

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"L

Covenant & Conversation

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹ Rosh Hashanah 16b.

² The Guide for the Perplexed, III: 46.

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

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

Two quite distinct processes were involved on Yom Kippur. First there was kapparah, atonement. This is the normal function of a sin offering. Second, there was teharah, purification, something normally done in a different context altogether, namely the removal of tumah, ritual defilement, which could arise from a number of different causes, among them contact with a dead body, skin disease, or nocturnal discharge. Atonement has to do with guilt. Purification has to do with contamination or pollution. These are usually³ two separate worlds. On Yom Kippur they were brought together. Why?

We owe to anthropologists like Ruth Benedict⁴ the distinction between shame cultures and guilt cultures. Shame is a social phenomenon. It is what we feel when our wrongdoing is exposed to others. It may even be something we feel when we merely imagine other people knowing or seeing what we have done. Shame is the feeling of being found out, and our first instinct is to hide. That is what Adam and Eve did in the garden of Eden after they had eaten the forbidden fruit. They were ashamed of their nakedness and they hid.

Guilt is a personal phenomenon. It has nothing to do with what others might say if they knew what we have done, and everything to do with what we say to ourselves. Guilt is the voice of conscience, and it is inescapable. You may be able to avoid shame by hiding or not being found out, but you cannot avoid guilt. Guilt is self-knowledge.

There is another difference, which explains why Judaism is overwhelmingly a guilt rather than a shame culture. Shame attaches to the person. Guilt attaches to the act. It is almost impossible to remove shame once you have been publicly disgraced. It is like an indelible stain on your skin. Shakespeare has Lady Macbeth say, after her crime, "Will these hands ne'er be clean?"

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

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

In shame cultures, wrongdoers tend either to go into exile, where no one knows their past, or to commit suicide. Playwrights have them die.

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

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

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

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

Judaism is a religion of hope, and its great rituals of repentance and atonement are part of that hope. We are not condemned to live endlessly with the mistakes and errors of our past. That is the great difference between a guilt culture and a shame culture. But Judaism also acknowledges the existence of shame. Hence the elaborate ritual of the scapegoat that seemed to carry away the tumah, the defilement that is the mark of shame. It could only be done on Yom Kippur because that was the one day of the year in which everyone shared at least vicariously in the process of confession, repentance, atonement and purification. When a whole society confesses its guilt, individuals can be redeemed from shame. *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**

"And you shall observe My decrees and My laws which a human being shall perform and he shall live by them; I am the Lord." (Leviticus 18:5) It is fascinating that our Bible commands us to perform the laws and statutes of the Lord, and then it adds "and he shall live by them." Would any moral individual think to perform laws that could cause them to die? Our Sages use this seemingly superfluous phrase to teach a most important lesson, one which distinguishes Judaism from some other religions: "You shall live by these My laws and not die by them. If someone says to you, 'Desecrate the Sabbath or I'll kill you,' you must desecrate the Sabbath; desecrate one Sabbath so that you will live to observe many more Sabbaths" (BT, Yoma 85b).

Our religion revels in life. To be sure, there are instances when one must be ready to die for one's faith, but this is limited to three most egregious crimes: murder, sexual immorality and idolatry. If one says to a Jew "kill X or I'll kill you; rape Y or I'll kill you," the Jew must give up his or her life rather than commit these crimes. Similarly, in times of persecution, Jews must demonstrate that they will not give in to gentile pressure – even pressure unto death – to relinquish their faith. But under ordinary conditions, no Jewish law overrides the preservation of human life.

Even the famous test of Abraham, the apparent Divine command that Abraham sacrifice his son to Him, concludes with Abraham being forbidden to harm his son (Kierkegaard notwithstanding). The most classic commentary, Rashi, even goes so far as to say that Abraham misunderstood the Divine command, that God never meant that he should slaughter his son, but rather dedicate him in life and not in death.

Unlike the Christian symbol of the cross, which eternalized the martyrdom of the founder of Christianity, and far from the glory some militant Islamic groups ascribe to the shahidim—the so-called martyrs who are urged (and handsomely paid) to blow themselves up together with innocent Israelis amid the promise of eternal bliss with 72 virgins—Judaism has never courted martyrdom.

Indeed, our priests-kohanim aren't even allowed to come into contact with a dead body, so consistent are we in promoting Judaism as a life-fostering and this-world oriented religion.

What still remains strange and difficult to understand is that immediately following the biblical mandate to "live by God's laws," in our weekly portion of Aharei Mot comes a long list of prohibited sexual relationships which fall under the rubric of "one must die rather than transgress." If living by God's laws is so important, why follow that stricture with laws for which one must be willing to die rather than transgress? I

believe the answer is to be found in a difficult conundrum suggested by the Elders of the Negev. The Talmud (BT, Tamid 32b) records a discussion between Alexander the Great and the Elders of the Negev: Alexander asked, "What ought people do if they wish to keep on living?" The Elders answered: "They must slay themselves". Asked Alexander: "What ought people do if they wish to die?" Answered the Elders. "They should try to stay alive!"

Permit me to explain. Let us answer the second question first. If an individual lives only in order to keep on living, he is bound to fail, and he will die in the end; after all, I am not aware of any individual who got out of this world alive! Hence if a person wishes to die, let him continue to try to stay alive forever. He will surely die because he will surely fail.

And what ought someone do if he wants to keep on living? Let him slay himself, or at least let his find an idea to live for which is more significant than his own life. Then even if he dies in pursuit of that ideal, his life will have gained ultimate meaning, and he himself will be linked to eternity. Martin Luther King, Jr. put it very well in his Detroit speech in June 1963: "And I submit to you that if a man hasn't discovered something that he will die for, he ain't fit to live."

The only life that is truly meaningful is a life dedicated to an idea which is greater than one individual's life.

Hence, in our portion, "You shall live by My laws," appears within the context of a group of laws for which one must be willing to give up his life. ©2022 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN**Wein Online**

The death of the two sons of Aaron remain one of the great mysteries that the Torah presents to us.

The Talmud and Midrash have advanced several ideas as to why such a tragedy occurred and it may seem to a certain extent it was self-inflicted. The reasons for their failures are listed -- they had drunk too much wine, they never intended to marry and father a family and they wanted their elders to pass on so that they could be the leaders of the people. Over the centuries other ideas of their failings have been enumerated by the commentators.

In the face of all of this we have the record of the Torah itself that their father Aaron was silent. The silence many times is the only acceptable answer in the face of tragedy. The silence indicates the line between the judgment of heaven and the understanding of life that humans bring to it. My thoughts are not your thoughts and my ways are not your ways, that is what the Lord says, and man must adjust to that difficult reality.

So, Aaron is silent. He does not complain, and he does not cast blame. Is he aware of the behavior of

his sons? The Torah does not comment upon that either. Many times, parents really do not comprehend their children nor are they privy to their ambitions or thoughts. But the Torah leaves all of this as an open question as far as Aaron and his sons are concerned. We have no idea as to what he thought of his sons, but we can understand the anguish and pain that he must have suffered on that terrible day of tragedy. Aaron remains a symbol therefore of the ability to continue life even when life has struck a deadly blow to the person. In this respect I always felt that he is a prototype of *Iyov* who also seems to suffer for causes that are unknown and inexplicable. However, *Iyov* complains loudly and demands to know why. Aaron is silent and does not raise his voice either in anger or in doubt.

I can only imagine that the surviving sons of Aaron, Elazar and Itamar, are placed under enormous personal and emotional pressure. The older sons, Nadav and Avihu, were seen as the heads of the family and as the ones who bore responsibility for preserving the line of the priesthood and the holiness of the Tabernacle and Temple. Now they have suddenly been removed from the scene. Elazar and Itamar are the only ones left. Many times in human history we have seen that younger brothers who never expected to become a monarch or have a position of importance and influence, when fate decreed otherwise and made that younger person the head of the family or the leader of the country, rose to the occasion.

It is not that they imitated their older siblings who no longer were present, but rather it was that they were able to assert their own personality and their own inner greatness. One never knows the capabilities and potential that one has until and unless one is challenged by fate and life itself. Potential exists within everyone. The ability to bring forth that potential and to further it and strengthen it and make it beneficial, that is a challenge.

So, included in the tragedy of the deaths of the two older sons of Aaron is the response of the two younger sons who apparently rise to the occasion. Elazar will be the high priest that leads the Jewish people to the land of Israel and Itamar will be the one that is able to organize and correctly finance the building of the tabernacle in the desert and other projects as well. The line of the priesthood of Israel that exists until today runs through Elazar and Itamar who never expected to be the ones that would have to bear that burden and meet that challenge. That is also part of the idea of Aaron's silence. For who knows how people will respond and who knows what potential will be released that will help build the Jewish people and humankind. ©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

Describing the Yom Kippur avodah service, the Torah tells us that Aaron the high priest cast lots upon two goats, “one lot for the Lord, and the other lot for Azazel” (Leviticus 16:8).

Rashi explains the procedure as follows: “One goat he [Aaron] placed on his right hand, the other on his left. He then put both hands in the urn, took one lot in each hand and placed it upon the corresponding goat. One of the lots was inscribed ‘for the Lord’ and the other ‘for Azazel’” (Rashi, Yoma 39a). Ibn Ezra explains that Azazel was a height from which the goat was hurled.

Can it be suggested that on a deeper level, the “lots ritual” reminds us that what appears to be an insignificant action can have significant consequences? The goats, the Mishnah notes, were similar in appearance, height, size, and value. Yet a slight shift of Aaron's hand brought about different destinies for the goats – one to the Lord, the other to Azazel (Yoma 62a).

This idea is expressed in the halachah of *mashehu* (the smallest amount). If, on Passover, a *mashehu* (literally a “something”) – the smallest amount – of liquid chametz falls into a large vat of Passover soup, it renders the entire Pesach dish unkosher. Here, the *mashehu* of the smallest amount becomes most significant, morphing into the *mashehu*, sometimes used in modern Hebrew to mean “wow” – as in, this person or this matter is really something. Really *mashehu*.

So too in life, it is often the case that an infinitesimal amount can be the difference between living and dying, between doing the right and the wrong thing.

The same concept applies in the realm of belief. Note that the Hebrew letter daled of the word *echad* (one) in the Shema is written large. The removal of the tiniest appendage on the top right of the letter would make it a reish, as in *acher* (other) – changing belief in one God to a belief in other or many gods. Hence, the daled is large. The small appendage is most significant.

A story is told of a rebbe who asks his students, how far is east from west? From Jerusalem to New York came one answer; from New York to California came another; from the eastern wall of the study hall to the back wall, someone chimed in. No, said the rebbe. How far is east from west? A *kleine drei* (one little turn) from facing west, and you've changed course and now face east.

This may be the deepest message of the “lots ritual,” appropriately read on Yom Kippur when we reevaluate our lives, reminding ourselves that the slightest movement – word or action – could make the

difference between heaven and earth, between being sent to the Lord and being cast to Azazel. ©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

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"A haron shall offer the bull for sin-offering which is his, and atone for himself and for his family." (Vayikra 14:23) Part of the Yom Kippur service was the fact that the Kohain Gadol had to offer a sin-offering of a bull on behalf of himself. The idea was that it is better for one who has become pure of sin himself to atone for the population, rather than for him to share their guilt and make one large atonement. It is much like a Jewish leader who marches at the head of his troops instead of behind them. He sets an example for them to follow.

This posuk teaches us that the bull must be "his." This is to say, the Kohain Gadol must pay for the bull himself. It cannot be given to him by the community, nor can it be given to him by his fellow Kohanim, even though they did have to give the Kohain Gadol money to ensure he was wealthy. The words, "asher lo, that is his," actually appear three times in this parsha to teach us the above, and that if the Kohain Gadol DOES utilize an animal belonging to others, it is invalid.

Why is it so important that the bull being offered must be paid for from the Kohain Gadol's pocket? If he follows the prescribed procedures of the Yom Kippur service, isn't that enough? What difference does it make who paid for it?

The answer we'd like to suggest is similar to what the commentaries say on the second verse in Sefer Vayikra. "When a man shall bring a sacrifice "from among you." The Sforno explains that the person must sacrifice part of himself (the ego) by humbling himself before Hashem. If not, then he is merely like a fool going through the motions of sacrificing an animal but it is meaningless and unwanted by Hashem.

The role of the Kohain Gadol was not merely to be a messenger of the Jewish People. He was not a hired hand working for someone else, but a Jew who, like everyone else, had to make sure that his relationship with Hashem was where it needed to be and growing stronger every day. Therefore, before he could atone for them, he needed to atone for himself. The only way to do that was to have a personal stake in the process.

If the bull he offered came from communal funds, or even from his fellow Kohanim, he might still remain aloof and detached. Perhaps he might delude himself into thinking he was without sin and was merely atoning for a group of sinners which had nothing to do

with him. Therefore, the Torah tells us that no matter what, the Kohain Gadol's sacrifice has to be personal. It has to come from his own pocket, with his understanding that he is in need of kapara. Then he can act as the messenger of the Jews to help them do what he has already done.

A man was sending his family on a journey and looked to hire a skilled driver for them. He had three candidates, and asked them the following question: "If you were driving along the edge of a cliff, how close could you get and still feel comfortable that you were in control?"

"I could be just a foot away from the edge and be confident," replied the first. The second countered, "I would be fine just six inches from the edge."

The third driver just shook his head. "I don't know about those two," he said, "but I wouldn't trust myself to go anywhere NEAR the edge." The third driver got the job. ©2022 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

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Do Not Follow Their Practices

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

The Torah (Vayikra 18:3) states regarding idol-worshipping non-Jews, "*Uvechukoteihem lo telechu*" ("Do not follow their practices"). Rashi elaborates on these practices: "such as theaters and circuses." The source of this comment is the *Sifra*. "Theaters and circuses" is a reference to arenas and stadiums where idols were worshipped, or lewd and violent entertainment took place.

Some take this to mean that one may not build structures that are similar to these non-Jewish ones and that serve similar purposes. However, if an architect or a contractor were to build a structure which resembles the architecture of a non-Jewish building, they would not transgress the negative commandment of "Do not follow their practices," as long as the building is not such an exact copy that it includes idols! Thus, we should not be disturbed by seeing synagogues built in the Gothic style.

Others, however, maintain that the prohibition is not referring to building structures but rather entering the premises of idol-worship or forbidden entertainment. Accordingly, the verse above may serve as the required admonition to the "rebellious child" (*ben sorer u-moreh*) to avoid excessive drinking and eating, as that is associated with a non-Jewish way of life. (If no admonishment had preceded his sin, the court would not have been permitted to punish him.)

Some derive from the verse, that one may not attend a bullfight in an arena. According to this opinion, the prohibition is not only because it causes pain to an animal (*tza'ar ba'alei chayim*). but because it is cruel entertainment associated with non-Jews.

This opinion is based on our Sages, who understand the verse “Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked” (*Tehillim* 1:1) as referring to those who do not attend the theaters and circuses of idolaters. They add that the next part of the verse, “or stand in the way that sinners take,” applies to avoiding gladiator fights and the like (*Avodah Zarah* 18b).

What options are we left with for our free time? Should we just sleep? Absolutely not! Rather, we should follow the mandate of the next verse in *Tehillim*, “Study Torah day and night.” ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Not Like Egypt or Canaan

Our parasha deals with Man's desire for meat and the temptation to slaughter animals outside of the Bet HaMikdash. Laws are presented for someone who wishes to slaughter without bringing the animal for sacrifice. Later in the parasha is a discussion of arayot, inappropriate uncovering of nakedness and inappropriate sexual immorality. Sandwiched between these two sections of the Torah, is a short paragraph that must draw our attention.

The Torah tells us, “Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: ‘I am Hashem, your Elokim. Like the practice of the land of Egypt in which you dwelled do not do; and do not perform the practice of the land of Canaan to which I bring you, and do not follow their statutes. Carry out my judgments and observe my decrees to follow them, I am Hashem your Elokim. You shall observe My decrees and My judgments, which man shall carry out and live by them, I am Hashem.’”

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin connects this paragraph to the section of the Torah which precedes it and follows it. He explains that the strong desire for meat which may lead a person to bring sacrifices outside of the Temple or to slaughter an animal without offering it as a sacrifice is called basar ta'ava. There is a connection between this desire and the desire for sexual relationships which can also be outside of the confines of the Law which is called ta'avat basar. This is not just a play on words. Just as fatty meat can bring a person to a state of impurity, so an illicit relationship can cause a person to become impure.

The Or HaChaim asks several questions about this paragraph. He begins with the double language of speak and say. Though we have seen this same double language before, we understand that the use of double language may be for different reasons. The Or HaChaim explains that all the mitzvot that Hashem gave to the B'nei Yisrael were mitzvot that man could stand firmly by. This was not true of the laws of family purity and purity in sexual relations. Man was created with a strong desire for sexual relations in order that he would fulfill the first commandment of the Torah to all

mankind, “be fruitful and multiply.” Placing limits on this natural instinct raises man to a much higher spiritual level. HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch explains that animals were also created with this instinct, but Man must limit that instinct within the confines of marriage. The laws which follow this paragraph clearly demonstrate those limits.

The Or HaChaim next asks why Egypt and Canaan were singled out among all the nations. Rashi explains that Egypt was the most degenerate of all nations and the land in which the Jews lived, Goshen, was the most degenerate. The Be'er BaSadeh explains that the people of Goshen “steeped themselves in the immoral practices of their pagan cult in the hope that their pagan gods would thereby keep Israel in bondage. When Israel was conquering the land of Canaan, it was the Canaanites who ... engaged in immoral pagan practices in the hope that they would fend off the Israelite conquest.”

The Kli Yakar disagrees and explains that Yosef wanted to insulate the Jews from Egypt's corrupt practices, and he suggested the land of Goshen because it was the least corrupt place in Egypt. He explains that Rashi spoke of a later time, a time when the Egyptians conquered the entire land of Goshen and began to insert their pagan practices where the Jews dwelled. HaRav Hirsch informs us that the practice of the Canaanites was even worse because it was in the land which Hashem had designated as a Holy Land. The land itself was capable of judging those who dwelled within its borders. The Torah speaks of the Land's ability to spit out those who are unworthy of living within it.

HaRav Hirsch explains the final sentences of our paragraph and the differences between the words “chukot and mishpatim.” “Chukot, in contrast to mishpatim, are the laws and rules for what is to be allowed or forbidden, which are not to be formed by ourselves out of the nature of things and conditions, but which are given from some outer source.” Man is given Laws by Hashem as opposed to his seeking rules from his observance of nature. When pagans, such as the Egyptians and Canaanites, “worshipped the animal life of instinct,” this led men to follow unnatural practices. They failed to understand that animal instinct was also limited by Hashem to sexual relations with only their own species. Man is to master all his instinctive urges through his free will, and that mastery elevates him to “a holy, morally free act of service to Hashem.” For non-Jews, there are two categories of these laws: (1) such practices and customs which are connected with non-Jewish polytheistic or immoral purposes and ideas, and (2) non-Jewish customs and practices for which there are no recognizable, reasonable, or permissible reasons.

Mishpatim are social laws, and Hashem has declared for us that only His Law can regulate one's

social and moral life. Most of the time in the Torah, mishpatim are listed before chukot since Man's interaction with others is often emphasized over rules and laws which carry no explanation but require strict observance as Hashem's decree. HaRav Hirsch explains that "this is surely to tell us that the social order itself can not exist without this moral order, and that the laws of justice and rights which Hashem wants to have respected and practiced as the basis of His human society, presupposes people who have been conceived, born, brought up, and living under the regime of His moral sexual and family laws." Torat Kohanim explains that mishpatim are laws which had they not been given, would still be sought out as necessary for life. Chukot are normally given to combat one's temptations that our materialistic nature and a non-Torah world would remonstrate against.

We live today in a world that has turned morals upside down. Actions which Hashem has decreed to be immoral are passed off as "normal" behavior and, in some cases, desirable. Judaism makes a distinction between the sinner and the sin. The sinner may face many different temptations in life, some more difficult to resist than others, but only one's actions are an abomination, not the person. The punishment for these actions is most often through the hand of Hashem, not through the courts of Man. Still, Judaism requires that we refrain from any public display of those actions, lest the courts be forced to punish the sin. We must not let the influence of our modern-day Egypt and Canaan challenge our adherence to Torah Laws and values. Our moral standard is the Torah and Hashem alone.

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RABBI DONIEL TRENK

Don't Come Too Close to Me

When I was in law school, I remarked to a frum classmate how there's so much opportunity for Kiruv, outreach to non-observant Jews, in our university. Many students were unaffiliated and had only a superficial understanding of their heritage. While they were familiar with fasting on Yom Kippur and the tradition of gathering for a Passover dinner (in the case of one student, a Passover brunch!), almost none of them had heard of Purim, nor Shavuos. They never saw a Mishnayos or Gemara, let alone studied from one. As a result, there was so much to teach, enlighten and inspire these lost souls, modern-day Tinukei She'nishba.

You can imagine then how stunned I was when my frum friend sarcastically replied: "I don't believe in Kiruv; I believe in Richuk."

At first, I thought he was being facetious, but quickly realized he was serious. Even more, he believed many frum people felt just the same! My

shock, in part, came from being raised in a home that highly valued Kiruv. We hosted countless Baalei Teshuva at our Shabbos table, including those just beginning their journey. In contrast to my personal experience, how could a frum Yid utter such cynical words as "I believe in Richuk"?

Yet, on second thought, was it possible that my law school friend's flippant remark was not as off-base as I previously believed (nor purposefully obnoxious)?

Upon closer analysis, we may find that the otherwise positive act of Kiruv, indeed has a dark side. To take one example, who's to say that the reverse won't occur, that the "Mekarev" won't be influenced by the one he's seeking to bring close? Likewise, what about the concept of "Oy l'Rasha, Oy l'Shcheino," that we're influenced by those we associate? Does Kiruv not pose a fatal risk to the Mekarev? Like my law school friend, perhaps we all should believe in Richuk.

As it turns out, in Parshas Acharei Mos, there are two sections - seemingly unrelated to one another - that reflect negative, even sinful behavior, associated with "Kiruv". First, regarding the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, and second, concerning the arayos prohibitions.

By Nadav and Avihu, the pasuk states they died, "B'Korvasam lifnei Hashem", because of their "coming close to Hashem." Ironically and tragically, their intended act of Kiruv led to just the opposite, the ultimate "Richuk," death. Then, at the end of the Parsha, we read of the forbidden relationships, the "arayos." Here, we find Kirvah associated with the worst human behavior. The pasuk states: "Lo Tikravu l'galos Erva," do not come close to those prohibited to you. This crime demands no less than "Yeharog v'lo Yaavor."

Clearly, something is lurking in the act of Kiruv that may prove lethal. What is it?

The common denominator between the Kirvah of Nadav v'Avihu, and that of Arayos, is how they're both acts of impulsivity. We may label this as "Bad Kirvah", the kind lacking discipline and restraint. "Bad Kirvah" comes from the unrestrained desire to enter the holiest of places, whether G-d's inner sanctum or the intimate relationship between man and wife. In turn, the impulsive nature of "Bad Kirvah" leads to the ultimate Richuk.

It is no coincidence that the word Kiruv shares the same shresh as Korban. True and lasting Kirvah, to Hashem or between spouses, can be found only in those who sacrifice. It must consist of labor (labor of love); fruitful relationships require commitment, loyalty, and devotion. Otherwise, they are degraded to a place "ervah", raw and unrefined impulse.

Only through self-sacrifice, with the offering of a figurative korban, can an intimate relationship be formed in Kedusha. To be Karov, both Lifnei Hashem and one's spouse, requires a single-minded, dedicated Avodas Ha'Chaim. © 2022 Rabbi D. T. Trenk

RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY**TorahWeb**

Seeing and speaking play a pivotal role in the process of evaluating tzora'as. The phrase, "v'ra'ah hakohen -- and the kohen will see", appears in both Tazria and Metzora numerous times. A metzora can only begin his purification when the kohen sees that the tzora'as has healed. The kohen seeing the tzora'as is so integral to ascertaining its status that the one cannot report to the kohen with certainty that he himself has seen tzora'as, rather the Torah insists that he merely state "k'negah nirah li b'bayis -- what seems like tzora'as is in my house."

The second critical component in deciding an issue of tzora'as is the kohen's speech. Even if the kohen is convinced that it is tzora'as that he is seeing, as long as a formal declaration hasn't been made the person's clothing or house remains pure. Thus the procedure for declaring the house to be impure is delayed until its contents have been emptied to avoid their becoming tamey as well, thereby avoiding an unnecessary loss of possessions for the homeowner.

What message is being sent to the metzora as he observes the eyes and mouth of the kohen deciding his future? He is being taught the lesson that he most needs for his spiritual improvement: it was his eyes and mouth that brought the metzora to this state.

Chazal speak of the deficiency of the "eyes" of the metzora. His jealousy upon seeing others' successes caused him to speak evil. There is a direct correlation between these sins of sight and speech, and as such the metzora must now learn the power of sight and speech. Just as he caused harm by looking and speaking evil about others, his home, clothing, and even his body are being scrutinized by the eyes and mouth of the kohen.

Our eyes and mouths are not only capable of harm, but can also be utilized for great good. The central theme of the seder night is v'higadeta l'bincha. The telling of yetzias Mitzrayim to our children is accomplished by using our eyes and mouths properly. "Ba'avor zeh", one sees the korban Pesach, matzoh and maror and formulates the story around these visual reminders. Chazal instituted many practices at the seder so the children will see and ask.

Not only is the annual mitzvah of sippur yetzias Mitzrayim done through the power of sight and speech, but our entire mesorah is transmitted using these two powerful vehicles. We must show our children what a life of Torah is. They must see with their own eyes what Torah means to us. The image of how we learn, daven and observe mitzvos must accompany them throughout life. Even Yosef had to conjure up the image of his father from his youth to enable him to withstand the challenge of an alien environment. We teach our children by transmitting the words of Torah from our

mouths to theirs. Accompanying this oral transmission are the powerful images we show our children.

Our potential to use sight and speech is so great, therefore we must always assure that our eyes and mouths are fit for this monumental task. We must be certain that we and our children look with an ayin tov and our mouths utter lashon tov to enable us to use the gifts of sight and speech for the wonderful tasks for which they were created. ©2014 Rabbi Z. Sobolofsky & The TorahWeb Foundation, Inc.

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER**Weekly Dvar**

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

Imagine walking into a dark room for the first time. Not knowing one's way or one's place, one trips over the furniture, unaware of which way to turn. However, after days and weeks and months and years, when one walks into that very same dark room, although the darkness still exists, with time we learn how to negotiate the furniture and we can make our way. This week's Parsha reminds us that after life ends (Acharei Mot), there can always be Kedoshim -- a sense of continuum that is expressed through holiness. How so? The challenge of death is to keep the person who has died alive in spirit. Indeed the Talmud says, there are some people who are actually living yet are not really alive -- they're only going through the motions. On the flip side, there are others who, although physically dead, continue to live through the teachings they left behind and through those whom they have touched in life. The goal is to live a life of character, purpose and meaning, and let those that have passed live through our actions. ©2016 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

