

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"L

Covenant & Conversation

The shock is immense. For several weeks and many chapters -- the longest prelude in the Torah -- we have read of the preparations for the moment at which G-d would bring His presence to rest in the midst of the people. Five parshiyot (Terumah, Tetzaveh, Ki Tissa, Vayakhel and Pekudei) describe the instructions for building the sanctuary. Two (Vayikra, Tzav) detail the sacrificial offerings to be brought there. All is now ready. For seven days the priests (Aaron and his sons) are consecrated into office. Now comes the eighth day when the service of the mishkan will begin.

The entire people have played their part in constructing what will become the visible home of the Divine presence on earth. With a simple, moving verse the drama reaches its climax: "Moses and Aaron went into the Tent of Meeting and when they came out, they blessed the people. G-d's glory was then revealed to all the people" (9: 23).

Just as we think the narrative has reached closure, a terrifying scene takes place: "Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu, took their censers, put fire into them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before G-d, which He had not instructed them to offer. Fire came forth from before G-d, and it consumed them so that they died before G-d. Moses then said to Aaron: 'This is what G-d spoke of when he said: Among those who approach Me I will show myself holy; in the sight of all the people I will be honoured.'" (10:1-3)

Celebration turned to tragedy. The two eldest sons of Aaron die. The sages and commentators offer many explanations. Nadav and Avihu died because: they entered the holy of holies; (Midrash Tanhuma (Buber), Acharei Mot, 7) they were not wearing the requisite clothes; (Vayikra Rabbah 20: 9) they took fire from the kitchen, not the altar; (Midrash Tanhuma, ibid.) they did not consult Moses and Aaron; (Yalkut Shimoni, Shmini, 524) nor did they consult one another. (Midrash Tanhuma, ibid.) According to some they were guilty of hubris. They were impatient to assume leadership roles themselves; (Midrash Aggada (Buber), Vayikra 10) and they did not marry, considering themselves above such things. (Vayikra Rabbah 20: 10) Yet others see their deaths as delayed punishment for an earlier sin, when, at Mount Sinai they "ate and drank" in the presence of

G-d (Ex. 24: 9-11).

These interpretations represent close readings of the four places in the Torah which Nadav and Avihu's death is mentioned (Lev. 10:2, 16: 1, Num. 3: 4, 26: 61), as well as the reference to their presence on Mount Sinai. Each is a profound meditation on the dangers of over-enthusiasm in the religious life. However, the simplest explanation is the one explicit in the Torah itself. Nadav and Avihu died because they offered unauthorized, literally "strange," fire, meaning "that which was not commanded." To understand the significance of this we must go back to first principles and remind ourselves of the meaning of kadosh, "holy", and thus of mikdash as the home of the holy.

The holy is that segment of time and space G-d has reserved for His presence. Creation involves concealment. The word olam, universe, is semantically linked to the word neelam, "hidden". To give mankind some of His own creative powers -- the use of language to think, communicate, understand, imagine alternative futures and choose between them -- G-d must do more than create homo sapiens. He must efface Himself (what the kabbalists called tzimtzum) to create space for human action. No single act more profoundly indicates the love and generosity implicit in creation. G-d as we encounter Him in the Torah is like a parent who knows He must hold back, let go, refrain from intervening, if his children are to become responsible and mature. But there is a limit. To efface Himself entirely would be equivalent to abandoning the world, deserting his own children. That, G-d may not and will not do. How then does G-d leave a trace of his presence on earth?

The biblical answer is not philosophical. A philosophical answer (I am thinking here of the mainstream of Western philosophy, beginning in antiquity with Plato, in modernity with Descartes) would be one that applies universally -- i.e. at all times, in all places. But there is no answer that applies to all times and places. That is why philosophy cannot and never will understand the apparent contradiction between divine creation and human freewill, or between divine presence and the empirical world in which we reflect, choose and act.

Jewish thought is counter-philosophical. It insists that truths are embodied precisely in particular times and places. There are holy times (the seventh day, seventh month, seventh year, and the end of

seven septennial cycles, the jubilee). There are holy people (the children of Israel as a whole; within them, the Levi'im, and within them the Cohanim). And there is holy space (eventually, Israel; within that, Jerusalem; within that the Temple; in the desert, they were the mishkan, the holy, and the holy of holies).

The holy is that point of time and space in which the presence of G-d is encountered by tzimtzum -- self-renunciation -- on the part of mankind. Just as G-d makes space for man by an act of self-limitation, so man makes space for G-d by an act of self-limitation. The holy is where G-d is experienced as absolute presence. Not accidentally but essentially, this can only take place through the total renunciation of human will and initiative. That is not because G-d does not value human will and initiative. To the contrary: G-d has empowered mankind to use them to become His "partners in the work of creation".

However, to be true to G-d's purposes, there must be times and places at which humanity experiences the reality of the divine. Those times and places require absolute obedience. The most fundamental mistake -- the mistake of Nadav and Avihu -- is to take the powers that belong to man's encounter with the world, and apply them to man's encounter with the Divine. Had Nadav and Avihu used their own initiative to fight evil and injustice they would have been heroes. Because they used their own initiative in the arena of the holy, they erred. They asserted their own presence in the absolute presence of G-d. That is a contradiction in terms. That is why they died.

We err if we think of G-d as capricious, jealous, angry: a myth spread by early Christianity in an attempt to define itself as the religion of love, superseding the cruel/harsh/retributive G-d of the "Old Testament". When the Torah itself uses such language it "speaks in the language of humanity" (Berakhot 31a) -- that is to say, in terms people will understand.

In truth, Tenakh is a love story through and through -- the passionate love of the Creator for His creatures that survives all the disappointments and betrayals of human history. G-d needs us to encounter Him, not because He needs mankind but because we need Him. If civilization is to be guided by love, justice, and respect for the integrity of creation, there must be moments in which we leave the "I" behind and encounter the fullness of being in all its glory.

That is the function of the holy -- the point at which "I am" is silent in the overwhelming presence of "There is". That is what Nadav and Avihu forgot -- that to enter holy space or time requires ontological humility, the total renunciation of human initiative and desire.

The significance of this fact cannot be over-estimated. When we confuse G-d's will with our will, we turn the holy -- the source of life -- into something unholy and a source of death. The classic example of this is "holy war," jihad, Crusade -- investing

imperialism (the desire to rule over other people) with the cloak of sanctity as if conquest and forced conversion were G-d's will.

The story of Nadav and Avihu reminds us yet again of the warning first spelled out in the days of Cain and Abel. The first act of worship led to the first murder. Like nuclear fission, worship generates power, which can be benign but can also be profoundly dangerous.

The episode of Nadav and Avihu is written in three kinds of fire. First there is the fire from heaven: "Fire came forth from before G-d and consumed the burnt offering..." (9: 24)

This was the fire of favour, consummating the service of the sanctuary. Then came the "unauthorized fire" offered by the two sons. "Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu took their censers, put fire in them and added incense; and they offered unauthorized fire before G-d, which He had not instructed them to offer." (10:1)

Then there was the counter-fire from heaven: "Fire came forth from before G-d, and it consumed them so that they died before G-d." (10:2)

The message is simple and intensely serious: Religion is not what the European Enlightenment thought it would become: mute, marginal and mild. It is fire -- and like fire, it warms but it also burns. And we are the guardians of the flame. *Covenant and Conversation 5775 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd Aaron was silent -- "VaYidom Aharon" (Leviticus 10:3) In the midst of the joyous celebration dedicating the desert Sanctuary, fire came out from before the Lord and devoured Nadav and Avihu, the two sons of Aaron, the High Priest. "And Moses said to Aaron, "that is what the Lord has said, saying that through those closest to Me shall I be sanctified..."(Lev.10:3). Rashi quotes the following words which the rabbis attribute to Moses: "Moses said to Aaron, 'Aaron my brother, I know that this Temple Sanctuary will have to be sanctified by beloved friends of the Divine, and I thought that it would be either through you or through me. Now I see that they (Nadav and Avihu) were greater than both me and you..."

According to this view, Nadav and Avihu were saintly individuals; worthy of being sacrificed on the altar of the desert Sanctuary, "VaYidom Aharon" -- Aaron silently acquiesced to God's will. But why did the desert Sanctuary, and by extension any great advance of the Jewish nation, have to be dedicated by the deaths of great Jewish personalities? Why must the pages of our glorious history be drenched in the blood of holy martyrs and soaked by the tears of mourners they leave behind?

The only answer I can give to this agonizing question of lamah – why? – is the one word answer that our Israeli children like to give to our questions about why they do what they do: “kakha” – that is just how it is. Why must sacrifice be a necessary condition for redemption?

The pattern may be discerned as far back as the Covenant between the Pieces, in which God guarantees Abram eternal seed (Gen 15:1-6) and the land of Israel (15:7). After this, a great fear descends upon Abram as he is told that his seed will be strangers in a strange land where they will be afflicted and enslaved until they leave, freed and enriched. God then commands Abram to circumcise himself and his entire male household. The blood of the covenant is thus built into the very male organ of propagation (Gen 17); the price of our nationhood is blood, sacrifice and affliction.

At our Passover Seder, the celebration of our national birth, we retell the tale of our initial march from servitude to freedom in the words of the fully liberated Jew bringing his first fruits to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem: “My father, (Jacob), was almost destroyed by the Aramean (Laban), and he went down to Egypt, and he became there a great mighty and populous (rav) nation” (Deut 26:5). The author of the Passover Haggadah then explicates the text with the description presented by the prophet Ezekiel (16:7):

“I caused you to be populous (revavah) even as the vegetation of the field, and you did increase and grow up and you came to excellent beauty. Your breasts were fashioned and your hair was grown – yet you were naked and bare”.

The Hebrews in Egypt were numerous and powerful, but empty and bare of merit, of true character and courage. To achieve this, they had to undergo the suffering of Egyptian enslavement, having their male babies cast into the Nile. They had to place their lives on the line by sacrificing the “god” of the Egyptians to the God of Israel and the world. They had to place the blood of this sacrifice on their doorposts and they had to undergo circumcision, to demonstrate their readiness to shed blood for freedom, for independence, and for their right to worship God in their own way.

With all of this in mind, the author of the Haggadah returns to Ezekiel (16:6): “And I passed over you, and I saw that you were rooted in your blood, and I say to you by that blood shall you live (the blood of circumcision).”

It is your willingness to sacrifice for your ideals that make you worthy of emulation, that made you a special and “chosen” people! And so the author of the Haggadah then returns to Biblical description of Hebrew suffering in Egypt, a suffering which was meant to teach us to “love the other, the stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

Rabbi Yisrael Prager tells how a Nazi guard in

the Vilna ghetto interrupted a secret nocturnal matzoh baking, causing the blood of the Jewish victims to mix with the dough of the baking matzot. The Rabbi cried out, “Behold we are prepared and ready to perform the commandment of the blood of the paschal sacrifice, the blood of the matzot which symbolize the paschal sacrifice!” As he concluded his blessing, his blood too was mixed with the baking matzot.

Lamah? Why such necessary sacrifice? Kakha, because so it is, because such is the inscrutable will of the Almighty. And “ashreiha’am she kakhah lo”, happy is the nation that can say kakhah, happy is the nation which understands that its sacrifices are for the sake of the Almighty, for the purification of their nation, for the world message that freedom and the absolute value that every human being is created in God’s image. And that these are values worth fighting for, values worth committing blood for. May it be God’s will that we now begin our exit from enslavement and our entry into redemption, for us and the entire world.

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RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

All living creatures that exist in our world require nutrition to be able to survive. Human beings, being the most sophisticated of all creatures on this planet, are especially concerned with the food that they eat. Most human beings know that they eat to survive, but there are many, especially in Western society today, that survive to be able to eat.

The variety of foods, recipes and menus that are designed by human beings for their food consumption is almost endless. And medical science has shown us that what and how we eat affects our health, longevity, psychological mood and even our social standing. As such, it becomes almost logical and understandable that the Torah, which is the book of life and of human beings, would suggest and ordain for us a list of foods that somehow would prove harmful to our spiritual health and traditional growth, to prevent man from harm.

In this week’s Torah reading, we are presented with such a list of forbidden and permissible foods available for the consumption by the Jewish people, for them to maintain their status as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. The Torah, in effect, is telling us that the physical foods that we consume somehow affect our inner souls, psyches and patterns of behavior. We are what we eat!

One of the hallmarks of Jewish survival throughout the ages has been the observance of the laws pertaining to kosher food, which takes on not only a physical dimension but an overriding spiritual dimension as well. What Jews eat has become the standard to measure the level of piety and tradition that exists within the national entity of the people of Israel.

The Talmud is of the opinion that eating non-kosher food somehow affects our spiritual senses. Commentators thought that eventually generations of Jews who unfortunately consumed non-kosher food became less charitable with their wealth, talents, and time. I know of no survey or statistical study that relates to this issue. However, in my many years as a rabbi of a congregation and as a fundraiser as well, I have noticed that generations of Jews who have assimilated and are no longer observant tend to be less committed towards charitable Jewish causes that were helped by their kosher food-eating ancestors.

There is no question that the laws of kosher food have contributed immensely to the survival of the Jewish people and the strengthening of Jewish core values throughout the ages. Kosher food was and is the hallmark of the Jewish people and remains a bulwark against the ravages of intermarriage and the adoption of value systems that are antithetical to Torah values and traditional Jewish societal life.

Perhaps even more than having a mezuzah on the doorpost, having a kosher kitchen brought a feeling of spirituality and godliness into the home, no matter how modest its physical appearance and stature may have been. It is ironic in the extreme that in our current world, where kosher food is so readily and easily available, and with so many varieties of Kosher food, which can satisfy any gourmet palate, tragically so many Jews have opted out from the observance of eating kosher in their daily lives. A renewed drive to promote the kosher home in all its aspects is certainly needed. ©2022 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

On the day Aaron assumed responsibility in the Tabernacle, two of his sons, Nadav and Avihu, “offered a strange fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them.” Instantly, “there came forth fire from before the Lord, and devoured them, and they died before the Lord” (Leviticus 10:1, 2).

Moses reacts instantaneously, attempting to comfort Aaron. He does so by stating, “This is what the Lord spoke, saying: through them who are close to Me I will be sanctified [b’krovai ekadesh], and before all the people I will be glorified [v’al p’nei chol ha’am ekaved]” (10:3).

Aaron responds to Moses’s comment by not responding – no words. As the Torah says, va’yidom Ahron (and Aaron was silent; 10:3).

Perhaps the exchange between Moses and Aaron reveals important lessons about comforting those who are suffering, those in pain, those who are

mourning. Often the comforter, with good intentions, seeks to do good, offering sweet words to ease the pain. Moses suggests two classical arguments:

- God only metes out pain on a level one can handle. It follows, the greater the suffering, the greater the person who is suffering. After all, only those on the highest level, able to navigate the most piercing pain, are singled out by God. As Moses says, b’krovai ekadesh.

- Yet another classical argument is that suffering brings glory to the larger community, as God’s name has been publicly sanctified. As Moses says, v’al p’nei chol ha’am ekaved.

Uttered by Moses, these arguments may have merit. But Aaron’s reaction, va’yidom Ahron, indicates that, in his inconsolable state, he was unable to accept Moses’s words, perhaps because the arguments on their merits fell short, or perhaps because, even if they resonated, they were ill timed, as they were offered too soon after the horror.

For me, the message of this exchange is that, when giving comfort, it’s often best not to speak, but to listen, which may explain the law that during shivah, those visiting should wait until the mourner speaks first (Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah 376:1). Comforting another means just being there. Aaron gently shows Moses – and all of us – that, at times of the greatest pain, it is often best to be present but silent – va’yidom. ©2022 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

Divine Justice

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

On the day following Yom Tov (*Isru Chag*), we do not recite *Tachanun* (a penitential prayer recited on all non-festive days). In fact, the custom is not to recite it during the entire month of Nissan. During the same time, we also omit eulogies and *Tziduk Ha-din*. (*Tziduk Ha-din* is a prayer which affirms G-d’s justice and righteousness, and is recited after a death, usually at the funeral.) Nevertheless, the *Encyclopedia Talmudit* cites the observation of the *Shibolei HaLeket* that for mourners on *Isru Chag* “The custom is to recite *Tziduk Ha-din* together (**be-yachad**). The normal way would be more like a eulogy (and thus prohibited).” This makes it clear that there are two styles of reciting *Tziduk Ha-din* at a funeral – either one person reads the words and everyone repeats after him, which is not permitted on *Isru Chag*, or everyone recites it together, which is permitted.

It seems that with the passage of time, people stopped being familiar with these two styles. This leads the *Beit Yosef* (citing the *Agur*) to write, “*Tziduk Ha-din* may be recited only when praying alone (**be-yachid**).”

Accordingly, the custom today is that when praying with a congregation, during the month of Nissan we do not say the prayer of *Tzidkat'cha Tzedek* at Mincha on Shabbat. This is because this prayer is essentially *Tziduk Ha-din* for Moshe Rabbeinu, who died on Shabbat at Mincha time. Thus, reciting it in *shul* would be a communal *Tziduk Ha-din*.

It should be noted that Parshat Shemini records the death of two of Aharon's sons. Aharon reacted with silence ("*Va-yidom Aharon*"). Since Aharon was in effect affirming G-d's justice, perhaps he did so silently because it was during Nissan. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"Moshe said to Aharon and his sons, Elazar and Itamar, do not let your hair grow wild, nor tear your clothing, and you shall not die and bring anger upon the nation... (Vayikra 10:6) On the first day of the Kohanim's service in the Mishkan, Nadav and Avihu went beyond what they were commanded and brought a "foreign fire." They were instantly killed by Hashem. Moshe, here, commanded Aharon and his remaining sons how to conduct themselves at this point. Though normally only a Kohain Gadol would continue to serve despite the death of a close relative, on this day Elazar and Itamar, regular kohanim, were to follow that rule as well.

The Torah states that if they had conducted themselves as mourners, they would die and bring anger upon the nation. Why would that be the case? Why would acting as mourners be grounds for their own deaths? And, even if they did something wrong by mourning, why would it bring anger upon the nation?

We must understand that Elazar and Itamar exemplified servants of Hashem. Were they to act anything but overjoyed about this opportunity, it would appear they did not willingly accept the korbanos of the populace which they offered, which would cause a denigration of Hashem's honor, leading to a dereliction in people's service of Hashem. This would be a source of sin for both the kohanim and the Jews.

However, there is an even deeper aspect to the symbiotic relationship of the kohanim and the Jews. When the kohanim offered the sacrifices for the nation, they achieved atonement and purification for the people they represented. Were they to desist from that due to their mourning, the Jews would be missing that, and subject to Hashem's wrath. But what about Elazar and Itamar dying themselves? Would desisting from bringing the korbanos truly make them deserving of death?

Chazal tell us one reason Nadav and Avihu died was because they did not marry and have children. While this would not be enough of a reason to kill them, when they brought the incense unbidden, they

did not have anyone at home who depended on them. Perhaps, says our Sages, had they had wives and children, the lives of Nadav and Avihu would have been spared so as to prevent any suffering to their families.

The kohanim act as a means to bring atonement to the Jews. They serve a purpose which the entire nation depends on. Had Elazar and Itamar not served in the Mishkan at that time, they'd have lost the protection of "being needed," and might possibly have died as well.

The roles we play in the lives of others are very important to our own lives as well. Our actions must always be guided by how they will affect not only ourselves, but those around us. In that way, we will protect each other and live to serve Hashem with all our ability.

The Bluzhover Rebbe z"l retold the miraculous story of a terrible game the Nazis w"MY enjoyed. They forced the Jewish concentration camp inmates to dig a pit twenty feet across. They then had to jump to the other side. If any of them made it, they could live for another day. The ones that fell into the pit were shot and buried there.

Many took running jumps; a futile effort. The Bluzhover Rebbe walked up to the edge of the pit with a few of his Chasidim, closed his eyes and proclaimed, "We are jumping!" When he opened his eyes, he found himself on the other side of the pit. Next to him, he saw one of his closest Chasidim.

Amazed, the Rebbe said to him, "I know how I made it across. I was holding onto the kapoteh (cloak) of my saintly father and grandfathers. Their holy merit carried me. But how did you make it across?"

The disciple replied with simple faith – "Rebbe, I held on to YOUR kapoteh!" ©2022 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

The Other Kosher Edibles

Most people know that there are kosher laws involving animals. They may even know that a kosher animal must have split hoofs and chew its cud. They may even know that those animals that do not exhibit both characteristics are not allowed to be eaten (e.g., pigs, camels). What may be missing is a knowledge of which birds, insects, reptiles, and fish may be kosher as well. The Torah speaks to each of these categories, yet few, outside of those who are careful about eating strictly kosher, are familiar with what is acceptable from each.

After listing the land animals which are and are not kosher, the Torah turns to those creatures that are found in the water. "This may you eat from everything that is in the water, everything that has fins and scales in the water, in the seas, and in the streams, those may you eat. And everything that does not have both fins and scales in the seas and in the streams, from all the

creeping things in the water, and from all the living creatures in the water, they are an abomination to you. And they shall be an abomination to you, you shall not eat of their flesh and you shall abominate their carcass. Anything that does not have fins and scales in the water, it is an abomination to you.”

Rashi explains that the fins are like wings as they are used for navigation. While some creatures who live in the seas may also have scales, the type of scales defined by the Torah must be able to be removed after death. This specifically eliminates crocodiles and other scaled creatures who live in the water but also crawl on the land. HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch speaks of the “sheketz, abomination” which is more than a “physical loathing, sickness” but a “spiritual, mental disgust.” Hirsch compares this disgust with our disgust of idolatry, another place where the term sheketz is used. He concludes that “eating of it must be in the sharpest contrary opposition to that condition of spiritual mentality which should form the fundamental character of our being.” Hirsch contrasts this with the term tamei, unclean or impure. “Whereas tamei only makes us unfit for holiness, sheketz leads to the very opposite of that condition.”

The Torah continues with the listing of unkosher birds. Many of the names of these unkosher birds are left untranslated by the commentaries, as there are differences of opinion about what more common names today match each individual bird. Though the names are uncertain, several of the names imply a characteristic of the bird rather than its more recognizable name. One such bird is the Shalach, which is translated by Onkelos as “that which casts out fish.” HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that there is no specific statement in the Torah which sets characteristics of these unkosher birds like we find by animals (split hoofs and chew their cud) or by sea creatures (fins and scales). He indicated that we can see a pattern, however, when we examine those birds which are unkosher and compare them to those which were not mentioned and were, therefore, kosher. HaRav Sorotzkin points out four characteristics of these unkosher birds: (1) Like the eagle, it tears the flesh and eats, (2) It does not have an extra upper finger either above the other fingers or below, (3) It does not have a crop, and (4) It does not have a split craw (hard stomach). These are primarily birds of prey, and the Rabbis speculate that this is the reason for their non-acceptance. Still, no specific rule as such is given in the Torah, so any observation of this phenomena only leads to speculation.

After listing the non-kosher birds, the Torah then gives us some generalized terms for creeping things which might also be kosher: “Every flying creeping creature that walks on four legs, it is an abomination to you. Only this may you eat from among all flying creeping creatures that walk on four: one that

has jumping legs above its legs, with which to spring upon the earth. You may eat these from among them: the arbeh according to its kind, the sal’am according to its kind, the chargol according to its kind, and the chagav according to its kind. Every flying creeping thing that has four legs, it is an abomination to you.” The arbeh, the sal’am, the chargol, and the chagav are all different types of locusts. Some Sephardic and Yemenite traditions believe that they know which locusts these are and permit eating them. Ashkenazim have lost that transmitted tradition and no longer accept what they cannot identify.

HaRav Sorotzkin recognized an additional aspect of the listings of kosher and non-kosher species. He explains that the order that is found here, namely, animals, fish and sea creatures, birds, and creeping creatures on land, is the opposite of their order of creation. The first mentioned are the wild and domestic animals which were created on the sixth day together with man. These were distinguished by their red, warm blood. Fish, birds, and creeping creatures were created on the fifth day, without listing an order of their creation. Still, it would appear that our list should place the birds before the fish, since they are more similar to Man and the warm-blooded animals than the fish are. Yet we find that the fish were listed before the birds. HaRav Sorotzkin believes that this is due to the fact that they were also given two signs of kashrut, fins and scales. Again, HaRav Sorotzkin asks why, based on his premise, birds are listed before the creeping creatures since the creeping creatures were given one sign and the birds none. He explains that birds have warm blood and insects do not. In addition, he notes that the skin of birds is much more useful than that of the creeping creatures. Yet there are two forms of creeping animals: smaller, insect-like creatures and larger reptiles. Unlike the smaller insect-like creatures, there are no varieties of the larger reptiles which are kosher. For those two reasons, the creeping creatures are mentioned last in our discussion.

There are many other laws concerning these lesser-known kosher creatures which are similar to the kosher laws of animals. Birds require slaughter just like the animals, and the same disqualifications which could have caused the death of the bird apply. Fish do not require slaughter, but must be caught for the purpose of eating rather than just found dead. The same restrictions against touching the carcasses of animals apply to birds or fish. It is an oversimplification to say that every rule for animals applies to birds and fish, but the major rules do apply.

There is much more to learn about these kosher animals, birds, fish, and creeping creatures than can be covered in a short drasha. Learning Torah is done on many levels, and we may only find a taste here to wet our appetites. May Hashem’s words and ideas turn on that spark in each of us to learn more so that

we may become closer to Hashem. ©2022 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

White Noise

It was the last day of the Mishkan's inauguration. The joy was immeasurable, somewhat akin to the ribbon-cutting ceremony of a cherished king's new palace—in this case, a shrine to the glory of the King of kings and to the splendor of His reign. But in a tragic anticlimactic sequence, the celebration went terribly wrong. The children of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, entered into the realm of the outer limits, the Holy of Holies, the Kodesh HaKedoshim. They offered incense, something they assumed would surely bring joy to their Creator. But it was their own recipe.

Uncommanded, and uncalled for, something went terribly wrong. "A fire came forth from before Hashem and consumed them, and they died before Hashem" (Leviticus 10:1-2). It's hard for us, here, to fathom the pain. Remember that picture of a smiling schoolteacher and her fellow astronauts, waving in anticipation of another successful mission on America's galactic pride and joy, only to be vaporized into a mist of memories plunging toward the ocean in a disastrous fate? The beloved children of a beloved leader on a beloved day in a beloved service were gone in an instant, from glory to death. Yet their own father did not react in open agony, rather only through silence and acceptance. "And Aaron was silent" (ibid v. 3). That silence was not only commended, but extolled. As a reward for that stoic reaction of acceptance, the next command in the Torah is offered directly to Aharon without Moshe, who normally was the principal in receiving Heavenly directives.

Yet despite the praise meted to Aharon for his silence, the nation is commanded to react in a diametrically opposed manner. Moshe commands the nation, "the entire House of Israel shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited" (Leviticus 10:6). Aharon is praised for his silence, yet the nation is told to openly bewail the tragedy. What is the difference?

Back in the 1800's, the Magid of Trisk and Reb Mendel of Vorke were dear friends living next to each other. But, unfortunately Rav Mendel had to move to the other side of the forest, a distance of a half-a-day's walk. Seeing his agony, Reb Mendel's sexton, Moishele, anxiously offered to make the three-hour trip each Friday to deliver correspondence.

And so it went. Every Friday morning, Moishele would set out across the forest and deliver Reb Mendel's letter to the Trisker Magid. He would wait for the Magid to read the letter and reply. Often it would take a while until the Magid returned from his study, eyes red from tears, his quivering hand holding the magnificently crafted response in a special envelope. Moshele would deliver the response to the Vorke

Rebbe, and that letter, too, evoked the same emotional response: tears of joy and meaning filled the Rebbe's eyes.

After a year as a faithful envoy, Moishele's curiosity overtook him. "What possibly can those letters contain? Would it be so bad if I took a peek?" Therefore, one Friday he carefully opened the envelope—without disturbing the seal. He saw absolutely nothing. Just a blank paper rested between the walls of the envelope.

Shocked, Moshe carefully, placed the so-called letter back into the envelope and delivered it to the Trisker Maggid. Like clockwork, the Rebbe went into the study, and a half-hour later, bleary-eyed and shaken, he returned a letter to be delivered to his friend Reb Mendel of Vorke.

At this point, Moishele could not wait to leave the house and race back into the forest, where he would secretly bare the contents of the envelope, hoping to solve the mysterious exchange.

Again, blank paper. Moishele was mortified. "Have I been schlepping six hours each week with blank papers? What is this a game?" he wondered.

The entire Shabbos he could not contain his displeasure. Motzoai Shabbos, Reb Mendel called him in to his study. "You seem agitated, my dear shammas," he asked. "What seems to be the problem?"

"Problem?" he responded. "You know those letters I've been carrying. I admit it. I looked, this Friday. There was nothing in them! They were blank! What kind of game is this?"

Reb Mendel, did not flinch. "The Torah," he said, "has black letters on white parchment. The black contain the words we express. The white contains a message that is deeper than letters. Our feelings are often expressed through black letters. This week, we wrote with the white parchment. We expressed an emotion that transcends letters."

It is very important to realize one cannot equate the reaction required by a mourner to that of the responsive community. Not everyone is on the level to keep quiet. For those who can make their statement of faith and strength through silence, that is an amazing expression. For the rest of us, who are not on that level, we must express our sorrow and exclaim it in a human way as afforded by the dictates of Moshe. ©2001 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

This is the parsha in which Nadav and Avihu make the deadly mistake of offering an incense offering that was not commanded. Just when everything had reached such a great height at the ceremony to inaugurate the Mishkan, they did this thing that caused a complete reversal from joy to mourning, and from religious ecstasy to shock.

The commentators, of course, spend a lot of words trying to explain what happened and why. And of course there is the idea of allilus, Divine pretext to carry out tikun on some level that we do not understand, but which can be traced back to Creation.

From the Talmud, it seems that part of the problem may have been their over-anxiousness to lead the nation. The Talmud says that while walking behind Moshe and Aharon, they would wonder to each other when their elders would pass on and they could take over. In response to that, God said, "Let's see who buries whom!" (Sanhedrin 52a).

It is okay to want to be great. It is the reason that makes the difference. If it is to be honored by others, the Zohar says that is an Erev Rav-like quality (Bereishis 25a). If you want to be great because you just want to be the very best you possibly can, that is a soul-drive. If you want to be great to make a positive difference to society, that is definitely a soul-drive.

A great way to learn about the path to greatness was actually in Megillas Esther last week. Mordechai did not aspire to be great for public praise. He wasn't interested in rising to the top of anything. He was only looking out for the best of his people, and risked his life to do so. If he had died anonymously, it wouldn't have bothered him as long as he knew he had done his best at what he believed God wanted him to do.

But look at where he ended up. In fact, the entire Megillah ends off talking about him and his success. It doesn't even discuss what happened to Esther in the end, just Mordechai. Just as the Torah seems to chronicle Moshe Rabbeinu's rise to prominence, Megillas Esther seems to do the same for Mordechai. The moral of the story: Greatness comes from God. Do your best to be the greatest for the right reasons, and God will take care of the rest. God knows who you are and where you can be found. If you deserve it, He'll make sure you shine for the rest of the world.

The Yerushalmi learns something else from Mordechai's rise to power (Yoma 14a). It compares the redemption of the Jewish People to the rise in power of Mordechai. It says that just as the morning light sparks a bit first and then takes time to get brighter before becoming day (in five stages: Ayeles ha'Shachar, dawn, the eastern sky lights up, sunrise, and noon), likewise the geulah of the Jewish peoples comes little by little.

That's certainly the way it seemed to have worked in Mordechai's and Esther's time. We talk about "v'nehafuch hu," that all of a sudden, the events of Purim turned around in favor of the Jewish people. One moment they were facing down the barrel of Haman's gun, and the next moment they were holding it on Haman. But that's just the way it appeared to us because when the redemption actually started, it was

too small for most people to notice.

How do we know this? Because these are the verses that the Yerushalmi mentions with respect to Mordechai: "Mordechai was sitting at the gate, etc." (Esther 2:21)... "Mordechai sat at the gate of the king" (6:12)... "Haman took the [royal] clothing and the horse, etc." (6:11)... "Mordechai went out before the king in the royal clothing" (8:15), and "There was light and joy for the Jewish people" (8:16)

Now, until the last verse, do you think that anyone said, "Well that's a sign that redemption is on its way!?" If anything, they might have wondered if Mordechai's humiliation of Haman would only anger him more and intensify his hatred of the Jewish people. Sometimes good events are followed by even worse events, and given the spiritual condition of the nation at the beginning of the story, why should they have assumed that God wanted to save them?

But hindsight is not only 20-20, it is also very insightful. The Babylonian Exile had been the first one that the Jewish people had experienced since first becoming obligated in Torah. Everything was new including how redemption worked. Their learning experience was recorded for us to know for the future, because more exiles were eventually on their way, three major ones and other more local exiles.

Unfortunately, the lesson seems to have been lost over time. Again, people do not recognize the redemption in progress because it happens in stages and in amounts that most do not see as part of the final redemption. They're waiting for the grand finish, when everything just seems to turn around so completely for the Jewish people.

Until then, they worry about the direction of history. Until redemption clearly happens, they ignore the signs that it is time to prepare for it and maybe even change locations. They see history as business as usual when in fact it is anything but that. They listen each year to Megillas Esther but they seem to miss its message.

Not good. Not safe. ©2022 Rabbi P. Winston and torah.org

