys societies. Communism was like that. In free societies, people change, culture changes, the world beyond a nation's borders does not stand still. So a politician will find that what worked a decade or a century ago does not work now. In politics it is easy to get it wrong, hard to get it right.

There is one more reason why leadership is so challenging. It is alluded to by the Mishnaic Sage, R. Nechemiah, commenting on the verse, "My son, if you have put up security for your neighbour, if you have struck your hand in pledge for another" (Prov. 6:1): "So long as a man is an associate [i.e. concerned only with personal piety], he need not be concerned with the community and is not punished on account of it. But once a man has been placed at the head and has donned the cloak of office, he may not say: 'I have to look after my welfare, I am not concerned with the community.' Instead, the whole burden of communal affairs rests on him. If he sees a man doing violence to his fellow, or committing a transgression, and does not seek to prevent him, he is punished on account of him... you are responsible for him. You have entered the gladiatorial arena, and he who enters the arena is either conquered or conquers." (Exodus Rabbah, 27:9)

A private individual is responsible only for their own sins. A leader is held responsible for the sins of the people they lead: at least those they might have prevented. ("Whoever can prevent the members of his household from sinning and does not, is seized for the sins of his household. If he can prevent his fellow citizens and does not, he is seized for the sins of his fellow citizens. If he can prevent the whole world from sinning, and does not, he is seized for the sins of the whole world." -- Shabbat 54b)

With power comes responsibility: the greater the power, the greater the responsibility.

There are no universal rules, there is no failsafe textbook, for leadership. Every situation is different and each age brings its own challenges. A ruler, in the best interests of their people, may sometimes have to take decisions that a conscientious individual would shrink from doing in private life. They may have to decide to wage a war, knowing that some will die. They may have to levy taxes, knowing that this will leave some impoverished. Only after the event will the leader know whether the decision was justified, and it may depend on factors beyond their control.

The Jewish approach to leadership is thus an

unusual combination of realism and idealism -- realism in its acknowledgement that leaders inevitably make mistakes, idealism in its constant subordination of politics to ethics, power to responsibility, pragmatism to the demands of conscience. What matters is not that leaders never get it wrong -- that is inevitable, given the nature of leadership -- but that they are always exposed to prophetic critique and that they constantly study Torah to remind themselves of transcendent standards and ultimate aims. The most important thing from a Torah perspective is that a leader is sufficiently honest to admit their mistakes. Hence the significance of the sin offering.

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai summed it up with a brilliant double-entendre on the word *asher*, meaning "when" in the phrase "when a leader sins." He relates it to the word *ashrei*, "happy," and says: Happy is the generation whose leader is willing to bring a sin offering for their mistakes. (Tosefta Baba Kamma, 7:5)

Leadership demands two kinds of courage: the strength to take a risk, and the humility to admit when a risk fails. *Covenant and Conversation 5781 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2021 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

If the entire congregation of Israel commits an inadvertent violation as a result of (a mistaken legal decision of the Highest Court)...and they thereby violate one of the prohibitory commandments of God, they shall incur guilt" (Lev. 4:13) If the Jewish state could be revived virtually from the ashes of destruction after two thousand years, then why hasn't the Sanhedrin, the great Jewish court of the First and Second Commonwealths, been revived?

During the centuries of its existence, this august body, comprised of seventy-one elders and sages who ruled on every aspect of life, brought unity to the land because their decisions were binding on the entire nation.

On the surface, reviving the Sanhedrin seems impossible because its members must be recipients of the classic Jewish ordination that traces itself back to Moses himself, and even to the Almighty, as it were, who ordained Moses, then Moses ordained Joshua, Joshua the elders, the elders the prophets, the prophets the Men of the Great Assembly. But this special ordination came to an end in the third century of the Common Era. And since intrinsic to the idea of the Sanhedrin is a living tradition of ordination, when ordination died out, so, it would seem, did the Sanhedrin and the possibility of its revival.

But a verse in this week's portion creates alternative possibilities. In his commentary to the Mishna, Maimonides writes, "if all the Jewish Sages

and their disciples would agree on the choice of one person among those who dwell in Israel as their head [but this must be done in the land of Israel], and (that head) establishes a house of learning, he would be considered as having received the original ordination and he could then ordain anyone he desires." Maimonides adds that the Sanhedrin would return to its original function as it is written in Isaiah 1:26: "I will restore thy judges as at first and thy Sages as in the beginning." Such a selection would mean an election, a list of candidates, ballots. So who does the choosing? The sages and their disciples—everyone with a relationship to Torah sages, to Jewish law. In an alternate source, however, Maimonides extends the privilege of voting to all adult residents of Israel! (Interpretations of the Mishnah, Chapter 4 of tractate B'Khorot, on the words "one who slaughters a first born animal and shows its blemish").

This idea reappears in Maimonides' Mishna Torah, Laws of Sanhedrin, Ch. 4, Law, 11, except there he concludes with the phrase, "this matter requires decision."

In 1563, a significant attempt was made by a leading sage of Safed, Rabbi Yaakov BeRab to revive classic ordination using the Maimonidean formula; in an election held in Safed, Rabbi BeRab was declared officially ordained. He proceeded to ordain several others of his disciples along with his most important student, Rabbi Yosef Karo, author of the *Shulchan Aruch*.

In the meantime, the rabbis in Jerusalem, led by Rabbi Levi ibn Habib, strongly opposed the Safed decision. When the question was put before Rabbi David Ben Zimra (Ridbaz), the chief rabbi of Egypt, he ruled in favor of the Jerusalem rabbis because not only had the election been restricted to one city of Israel (Safed and not Jerusalem) but the acknowledgment that "this matter requires decision" opened up the possibility that Maimonides may have changed his mind, in effect leaving the issue unadjudicated.

Rabbi Yaakov BeRab, on the other hand, understood that the phrase "requires decision" referred to whether one sage was sufficient to ordain others, or three sages were required for ordination. But he was absolutely convinced that Maimonides had no doubt whatsoever about the method and the inevitability of reviving classic ordination.

Three centuries later, the first minister of religion in the new government of the Jewish state, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Maimon, renewed this controversy when he tried to convince the political and religious establishments that along with creation of the State should come creation of a Sanhedrin.

In his work *The Renewal of the Sanhedrin* Our Renewed State, he cites the existence of a copy of Maimonides' commentary to the Mishna published along with emendations and additions written by

Maimonides himself after he wrote the Mishna Torah, where he specifically writes that ordination and the Sanhedrin will be renewed before the coming of the Messiah, which implies that it must be achieved through human efforts. A photocopy of these words, in Maimonides' own handwriting, is provided in the book by Rav Maimon.

What is the basis for his most democratic suggestion? I believe it stems from a verse which we find in this week's portion of Vayikra, quoted above, which deals with the issue of the sins of the entire congregation.

Commentators ask how can an "entire congregation" sin and Rashi identifies the "congregation of Israel" with the Sanhedrin. In other words, when it says "if the entire congregation of Israel errs" it really means that "if the Sanhedrin errs."

The Jewish people are a nation defined by commandments, precepts and laws. Therefore the institution that protects and defines the law is at the heart of the nation's existence. In fact, how the Jewish people behave, what they do, can become the law. ("A custom of Israel is Torah.")

Knowing all this, it should not come as a surprise that Maimonides wanted to revive the ordination, and found a method utterly democratic in its design. The "people" equals the Sanhedrin, the "people" can choose one leading Jew who will then have the right to pass on his ordination to others, to re-create the Sanhedrin!

And for Maimonides, it is the population living in the land of Israel which represents the historical congregation of Israel (B.T. Horayot 3b).

Apparently, Maimonides is saying that before the next stage of Jewish history unfolds, the nation will have to decide who shall be given the authority to recreate ordination and who will be the commander-in-chief of the rabbis. Will it happen in our lifetime? © 2021 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

Moshe hears the voice of the Lord as God calls to him. However, it is not the same experience that it was at Mount Sinai. There, it was with noise and fanfare, thunder and lightning, pageantry, and awe. At Mount Sinai, even the soundwaves were visible and real. But here, according to the Midrash, it is a private revelation exclusive to Moshe. The great heavenly voice is not heard outside the precincts of the Tabernacle itself.

According to some commentators, this is one of the reasons why the word Vayikra itself is spelled with a small letter -- Aleph zeira -- the small Alef at the end of the word Vayikra. It is interesting to note that one of the celestial powers of the Almighty is that of tzimtzum -- the ability to diminish the godly presence, so to speak,

in the universe, to allow for nature and human beings to function in the so-called vacated space.

We find that when the prophet Elijah searches for God, he does not find Him in the great wind or in thunderous sound, but, rather, in the still small voice of silence itself. I have written many times about the importance of being able to find God within our own being, within our own soul, for only by discovering God in that manner can a person achieve permanent elevation of spirituality and faith.

External events may make a great impression upon us, both physically and spiritually. But they are usually only a temporary influence, a momentary catalyst. Determined pursuit of spiritual and moral attainment is always dependent upon that still small voice that Elijah heard within himself and is the voice that all of us can also hear for ourselves, if we will do so.

We are all aware that it is much easier to hear loud sounds than furtive whispers. To hear a low voice or a whisper requires concentration. It demands a desire to hear, not an automatic reflex of our auditory senses, but, rather, an intentional expression of our inner desire to hear the seemingly inaudible. The gurus of espionage and counterespionage, of police and governmental surveillance, have constructed elaborate technological methods for blocking out all the extraneous noise that their microphones pick up, so that they are able to eavesdrop on the whispered conversations of enemy agents, spies, saboteurs, and criminals. Only one extraneous noise can cancel a surveillance project and prevent a consequence or benefit.

I would hazard to say that this is true in the pursuit of a meaningful spiritual life as well. All the outside static of everyday life, of the mundane and the tawdry, foolish and the distracting, must be eliminated, for us to hear our own still small voice in our soul. We live in a very noisy world, and the ruckus of life often prevents us from hearing what we ourselves wish to say to ourselves, because of the outside static of noise that constantly engulfs us. We should certainly concentrate more on hearing our own inner self and soul. © 2021 *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

Will sacrifices be restored in messianic times? Rambam in his Mishneh Torah argues that it will be reinstated. In his words: King Messiah will arise in the future and restore the kingship of the House of David, reestablishing its former sovereignty; he will build again the Sanctuary and gather in all the

dispersed of Israel; in his days, all the laws [in this code] will regain their validity; sacrifices will again be offered, and the Sabbatical and Jubilee years will be observed according to all their commandments as said in the Torah. (Laws of Kings 11:1)

In his philosophical work *Guide for the Perplexed*, he singles out sacrifice as the paradigm example of God giving the Torah while taking into account contemporary norms of society.

It is impossible to go suddenly from one extreme to the other.... The custom which was in those days general among all people consisted of sacrificing animals.... It was in accordance with the plan of God that He did not command us to give up and to discontinue all these manners of service. To obey such a commandment would have been contrary to the nature of man and woman, who generally cleave to that which they are used.... Therefore, God allowed the abovementioned kinds of worship to remain, but transferred them to His own name, commanding us to practice them with regard to Him. (3:32)

Here, Rambam seems to reverse course. Sacrifices were concessions to the norms of biblical times. It would seem that once the Temple was destroyed, and the "custom" to offer sacrifices was not "general among all people," they would not be reinstated.

But even if one's position is that sacrifices will one day be renewed, it is clear that sacrifices were meant to be an external manifestation of what a person feels internally. Indeed, the first animal sacrifice accepted was that of Abel. There, the Torah states that "Abel also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof" (Genesis 4:4).

The Hebrew for "also brought" is *gam hu* (literally, "also him"), which Sefat Emet understands to literally mean that Abel brought himself. His sacrifice was accepted because it reflected his sincere inner feelings of connecting with God.

Note that the major animal sacrifices reflect this very idea. *Olah* (the burnt offering) literally means an offering one "brings up" from the depths of one's soul. *Shelamim* (peace offerings) refer to a person who is in a state of *shelemut* (wholeness), whose outside reflects a purity of inner soul. *Asham* (the guilt offering) is a composite of *Aleph sham* (the Chief [the Lord]) is there. And *chatat* (the sin offering) interfaces with *l'chatei*, which literally means "to cleanse."

As important as the sacrificial service was during ancient times, countless prophets spoke out against sacrifices that were not sincere. And so, when King Saul tried to defend himself to Samuel, pointing out that the soldiers "took sheep and cattle from the plunder...in order to sacrifice them to the Lord," the prophet gloriously responds, "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice (*shemoa*

mi'zevach tov), and to heed is better than the fat of rams" (1 Samuel 15:21, 22).

Today, prayer has replaced sacrifices. Its efficacy, too, depends upon the purity of the heart, the goodness and sincerity of the supplicant. © 2021 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

A Fifth

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

As a general rule, a person who steals from another must reimburse the victim, paying the monetary value of the stolen item. There is, however, an exception to this rule: "When a person sins and commits a trespass against G-d by dealing deceitfully with his fellow in the matter of a deposit or a pledge, or through robbery, or by defrauding his fellow... and if he swears falsely... he shall repay the principal amount and add a fifth to it" (*Vayikra* 5:21-25). In other words, he must add an additional twenty percent (*chomesh*) to the value of the stolen item. He is also obligated to bring a guilt offering (*korban asham*).

In order for a person to be liable to this penalty, there are three conditions:

1. He must have stolen.
2. He must have falsely sworn that he did not steal.
3. He must have later admitted that he lied under oath.

May a victim decide to waive his right to the payment of the *chomesh*? According to the Mishnah in *Bava Kamma*, he may.

Given this explicit statement of the Mishnah, it is very difficult to understand the Rambam's statement, "The *chomesh* and the [*asham*] offering are for atonement" (*Hilchot Gezeilah* 7:8).

If the payment of the *chomesh* serves to achieve atonement for the sinner, it would seem that the victim should not be allowed to waive it. Refusing payment would leave the thief without the ability to achieve atonement for his sins (swearing falsely as well as stealing).

One possible way to explain the Rambam is to say that the victim is permitted to waive payment of the value of the stolen item itself. Once he has done this, the additional fifth becomes irrelevant, as a fifth of zero is zero. If this happens, the thief does indeed lose his chance to gain atonement (*Kovetz Shiurim*). Alternatively, one might argue that the obligation to pay the victim is first and foremost a financial one. Once the thief fulfills this monetary obligation, he achieves atonement for his sins. Therefore, when he has no monetary obligation, even if it is because the victim chose to waive his rights, he achieves atonement (*Avnei Nezer*).

What if there is a case in which the thief does not need atonement? Is there still be an obligation to pay the *chomesh*? If the reason for the payment is atonement, then the answer should be no. Yet we know that if the thief dies before making the *chomesh* payment, his heirs must pay it (even though they do not need atonement). This strengthens our earlier suggestion that the obligation is first and foremost monetary, and taking care of the monetary obligation is what achieves atonement. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"As an offering of choice firsts they may be offered to Hashem but to the altar they shall not be lifted as a pleasing aroma." (Vayikra 2:12) The previous posuk tells us that neither leaven nor honey may be brought upon the mizbeiach. Now, the Torah tells us that there is a time when these items can be offered to Hashem, though not as a burnt offering on the altar.

Leaven is brought as part of the Shtai HaLechem, the two loaves brought on Shavuot, and honey refers to sweet fruits brought as Bikkurim, also brought Shavuot-time. What is significant about the timing of these two things and what can we learn from it?

The Klei Yakar discusses this and says that leaven, *chometz*, is a euphemism for the Yetzer Hara. Air in the dough makes it look larger but in actuality it's just an illusion. Similarly, the temptations we face often promise great things that do not materialize. This bread is offered, therefore, on the day of Matan Torah, which is a "spice" to transform the Yetzer Hara.

Honey sweetens things, but it, too, merely masks the original flavor instead of transforming the item. These two things do not constitute a perfection or completeness that should go on the mizbei'ach to be offered to Hashem. Nevertheless, they are offered, both on Shavuot.

This is because these two items which are not perfect on their own can help a person become a more perfect version of himself. These breads were not burnt for Hashem; they were given to the Kohanim to eat. Recognizing the importance of one's fellow man and loving him as yourself is a fundamental principle of Torah.

The same thing with Bikkurim, the first fruits. When one brings these delicacies to the Bais HaMikdash though they are not used for sacrifices, it ensures that one's everyday life is infused with the sweetness of Torah and holiness. We do not differentiate between the divine and the mundane. Rather, everything in our lives, including the delicacies and luxuries we enjoy, is treated as holy and spiritual.

No matter what we have in life, even our Yetzer

Hara itself, we can use it to forge a better connection to Hashem. If we have a desire for honor, and we therefore push ourselves to give charity or study Torah, that's a way to harness our evil inclination and channel those energies for good.

When we live our lives by Torah, then everything can be uplifted and used for growth. We are able to raise the levels of holiness in even the most mundane of items and circumstances, and THAT will be the pleasing aroma Hashem enjoys.

R' Yisrael Salanter's wife related that when they got married, they made a deal to divide up the decision-making in their home.

Anything that was related to "ruchnius," spirituality, would be decided by R' Yisrael. Anything that related to the "gashmius," the physicality of their home, would be the decision of the Rebbetzin.

A listener asked her how that arrangement worked out. Smiling, she replied, "To be perfectly honest, I've never made any decisions. To R' Yisrael, EVERYTHING is a matter of ruchnius!" ©2021 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI AVROHOM LEVENTHAL

The Pulse on the Finger

The finger has a very important place in Judaism in general, and in this parsha, in particular. A key step in the process of bringing *korbonot* (sacrifices) was the sprinkling of blood on the mizbeach (altar). That sprinkling of blood, done by finger, was to bring home to the petitioner that, in fact, it is his blood that should be offered and he was receiving atonement through the sacrifice.

There are others aspects of the service in the Beit HaMikdash that involve various fingers.

The plagues of Egypt were referred to as being carried out by "the finger of G-d". When we recite the list of the plagues during the Pesach seder, we spill wine from our cup with our finger to express that it is not proper to rejoice in the suffering of anyone, even our enemies.

As children, many of us fell asleep finding safety and comfort by sucking our thumb. We are born with our very own calculator with five digits on each hand.

The fingers can stir the soul by plucking on the strings of a guitar or by tickling the keys on the piano. A conductor's finger melds diverse instruments into a symphony orchestra.

"Thumbs up" conveys approval to another and in some places extending the thumb or finger can even stop a moving vehicle. With their finger, a traffic officer can facilitate smooth travel and prevent accidents.

Through skilled fingers, the seamstress weaves, the artist paints, and the surgeon saves lives. Marriage begins by placing a ring on a finger.

The finger holds amazing potential for so much

good.

And yet, the finger can have darker sides as well.

Blaming others is called “pointing a finger”. In that case, one best heed the words of attorney Louis Nizer: “When a man points a finger at someone else, he should remember that four of his fingers are pointing at himself.”

The upward extension of a particular finger is the ultimate insult and “tell off”.

A bullet can kill through a finger’s pull of the trigger.

During the nightmare of the Holocaust, millions were sent to their death through the pointing of a finger.

As is the case with most things, it is up to us to dictate what we can accomplish with the gifts that God bestows upon us..

The fingers are the extension of a hand used to help another. Your finger dials the phone number of a friend who could use a quick hello or call emergency services when needed.

Our fingers conveniently fit into our ear to block out those things that we shouldn’t hear.

For parents and educators, the index finger is a powerful tool of recognition and acknowledgment.

How many times does our child or student interrupt us as we are speaking or teaching. The natural inclination is to ignore the interrupter until he or she (or their interruption) “goes away”.

By signaling with your index finger extended up, you send the message to your child or student that you acknowledge them and what they want/need, but to please wait a second/minute until you have finished speaking. One can’t underestimate how empowering that simple gesture is.

People are very much like fingers. No two are the same, yet all are important.

And just like fingers, there is so much more strength when we work together to accomplish great things. ©2021 Rabbi A. Leventhal. Rabbi Leventhal is the Executive Director of Lema’an Achai lemaanachai.org

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

The Power of the Temple

The major portion of the service in the Mishkan involved the korbanot, the numerous offerings that were brought in the service of Hashem. Although these offerings also involved various forms of matzah as well as spices and libations of wine, the central offerings in the Mishkan consisted of animals. Each of these sacrifices consisted of several parts: shechitah, the slaughtering of the animals, kabbalah, the collecting of a portion of the blood from that slaughtering, holachah, the carrying of the blood to the altar, and z’rikah, the sprinkling of the blood onto the sides of the altar. Included is the burning of the appropriate parts of each sacrifice on the altar. Every aspect of the

sacrifice had to be performed with the proper understanding of the type of sacrifice and for whom that sacrifice was being offered. The Kohein who handled each korban had to maintain his concentration throughout, for even his thoughts could invalidate the korban.

One might think that after all of those conditions above were met, the korban would be automatically accepted and forgiveness accomplished. There are several other factors which can also invalidate acceptance. The Gemarah in Zevachim discusses the idea of “chutz liz’mano, after its time”. Various sacrifices were consumed by either the Kohein or the person bringing the sacrifice and they had to be eaten by a set time or the remainder of that meat was considered “notar, leftover”, and had to be burned. If at any time in the process, the Kohein had in mind to eat the meat of the sacrifice after the allotted time, the korban is rendered invalid and the obligation has not been fulfilled. If the meat is eaten after its time, the person eating that meat is subject to kareit, being cut off from the people. The Gemara also discusses “chutz lim’komo, outside of its designated place.” Various sacrifices had limitations on where the meat could be eaten. Intention to eat the meat outside of its appropriate area would invalidate the korban. It does not matter if the postponing of the eating actually occurred or if the eating of the meat was in the wrong place, the improper intention of the Kohein creates this invalidation.

Nowhere more is the Kohein’s responsibility tested than when he is handling the blood of the korban. The most crucial moments of concentration for the Kohein are from the moment of slaughter until he has completed the sprinkling of the blood. After the sprinkling of the blood, the korban is accepted and the obligation of the donor has been fulfilled. There are still processes that must be done correctly which can affect the korban, but only gross negligence will disqualify the korban after that sprinkling.

HaRav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains the significance of the korbanot and specifically of the blood as the primary component of the korban. The way for a person to become closer to Hashem is by devoting himself to Hashem’s Torah. The place of the Torah is in the Aron Kodosh which is in the innermost sanctuary of the Temple. The bringing of a korban to the area immediately next to the opening of the Holy, is an integral part of the sacrifice. Man’s quest to become closer to Hashem is symbolized by his giving up his life (represented by the life of his korban) to the study and observance of Torah. Hirsch reminds us that the change that a person makes “is something which must be accomplished not by the Sanctuary on the person, but by the person on himself, if he is to be able to live the positive active life which the Sanctuary has to teach him.”

Until the time of the slaughter, the animal is referred to as a ben bakar, a bullock, but after the blood is captured in a service vessel, the animal is now called an "olah, a going up". That change is one of the reasons that the receiving of the blood and any subsequent service must be performed by a Kohein even though the actual slaughter may be performed by a non-Kohein. Hirsch describes Man's existence as selfish in that his body has needs, and Man is driven to fulfill those needs or perish. It is not an accusation but a statement of fact. The blood of the soul, "by being received in the service vessel, receives the higher calling of belonging to the Sanctuary of the Torah of Hashem." This blood of the soul is now brought closer to Hashem just as we hope to be brought closer to Hashem by our sacrifice.

Hirsch explains that the altar itself was a continuation of the theme of each sacrifice. The base of the altar defined Man's quest to carry out Hashem's Will in all earthly matters. The altar was a reflection of the sides of the Mishkan. The west side is where the Torah was located inside of the Aron Kodesh. The southern side represents the menorah which is intellect. The northern side is the shulchan, the table of the show-breads, which represented the material world. The eastern side represents the door of the Mishkan which opened to the people Israel. Following this pattern, we see that the W.S. corner was the "intellectual life produced by, and coming out of the Torah", the S.E. corner was "the life of the people directed toward the Torah", the E.N. corner was the "material life developed from the national life which was devoted to Torah", and the N.W. corner represented the "material rewards of the closeness to Torah." The sprinkling of the blood was done on the E.N. side first and the W. S. corner last. The lesson here being that one who wishes to become closer to Hashem will start with the intellect and Torah and will be rewarded with a life devoted to Torah through which he will receive his material rewards.

Man has a difficult task here on earth. Our bodies, by their very physical nature, require a certain amount of selfishness in order to survive. Yet Man is tasked with going beyond that selfishness and raising himself to a level of spirituality which overcomes our pure selfish behavior and replaces it with giving our lives to the service of Hashem. Man is constantly faced with this balancing act between his needs and the Will of Hashem. We must all strive to achieve this perfect balance. With our lives devoted to Torah and Torah values, we can hope to accomplish this task. © 2021 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Lelamed Weekly Dvar

Sefar Vayikra opens with G-d's addressing Moshe from the newly constructed Mishkan. The Parsha

begins "when a person from [among] you brings a sacrifice to G-d..." (1:2) and goes on to discuss the laws of cattle, sheep, and goat offerings. Since the Torah does not waste words and the directive could have easily been done without the words "from among you," it begs the question: what is the purpose of adding those words?

Rabbi Shimon Schwab suggests that the word "mikem" means "from among you," but can also mean "from within you." Sharing or donating something that you have earned can sometimes feel like you are giving away a piece of yourself. G-d recognizes our sacrifices, especially when they are not mandatory. When we give of our time, money, and effort, it is not only comforting but also vital that we know it is acknowledged and appreciated, and the beginning of Vayikra looks to model that behavior for us. © 2021 Rabbi S. Ressler and Lelamed, Inc.

RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ Z"L

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states, "Every meal offering that you offer to the Almighty do not make it chometz (leavened); for you shall burn no yeast, nor any honey, in any offering of the Almighty made by fire. With all your offerings you shall offer salt" (Leviticus 2:11-13).

Yeast and honey were not permitted in the offering on the altar. Yeast makes the dough rise higher, but it is an external additive. Honey makes things taste sweet, but it is also an external additive. Salt, on the other hand, brings out the flavor of the food, but only the flavor that is already there. This, says Rabbi Mordechai Gifter, symbolizes a basic principle in spiritual matters.

When serving the Almighty you should follow the model of salt. That is, utilize all the abilities and talents that you have to serve Him. Do not be like yeast that causes distortion of what is there. Do not be like honey that is very sweet, but is something borrowed from the outside. Be yourself, but make every effort to be all that you can be. Based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin © 2014 Rabbi D. Siegel & torah.org

