

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

One of the most difficult elements of the Torah and the way of life it prescribes is the phenomenon of animal sacrifices -- for obvious reasons. First, Jews and Judaism have survived without them for almost two thousand years. Second, virtually all the prophets were critical of them, not least Jeremiah in this week's haftarah.

"When I freed your fathers from the land of Egypt, I did not speak with them or command them concerning burnt offerings or sacrifice." (Jeremiah 7:22; a remarkable statement. See Rashi and Radak ad loc., and especially Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed, III: 32.)

None of the prophets sought to abolish sacrifices, but they were severely critical of those who offered them while at the same time oppressing or exploiting their fellow human beings. What disturbed them -- what disturbed God in whose name they spoke -- was that evidently some people thought of sacrifices as a kind of bribe: if we make a generous enough gift to God then He may overlook our crimes and misdemeanours. This is an idea radically incompatible with Judaism.

Then again, along with monarchy, sacrifices were among the least distinctive features of Judaism in ancient times. Every ancient religion in those days, every cult and sect, had its altars and sacrifices. Finally, it remains remarkable how simply and smoothly the Sages were able to construct substitutes for sacrifice, three in particular: prayer, study, and tzedakah. Prayer, particularly Shacharit, Minchah, and Musaf, took the place of the regular offerings. One who studies the laws of sacrifice is as if he had brought a sacrifice. And one who gives to charity brings, as it were, a financial sacrifice, acknowledging that all we have we owe to God.

So, though we pray daily for the rebuilding of the Temple and the restoration of sacrifices, the principle of sacrifice itself remains hard to understand. Many theories have been advanced by anthropologists, psychologists and Bible scholars as to what the sacrifices represented, but most are based on the questionable assumption that sacrifice is essentially the same act across cultures. This is poor scholarship. Always seek to understand a practice in terms of the distinctive beliefs of the culture in which it takes place. What could sacrifice possibly mean in a religion in which

God is the creator and owner of all?

What, then, was sacrifice in Judaism and why does it remain important, at least as an idea, even today? The simplest answer -- though it does not explain the details of the different kinds of offering -- is this: We love what we are willing to make sacrifices for. That is why, when they were a nation of farmers and shepherds, the Israelites demonstrated their love of God by bringing Him a symbolic gift of their flocks and herds, their grain and fruit; that is, their livelihood. To love is to thank. To love is to want to bring an offering to the Beloved. To love is to give. Sacrifice is the choreography of love.

(The verb "to love" -- a-h-v -- is related to the verbs h-v-h, h-v-v and y-h-v, all of which have the sense of giving, bringing, or offering.)

This is true in many aspects of life. A happily married couple is constantly making sacrifices for one another. Parents make huge sacrifices for their children. People drawn to a calling -- to heal the sick, or care for the poor, or fight for justice for the weak against the strong -- often sacrifice remunerative careers for the sake of their ideals. In ages of patriotism, people make sacrifices for their country. In strong communities people make sacrifices for one another when someone is in distress or needs help. Sacrifice is the superglue of relationship. It bonds us to one another.

That is why, in the biblical age, sacrifices were so important -- not as they were in other faiths but precisely because at the beating heart of Judaism is love: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." In other faiths the driving motive behind sacrifice was fear: fear of the anger and power of the gods. In Judaism it was love.

We see this in the Hebrew word for sacrifice itself: the noun korban, and the verb lehakriv, which mean, "to come, or bring close". The name of God invariably used in connection with the sacrifices is Hashem, God in his aspect of love and compassion, never Elokim, God as justice and distance. The word Elokim occurs only five times in the whole of the book of Vayikra, and always in the context of other nations. The word Hashem appears 209 times. And as we saw last week, the very name of the book, Vayikra, means to summon in love. Where there is love, there is sacrifice.

Once we realise this we begin to understand how deeply relevant the concept of sacrifice is in the twenty-first century. The major institutions of the modern

world -- the liberal democratic state and the free-market economy -- were predicated on the model of the rational actor, that is, one who acts to maximise the benefits to him -- or herself.

Hobbes' account of the social contract was that it is in the interests of each of us to hand over some of our rights to a central power charged with ensuring the rule of law and the defence of the realm. Adam Smith's insight into the market economy was that if we each act to maximise our own advantage, the result is the growth of the common-wealth. Modern politics and economics were built on the foundation of the rational pursuit of self-interest.

There was nothing wrong with this. It was done for the highest of motives. It was an attempt to create peace in a Europe that had for centuries been ravaged by war. The democratic state and the market economy were serious attempts to harness the power of self-interest to combat the destructive passions that led to violence. (The classic text is A. O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests*.) The fact that politics and economics were based on self-interest did not negate the possibility that families and communities were sustained by altruism. It was a good system, not a bad one.

Now, however, after several centuries, the idea of love-as-sacrifice has grown thin in many areas of life. We see this specifically in relationships. Throughout the West, fewer people are getting married, they are getting married later, and almost half of marriages end in divorce. Throughout Europe, indigenous populations are in decline. To have a stable population, a country must have an average birth rate of 2.1 children per female. In 2015 the average birth-rate throughout the European Union was 1.55. In Spain it was 1.27. Germany has the lowest birth-rate of any country in the world. (The Observer, 23 August 2015) That is why the population of Europe is today rendered stable only on the basis of unprecedented rates of immigration.

Lose the concept of sacrifice within a society, and sooner or later marriage falters, parenthood declines, and the society slowly ages and dies. My late predecessor, Lord Jakobovits, had a lovely way of putting this. The Talmud says that when a man divorces his first wife, "the altar sheds tears" (Gittin 90b). What is the connection between the altar and a marriage? Both, he said, are about sacrifices. Marriages fail when the partners are unwilling to make sacrifices for one another.

Jews and Judaism survived despite the many sacrifices people had to make for it. In the eleventh century Judah Halevi expressed something closer to awe at the fact that Jews stayed Jewish despite the fact that "with a word lightly spoken" they could have converted to the majority faith and lived a life of relative ease (Kuzari 4:23) Equally possible though is that Judaism survived because of those sacrifices. Where people make sacrifices for their ideals, the ideals stay

strong. Sacrifice is an expression of love.

Not all sacrifice is holy. Today's suicide bombers sacrifice their lives and those of their victims in a way I have argued (in *Not In God's Name*) is sacrilege. Indeed the very existence of animal sacrifice in the Torah may have been a way of preventing people from offering human sacrifice in the form of violence and war. But the principle of sacrifice remains. It is the gift we bring to what and whom we love. *Covenant and Conversation* is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt"l © 2016 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The Sabbath before Pesach is called "The Great Sabbath" (Shabbat Hagadol) after the last verse of the reading from the prophets (haftara) for that day: "Behold I send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord" – the day of Redemption (Malachi 3:23). It is certainly logical that Elijah, the herald of the redemption, features before Pesach – the "time of our freedom" and redemption from Egyptian servitude.

But what kind of person is Elijah, who will be the "messenger of good news, salvation and comfort" (Grace after Meals)?

The biblical Elijah was a zealot who slaughtered 450 prophets of Baal after a contest at Mount Carmel, and challenged God to punish the Israelites for having rejected His covenant and allowed Jezebel to murder the Lord's prophets (I Kings 19:10). But somehow in Talmudic and folk tradition, Elijah morphs into a benign, grandfatherly figure who drinks from a special goblet at everyone's Seder table, graces every newborn male baby with his presence at their circumcision and frequently appears as a *deus ex machina* to teach important lessons and save people's lives at critical moments.

Just when, why and how did this fiery fanatic become a venerable sage? Let us look again at the biblical text and I believe we'll discover the dynamics of the process.

Elijah lives in Israel under the idolatrous monarchy of Ahab and Jezebel, Baal devotees who murdered the prophets of the Lord. The wrath of God is expressed in the form of a drought which wreaks havoc on the land. Elijah stages a Steven Spielberg-style extravaganza: He convinces King Ahab to invite all the Israelites to the foot of Mount Carmel, where he has the 450 prophets of Baal choose a bull. Elijah takes another bull, and each animal is cut in half and placed on an altar without a fire – one altar to God and one to Baal. The victor will be the person whose altar is graced by fire from on high.

After the better part of a day of fruitless prayers, incantations and orgiastic immolations by the prophets

of Baal, Elijah drenches his offering in water and then calls out to God. A fire descends from heaven, consuming his offering together with the wood, the stones, the water and the earth. The Israelites cry out: "The Lord! He is God!"

Elijah then slaughters the 450 prophets of Baal, clouds gather and a great rain comes down. Elijah is exultant, until he receives a message from Queen Jezebel, who vows that "at this time tomorrow I shall make your soul like one of those [prophets of Baal]."

Elijah is shocked that she does not repent or seek forgiveness for her idolatrous ways. Yet he also understands the shrewdness in her words. After 24 hours, she shall have him killed! Why not immediately? Because it will take the Israelites only 24 hours to forget the immediacy of the miracle. After only one day, the Israelites will forget about God and allow the wicked queen to destroy His only remaining prophet.

Elijah escapes to Beersheba and asks God to take his soul. An angel provides him with food and sends him on a 40-day journey to Mount Sinai. When he arrives, God asks why he has come, and he responds: "I have been a zealot; yes, a zealot for the Lord God of hosts, because the Israelites have forsaken Your covenant; they have destroyed Your altars, they have killed Your prophets and they now seek to take my life as well, I who am now left alone" (I Kings 19:10).

Elijah understands that despite the great miracle he wrought at Mount Carmel, no one has repented, nothing has changed, and his life is in danger.

God then sends Elijah a vision: a great, powerful wind, but the Lord is not in the wind; an earthquake, but the Lord is not in the earthquake; a fire, but the Lord is not in the fire. And after the fire comes a still, silent sound – the voice of the Lord.

God is telling His prophet that people aren't moved in the long term by miracles on a mountain – whether Mount Sinai or Mount Carmel – and that the Israelites will not be forced into submission by dire punishments. After the first revelation at Sinai, they worshiped the Golden Calf, and after the revelation at Mount Carmel, they didn't repent of their idolatry, despite their shouts of "The Lord! He is God!"

The Israelites will be moved only by learning of God's second revelation at Sinai – the glimpse He shared with Moses into His divine essence by the still, small voice of kindness and understanding, by the God of love and forgiveness (Exodus 34:6-8).

And this is precisely what Malachi says at the conclusion of his prophecy. There is the possibility that "the end of days" will be awe-some and awe-ful, replete with war, destruction and the bare survival of the faithful remnant; but the preferred possibility is that the end of days come as a result of national repentance for ignoring the voice of God, and the return of Israel to our heavenly Father in love and gratitude rather than out of fear. Elijah must "turn back the hearts of the parents to their children

and the hearts of the children to their parents" with the still, silent sound of unconditional love. God does not want to "strike the land with utter destruction" at the end of days (Malachi 3:24).

The rabbis of the Midrash go one step further. God is teaching Elijah that the prophet wanted to punish Israel only because he grossly misjudged them when he said, "They rejected Your covenant." Elijah will be "taken to heaven" (II Kings 2: 11, 12), but he will have to shuttle between heaven and earth, he will attend every Pesach Seder where Jews celebrate God's promise of redemption, and be present at every circumcision where Jews demonstrate their willingness to shed blood for the covenant. The prophet will transform his people not by judging (or misjudging) them, but only by loving them with the still, small sound of our Father's unconditional love.

The opening words of this third book of the Bible, the Book of Vayikra, tells us that God first called to Moses and then communicated to him a specific message concerning the sacrificial offerings of the Sanctuary. Why this double language of "calling" first and then "speaking" afterwards? Why not cut to the chase: "And the Lord spoke to Moses from the Tent of Meeting"?

The Talmudic sage Rabbi Musia Rabbah, in Tractate Yoma (4b), explains that the Bible is giving us a lesson in good manners: before someone commands another to do something, he must first ask permission to give the order. He even suggests that before someone begins speaking to another, one must ascertain that the person wishes to hear what he has to say. With great beauty, the rabbis suggest that even God Himself follows these laws of etiquette when addressing Moses; asking his permission before speaking to or commanding him.

The Ramban (Nahmanides) takes a completely opposite view, limiting this double language of addressing to the Sanctuary specifically: "this (seemingly superfluous language of first calling and then speaking) is not used elsewhere (where God is addressing Moses); it is only used here because Moses would not otherwise have been permitted to enter the Tent of Meeting, would not otherwise have been permitted to be in such close proximity to the place where the Almighty was to be found" (Ramban ad loc).

From this second perspective, it is Moses who must first be summoned by God and receive Divine permission before he dare enter the Sacred Tent of Meeting of the exalted Holy of Holies.

This latter interpretation seems closest to the Biblical text; since the very last verses in the Book of Exodus specifically tell us that whenever a cloud covered the Sanctuary, Moses was prevented from entering the Tent of Meeting and communicating with the Divine (Exodus 40:34, 35). Hence, the Book of Leviticus opens with God summoning Moses into the Tent of Meeting, apparently signaling the departure of the cloud and the

Divine permission for Moses to hear God's words.

This scenario helps us understand God's relationship – and lack thereof – with the Israelites in general and with Moses in particular. You may recall that the initial commandment to erect a Sanctuary was in order for the Divine Presence to dwell in the midst of the Israelites (Ex. 25:8); such a close identity between the Divine and the Israelites on earth would signal the period of redemption. This would have been a fitting conclusion to the exodus from Egypt.

Tragically, Israel then sin with the Golden Calf and God immediately informs them that "I cannot go up in your midst because you are a stiff-necked nation, lest I destroy you on the way" (Exodus 33:3). Only if the Israelites are worthy can God dwell in their midst. If they forego their true vocation as a "sacred nation and a Kingdom of priest-teachers" while God is in such close proximity to them, then this God of truth will have to punish and even destroy them. He will therefore now keep His distance from them, retaining His "place", as it were, in the supernal, transcendent realms, and sending His "angel-messenger" to lead them in their battles to conquer the Promised Land (ibid 33:2,3).

As a physical symbol of the concealment – or partial absence – of the Divine (*hester panim*), Moses takes the Tent of Meeting and removes its central position in the Israelite encampment, to a distance of 2000 cubits away (33:7). He then remonstrates with God arguing that the Almighty had promised to show His love by means of His Divine Name, to reveal to him His Divine attributes; and to accept Israel as His special nation (33:11,12). In other words, Moses argues that that He, God – and not an angel-messenger – must reveal His Divine ways and lead Israel (Rashbam on 33:13).

God then responds that indeed "My face will lead" – I, Myself and not an angel-messenger – and "I shall bring you (you, Moses, but not the nation) to your ultimate resting place" (33:14). Moses is not satisfied, and argues that God Himself – His "face" and not His angel-messenger – must lead not only Moses but also the nation! Otherwise, he says, "do not take us (the entire nation) out of this desert". And finally, God agrees that although He cannot be in the midst of the nation, He can and will lead them, stepping in whenever necessary to make certain that Israel will never disappear and will eventually return to their homeland.

God may not be completely manifest as the God of love in every historical experience of our people, and will not yet teach the world ethical monotheism. Israel remains a "work-in-progress" with God behind a cloud and "incommunicado". Our nation, albeit imperfect, still serves as witnesses that the God of love and compassion exists, and orchestrates historical redemption through Israel. God is "incorporated," incorporated, in Israel, the people and the land.

What God leaves behind even when He is in a cloud are the two newly chiseled tablets of stone – His

Divine Torah with the human input of the Oral Law – as well as His thirteen "ways" or attributes: God's spiritual and emotional characteristics of love, compassion, freely given grace, patience, kindness, etc. (Leviticus 34:1-7). And when individuals internalize these attributes – imbue their hearts, minds and souls with love, compassion, kindness, grace and peace – they cause God to become manifest, enabling them to communicate with God "face to face", like Moses. Then the cloud between Moses' Active Intellect and God's Active Intellect disappears, and Moses is enabled to teach and understand God's Torah.

And so, *Vayikra* opens when God perceives that Moses has reached the highest spiritual level achievable by mortals, the cloud is removed from the Tent of the Meeting and God invites Moses to enter it and receive more of those Divine Emanations which comprise our Bible. ©2023 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The parsha of Tzav more often than not coincides with the Shabat preceding Pesach -- Shabat Hagadol, the "great Shabat." At first glance there does not seem to be any inherent connection between the parsha of Tzav and Shabat Hagadol and Pesach. However, since Judaism little recognizes randomness or happenstance regarding Jewish life, and certainly regarding Torah itself, a further analysis of the parsha may reveal to us an underlying connection between Tzav and Pesach.

I feel that this underlying theme lies in the description that the parsha contains regarding the consecration of Aharon and his sons as the priests and servants of God and Israel. Judaism teaches us that freedom equals responsibility. Freedom without limits or purpose is destructive anarchy. The entire narrative of the Torah regarding the construction of the Mishkan and the institution of public worship/sacrifices come to emphasize to the freed slaves from Egypt their newfound responsibilities.

The rabbis cogently and correctly defined freedom in terms of obligations and study of Torah, as opposed to the alleged freedom of hedonism. The consecration of Aharon and his sons coinciding with the consecration and dedication of the Mishkan itself brought home to the Jewish people the requirement of community service and national unity.

Look at the freedom movements that have arisen in the Middle East over the past few years and the chaos and deaths of tens of thousands of people that followed in their wake. The inability to create unity, to develop a moral and tangible national goal mocks all pretenses of positive freedom. Without Aharon and the Mishkan the promise of the freedom of Pesach would have remained permanently unfulfilled.

Part of the lesson of the Great Shabat is that

without Shabat, Jewish freedom is only an illusion. Shabat is truly the epitome of freedom. The absence of workday activities, the sense of family and friends, and of the contentment that Shabat engenders all combine to create a vision of true freedom that is attainable and real.

The Great Shabat that precedes Pesach gives it its true meaning and places the anniversary of our freedom from Egyptian bondage into holy perspective. Freedom to toil 24/7 is only a different form of slavery. When Saturday looks like Tuesday but only more so since school is out and the burdens of car pooling and "having a good time" are even greater, then that cannot even remotely be related to true freedom.

In reality every Shabat is the Great Shabat and the Shabat preceding Pesach is even more so. Shabat Hagadol represents the miracle that blessed our forefathers in Egypt when they took the Paschal lamb and the Egyptians did not object. But the true and ultimate miracle of Shabat Hagadol is Shabat itself. It has preserved the Jewish people throughout the ages in the face of opposing innumerable odds and challenges. It is in the realization of our freedom that we are able to properly appreciate and give tribute to Shabat -- Shabat Hagadol, the Great Shabat that we now commemorate so joyfully and gratefully. © 2023 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

One type of shelamim (peace offering) is the todah (thanksgiving) sacrifice (Leviticus 7:12). Rashi notes that the todah was offered after experiencing a special miracle. He specifies one who has endured a sea voyage, a trip through the wilderness, a prison stay, or recovery from an illness (Berachot 54b). To this day, those who survive difficult situations are obliged to recite birkat hagomel, the thanksgiving benediction at the Torah. Jewish law extends the obligation to include those who are saved from any type of peril.

For Nachmanides, the offering of thanksgiving at exceptional times reminds us that all moments are exceptional. Thus, God's singular intervention should also provide a sense of God's involvement in the everyday. For example, from the splitting of the sea, an event in which God was so obviously manifest, one should come to recognize God's everyday role in containing waters within the boundaries of the seashore (Nachmanides, Exodus 13:16).

That the thanksgiving sacrifice is a type of peace offering is of great import: When acknowledging God, the human being achieves a level of inner peace.

How I remember writing to the Rav, Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, upon his return to class after he lost his wife. After listening to his shiur (lecture), I was

overcome with emotion and wrote to him, expressing my admiration and love. A few days later, he thanked me but graciously told me the note was unnecessary. I responded, "Rebbe, I wrote the letter for you, but even more important, for myself. I had a need to thank you." With a sweet smile I'll never forget, the Rav nodded.

Truth be told, there are two types of thank-yous. There is a perfunctory thank-you – one we say when someone, for example, opens the door for us or gives up a seat. And then there is a deeper thank-you. A thank-you in which the word todah interfaces with the word l'hodot (literally, "to make an admission"). This is a thank-you in which one says to the other, in deep gratitude, I could not have done it without you.

The latter thank-you is more difficult to offer, as the thanker indicates limitation, which is not easy for some to admit as it reflects vulnerability. Notwithstanding, it is important to offer these words to others and to God.

If only we would learn to say the simple words to those who mean the most to us but whom we often take for granted – words like todah, thank you – to our closest of kin and, of course, to God. Expressing gratitude is a recipe for being at peace with oneself. ©2023 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

DR. ERICA BROWN

The Torah of Leadership

Since childhood, I have been mesmerized by the Ner Tamid, the permanently lit ritual lamp in every synagogue that hangs in front of the Aron, or Holy Ark. One of my favorite times of the week then and now is right after Friday night services when everyone congregates in the social hall before dispersing for the night. I often slip back into the sanctuary and sit in the front row for a few minutes by myself. The room is always very dark except for that light. When the synagogue is well-lit, it's hard to see that small lamp and the difference it really makes. To this day, I find it among the most meditative of spaces. It's a place where I go to reflect on the week past. I find in that quiet sanctuary, empty of people, a place of clarity.

In this week's sedra, Tzav, we have the foundational image that is captured in the Ner Tamid of every synagogue: "The fire on the altar shall be kept burning, not to go out: every morning the priest shall feed wood to it, lay out the burnt offering on it, and turn into smoke the fat parts of the offerings of well-being. A perpetual fire (aish tamid) shall be kept burning on the altar, not to go out" (Lev. 6:5-6). Rashi comments that one who extinguishes its flame transgresses not one but two commandments – that the fire of the altar remain lit and that it also never be extinguished. R. Abraham Ibn Ezra explains the repetition differently. The prohibition is

repeated “to add that it shall not go out during the day.” Even when you cannot see it, you must know that a flame is always burning.

The Hizkuni, a medieval French exegete, adds that even when the Israelites were journeying through the wilderness, the flame never went out. If you’ve ever tried walking with a candle, you know how hard it is to travel while holding a flame. One midrash the Hizkuni cites suggests that a metal cover was used to prevent the flame from going out. If you want to maintain the flame, you have to protect it. According to the Talmud, the eternal flame on the altar was used to light the menorah (BT Yoma 45b). One light brings more light.

Maimonides, in his philosophical opus, *The Guide to the Perplexed*, writes about the symbol of a small light as a metaphor for wisdom and the power of parables: “A person let a pearl drop in his house, which was dark and full of furniture. Now this pearl is there, but he does not see it and does not know where it is. It is as though it were no longer in his possession since he can get no benefit from it until... he lights a lamp.” We often find ourselves in the dark – I can only speak personally – but we know a solution lies somewhere in the opacity, and one small light in that darkness makes all the difference.

That light that burns perpetually on the altar and in the synagogue reminds us of the flame that burned but did not consume the burning bush where Moses received his calling. It prompts us to remember the way that Mount Sinai was aflame with God’s presence and also brings to mind the Chanukah menorah as a symbol of optimism amidst oppression that became the logo of the State of Israel. These holy fires are unlike larger, uncontrolled conflagrations that we associate with darker periods of Jewish history, as Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wrote in his column in *The Times*, “Somehow faith outlives every attempt to destroy it. Its symbol is not the fierce fire that burns synagogues and sacred scrolls and murdered lives. It is the fragile flame we, together with our children and grandchildren, light in our homes, singing God’s story, sustained by our hope” (“The Flame of Faith that has Survived all Tyranny,” *The Times*, December 19, 2008).

When we think of those fires that tried to destroy us, we can take comfort in an obscure detail of Jewish law. When wine libations were offered on the altar, one scholar of the Talmud was concerned that the liquid might put out the flame and cites our verse: “A perpetual fire shall be kept burning on the altar, it shall not go out” (Lev. 6:6). The novel conclusion is itself telling: “Extinguishing in a partial manner is not called extinguishing” (BT Zevachim 91b). A sprinkle or trickle of wine is unlikely to put out the fire, even if the flames are temporarily diminished. They will soon come back to their full size and provide the same light and heat they did before. This, too, is a pearl of leadership wisdom to treasure. Our light may become temporarily dimmed by

circumstance, but we must maintain the still, small flame – watched over and protected – so that it will never go out.

Is that not the ultimate function of the Ner Tamid, to let us know as a small people that we must bring light, be the light, and seek out light? That leaders must take a role in stewarding and protecting this light? Is this not what Isaiah meant when he called upon us to be a light to the nations? He was not posturing with spiritual confidence but making a statement of collective obligation: “I the Lord in My grace, have summoned you, and I have grasped you by the hand. I created you, and appointed you a covenant people, a light of nations— opening eyes deprived of light, rescuing prisoners from confinement, from the dungeon of those who sit in darkness (Is. 42:6-7). God holds our hands and points us in the direction of darkness, as if to say, “You are my partner. Now go spread your light.”

Go to where there is darkness, says the prophet, because one small light can make all the difference. The same was said of Moses as a leader: he was like a candle that provided the flame for other candles (Midrash Rabba, Num. 11:17). The world can be a dark, dark place. What darkness needs your light? ©2023 Dr. E. Brown and Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks-Herenstein Center for Values and Leadership

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Consuming Blood

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

The Torah prohibits the consumption of blood and imposes the punishment of *karet* (excision) on anyone who disregards the prohibition. However, there is a disagreement about the minimum amount a person must consume to become liable to this punishment. Most sources state that the minimum is the volume of a *kezayit* (an olive, approximately 20cc). However, in *Yevamot* 114b, the minimum amount given is a *revi'it* (approximately 86cc) – four times the volume of an olive.

In *Responsa Binyan Tzion* (#49), Rav Yaakov Ettlinger was asked a question relating to this law. A person was ill, and was directed by his doctor to drink animal blood daily. To avoid doing something normally punishable by *karet*, Rav Ettlinger advised him to eat less than the minimum amount required for liability. However, it was unclear to the rabbi whether this minimum was a *kezayit* or a *revi'it*. Some say that the two different measurements apply to two different cases: one is the minimum for eating coagulated blood, and the other for free-flowing blood. However, Rav Ettlinger rejected this distinction.

We may resolve this dispute with a text recently printed by Yad HaRav Herzog (publisher of this book), which lists variant readings of Talmudic texts. There we find that even though the minimum amount is a *revi'it* in our standard Vilna Talmud version of *Yevamot* (as well

as in the Soncino and Venice Talmuds, which were the basis of the Vilna Talmud), nevertheless, in six manuscripts the amount that appears is a *kezayit*. The text found in *Beit HaBechirah* of the Meiri (1249-1306), which was not available in the time of Rav Ettlinger, reads *kezayit* as well.

Now that we are aware of these textual variants, we can easily resolve the contradiction without resorting to casuistic distinctions (*pilpulim*). ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

The Shalsholet Chain

The Torah is chanted according to a series of notes, which are called the taamim or trop, depending on one's ancestry. These notes have been determined by the Rabbis, and they are often an indication of the hidden meaning of a word or phrase. Most of the notes occur regularly in the chanting, however there are some notes that occur with such irregularity as to draw attention to the notes whenever they are used. One such note, the shalsholet or chain, occurs only four times in the entire Torah, the Five Books of Moshe. This note is written only in the book form, as no notes or vowels are written on the scrolls of the Torah. A person reading from the Torah must study both the vowels and the notes prior to reading, so that he can ensure that the reading is smooth and correctly done.

The shalsholet is indicated by a squiggle above the word which resembles a reverse double z, one on top of the other. While the sound of the note differs in different communities, it appears that the notes indicate a struggle, pulling from two directions at the same time. If we examine the four words over which this series of notes occur, we will see how this note affects our understanding of those words and the struggles which appear to be taking place.

The first appearance of this note comes from the story of Lot, Avraham's nephew, who went to live in Sodom. The people of Sodom were so evil that Hashem decided to destroy Sodom and the four cities that were partners with Sodom in its evil ways. Hashem sent angels to save Lot and his family because of his relationship with Avraham, and because Lot did not disclose to Par'oh that Sarah was not Avraham's "sister" as Avraham had claimed in order to save his life. Lot was reluctant to leave Sodom, both because he had just been appointed a judge there and because he was considered righteous compared to the people of Sodom but would have appeared a grave sinner if compared to Avraham. The shalsholet is written over the word, "vayitmahmah, and he tarried," thus indicating Lot's reluctance to leave. Eventually, he made the right decision as we see him accompanying the angels out of Sodom.

The second time that we see the shalsholet is when Eliezer was sent to find a wife for Avraham's son,

Yitzchak. Upon arriving at the Well in Aram where Avraham's relatives lived, Eliezer prayed to Hashem for success in finding a bride. Here the shalsholet is written over the word, "vayomar, and he said," indicating a struggle which Eliezer had with asking for Hashem's help. We would not know why Eliezer struggled were it not for the Midrash quoted by Rashi, who tells us that Eliezer had wanted his own daughter to become Yitzchak's wife, but she was excluded because she was a Canaanite slave like Eliezer. Eliezer overcame his reluctance and asked Hashem for guidance to find the right woman for Yitzchak.

The third time that we find the shalsholet is in the story of Yosef after he had been sold as a slave into Egypt. He was purchased by Potiphar, the head of Par'oh's kitchen and also Par'oh's prison. Potiphar quickly appointed Yosef to be in charge of all his household, as Yosef was wise and successful in all his business dealings. The problem arose when Potiphar's wife was influenced by Yosef's beauty and wanted to seduce him. Here the shalsholet is written over the word, "vay'ma'ein, and he refused." We sense here another struggle, and again we would not comprehend the struggle without a Midrash. Yosef understood, through a message from Hashem, that he would have children from Potiphar's household. He did not yet know that when he was eventually made second-in-command of Egypt, he would be given Potiphar's daughter as a wife. Yosef made the right decision and it cost him a long jail term before he was freed.

The fourth and final appearance of the shalsholet in the Torah occurs in this week's parasha, Tzav. When the B'nei Yisrael finished building the Mishkan, the portable Temple of the desert, Moshe began the task of inaugurating the Kohanim to their position as the Priests of the Temple. This inauguration took seven days during which Moshe acted as the Kohanim would in the future by bringing the various sacrifices on the Altar. On the eighth day, the responsibility of the sacrifices was finally turned over to the Kohanim. We find the note shalsholet written over the word, "vayishchat, and he slaughtered," which was the last sacrifice that Moshe brought before turning over this task to Aharon and his sons. Moshe was ambivalent while bringing this last opportunity for him to serve Hashem as the spiritual leader of the people. He was proud that his brother, Aharon, was chosen for this future task, yet he was still reluctant to give up this closeness to Hashem. Moshe made the right decision and this was the final sacrifice that he administered.

There is one further detail about each of these incidents that emphasizes the difficulty of each decision. Along with the shalsholet each time it occurs, the note is followed by another abrupt note called a "psik, a stop." The person who reads from the Torah pauses before beginning the next word. This pause helps us to comprehend the finality of each decision made, and the

consequences of that decision. Lot was petrified to leave Sodom where he appeared righteous and worthy of reward. He knew that he was unworthy, but he could be satisfied that he appeared to be the best among his friends and neighbors. When Lot was forced to leave, his fantasy world of ideas was ended. Eliezer was worthy of having his daughter marry Yitzchak, yet he was still a Canaanite slave even though righteous. By speaking to Hashem and asking for help, he knew that his daughter would be condemned forever to be a slave. His proper choice sealed her fate. Yosef realized that his position was fraught with danger. If he gave in to Potiphar's wife's demands he might be fulfilling Hashem's prophecy to him, yet he knew that this was more likely not the way in which he was to rise to leadership. Still, were he to refuse Potiphar's wife, he would surely be the subject of her lies and thrown in prison. His decision sealed his fate. Moshe had the easiest of decisions, yet his decision would limit his service to Hashem. He loved his brother and knew that this was Hashem's plan, still he had misgivings about relinquishing this service to Hashem and the closeness it provided. His decision was correct, but the finality of his decision was difficult for him to endure.

We each face difficult decisions in our lives, some of which present a definite finality of our past lives. The decision we know that we must make will place additional demands on us that we may be reluctant to fulfill. May we all choose wisely by allowing ourselves to be guided by Hashem's hand. © 2023 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

This is the offering that Aharon and his sons shall offer to Hashem on the day of his anointment, a tenth of an ephah of choice flour..." (Vayikra 6:13) As the Torah goes through the method of offering various korbanos, one of the offerings discussed is the korban Mincha. Just after the Torah explains its ritual, a new section begins and declares that the Kohain Gadol shall bring a daily Mincha offering of 1/10 of an ephah measure of flour, half in the morning and half in the evening, every day.

Not only was the Kohain Gadol to bring this korban, but every kohain, on the day he began to do the avoda, was to bring this meal offering. Not only that, but if he did not bring it, and offered any other korbanos, they were invalid. Why did the Kohanim specifically bring this korban when they came into the position?

The Haamek Davar explains that the Minchas Chavitin contains elements of all four of the meal-offerings, and that each of them represents a character flaw which needs to be rectified. Since the kohanim were to be the influencers of Klal Yisrael, the vanguards of proper behavior, they would bring this offering when they started their service to inculcate this responsibility into them. The Kohain Gadol would do this each day.

Last week, when the Torah discussed the various korbanos a person would bring based on their financial wherewithal, we find that regardless of whether the person brought a large animal, a bird, or simply a grain-offering, it was precious to Hashem. Chazal tell us, "One who does more and one who does less, as long as their hearts are dedicated to Heaven." Rather than looking at the physical offering, we are directed to view the spiritual and emotional aspects of the offering.

The pauper who could not afford a large animal was more likely to be humble of spirit and recognize that all he can give Hashem is his heart. Those who can afford showy sacrifices may fall into the trap of thinking they can buy Hashem's love, and that is a mistake they must avoid.

Perhaps, then, the kohanim, upon their inauguration, were directed to offer the grain offering as if they were paupers; to envision that all they have to offer Hashem is their devotion and selfless service. This would engender proper midos within them, because they would be looking at themselves in relation to Hashem. They would not feel haughty, nor better than other people. They would live their lives with a feeling of responsibility and a desire to serve Hashem and others. They would then be proper role models for the nation.

Additionally, this offering would help them to see things in their proper perspectives. When a poor man brought a meal-offering, it would arouse memories in the hearts of the kohanim of their own inauguration, their first step closer to Hashem on a lifelong journey. They would then be able to receive the poor man's korban with the proper viewpoint, and in this way ensure his offering was valued as it should be.

A man was very excited to have been invited to dine at the home of R' Akiva Eiger z"l, one of the greatest Torah luminaries of his generation. Imagine his embarrassment, then, when during the meal he knocked over his glass and stained the beautiful white tablecloth.

R' Akiva Eiger was not upset and said nothing.

A few moments later, R' Akiva silently kicked the table leg near his seat, shifting the table and tipping his own glass over, adding to the mess.

"Oy," he exclaimed, "This table is so shaky. Look what a mess I have made because it is not even!" His greatness in Torah was matched by his greatness in compassion. © 2023 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

