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Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"L

Covenant & Conversation

Among the sacrifices detailed in this week's sedra is the korban todah, the thanksgiving offering: "If he offers it [the sacrifice] as a thanksgiving offering, then along with this thanksgiving offering he is to offer unleavened loaves mixed with oil, unleavened wafers spread with oil, and loaves of fine flour well-kneaded and mixed with oil." (Lev. 7:12).

Though we have been without sacrifices for almost two thousand years, a trace of the thanksgiving offering survives to this day, in the form of the blessing known as Hagomel: "Who bestows good things on the unworthy", said in the synagogue, at the time of reading of the Torah, by one who has survived a hazardous situation.

What constitutes a hazardous situation? The sages (Berakhot 54b) found the answer in Psalm 107, a song on the theme of giving thanks, beginning with the best-known words of religious gratitude in Judaism: Hodu la-Shem ki tov, ki le-olam chasdo, "Give thanks to the Lord for His lovingkindness is forever".

The psalm itself describes four specific situations:

1. Crossing the sea: "Some went out on the sea in ships; they were merchants on the mighty waters... They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths; in their peril their courage melted away... Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he brought them out of their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed."

2. Crossing a desert: "Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle. They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress."

3. Recovery from serious illness: "They loathed all food and drew near the gates of death. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. He sent forth his word and healed them; he rescued them from the grave."

4. Release from captivity: "Some sat in darkness and the deepest gloom, prisoners suffering in iron chains... Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress. He brought them out of darkness and the deepest gloom and broke away their chains."

To this day, these are the situations of hazard (many nowadays include air travel as well as a sea voyage) on which we say Hagomel when we come through them safely.

In his book A Rumour of Angels, the American sociologist Peter Berger describes what he calls "signals of transcendence"-phenomena within the human situation that point to something beyond. Among them he includes humour and hope. There is nothing in nature that explains our ability to reframe painful situations in such a way that we can laugh at them; nor is there anything that can explain the human capacity to find meaning even in the depths of suffering.

These are not, in the classic sense, proofs of the existence of God, but they are experiential evidence. They tell us that we are not random concatenations of selfish genes, blindly reproducing themselves. Our bodies may be products of nature ("dust you are, and to dust you will return"), but our minds, our thoughts, our emotions-all that is meant by the word "soul"-are not. There is something within us that reaches out to something beyond us: the soul of the universe, the Divine "You" to which we speak in prayer, and to which our ancestors, when the Temple stood, made their offerings.

Though Berger does not include it, one of the "signals of transcendence" is surely the instinctive human wish to give thanks. Often this is merely human. Someone has done us a favour, given us a gift, comforted us in the midst of grief, or rescued us from danger. We feel we owe them something. That "something" is todah, the Hebrew word that means both "acknowledgement" and "thanks".

But often we sense something more. It is not just the pilot we want to thank when we land safely after a hazardous flight; not just the surgeon when we survive an operation; not just the judge or politician when we are released from prison or captivity. It is as if some larger force was operative, as if the hand that moves the pieces on the human chessboard were thinking of us; as if heaven itself had reached down and come to our aid.

Insurance companies tend to describe natural catastrophes as "acts of God". Human emotion does the opposite. God is in the good news, the miraculous survival, the escape from catastrophe. That instinct-to

offer thanks to a force, a presence, over and above natural circumstances and human intervention-is itself a signal of transcendence. That is what was once expressed in the thanksgiving offering, and still is, in the Hagomel prayer. But it is not just by saying Hagomel that we express our thanks.

Elaine and I were on our honeymoon. It was summer, the sun was shining, the beach glorious and the sea inviting. There was just one problem. I could not swim. But as I looked at the sea, I noticed that near to the shore it was very shallow indeed. There were people several hundred yards from the beach, yet the water only came up to their knees. What could be safer, I thought, than simply to walk out into the sea and stop long before I was out of my depth.

I did. I walked out several hundred yards and, yes, the sea only came up to my knees. I turned and started walking back. To my surprise and shock, I found myself suddenly engulfed by water. Evidently, I had walked into a deep dip in the sand. I was out of my depth. I struggled to swim. I failed. This was dangerous. There was no one nearby. The people swimming were a long way away. I went under, again and again. By the fifth time, I knew I was drowning. My life was about to end. What a way-I thought- to start a honeymoon.

Of course someone did save me, otherwise I would not be writing these lines. To this day I do not know who it was: by then I was more or less unconscious. All I know is that he must have seen me struggling. He swam over, took hold of me, and brought me to safety. Since then, the words we say on waking every day have had a deep meaning for me: "I thank You, living and enduring God, for You have restored my life to me: great is Your faithfulness." Anyone who has survived great danger knows what it is to feel, not just to be abstractly aware, that life is a gift of God, renewed daily.

The first word of this prayer, Modeh, comes from the same Hebrew root as Todah, "thanksgiving". So too does the word Yehudi, "Jew". We acquired the name from Jacob's fourth son, Judah. He in turn received his name from Leah who, on his birth, said: "This time I will thank [some translate it, "I will praise"] God" (Gen. 29:35). To be a Jew is to offer thanks. That is the meaning of our name and the constitutive gesture of our faith.

There were Jews who, after the Holocaust, sought to define Jewish identity in terms of suffering, victimhood, survival. One theologian spoke of a 614th commandment: You shall not give Hitler a posthumous victory. The historian Salo Baron called this the "lachrymose" reading of history: a story written in tears. I, for one, cannot agree. Yes, there is Jewish suffering. Yet had this been all, Jews would not have done what in fact most did: hand on their identity to their children as their most precious legacy. To be a Jew is to feel a sense of gratitude; to see life itself as a gift; to be able to live through suffering without being defined by it; to give hope the victory over fear. To be a Jew is to offer thanks. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly sponsored by the Schimmel Family in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel zt"l*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"And the Lord spoke to Moses saying: 'Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying this is the law of the sin offering: At the very same place where the whole burnt offering shall be slaughtered, there shall the sin offering be slaughtered before the Lord; it is the Holy of the Holy." (Leviticus 6:17, 18) It seems rather strange that the "whole burnt offering," which represents total dedication to God and is the highest expression of complete commitment, is to be offered in the very same place where the transgressor brings his sin offering. Would it not have been more logical for there to have been two separate places for these two very separate types of sacrifices? Remember that the very first whole burnt offering was the lamb which father Abraham brought as a substitute for Isaac, the lamb which has become for all time the symbol of consummate dedication to God. So why mix and match two such different individuals on two such different ends of the religious spectrum? And why does our biblical verse conclude with the words "Holy of the Holy," which seems to refer not only to the whole burnt offering but also to the sin offering?

My first response would be that this is precisely the point that our Bible is trying to make, a Bible which is anxious to preserve the anonymity of the sinners, who must express their sin to God but not necessarily to anyone else. Once the sinner brings his sin offering to the very same place that the dedicated individual brings his whole burnt offering, no onlooker could ever condemn an individual because he saw him or her offering a sacrifice in a particular place within the Temple precinct.

In addition, the Torah is teaching us about the range of the human personality. One day you're a vice president and the next day you're typing as an office temp, scrounging to make a dollar. One day you're holy, kadosh, and the next day you're mired in unscrupulous behavior. The individual bringing the sin offering today might well bring a burnt offering tomorrow!

Last, the sin offering and the burnt offering are brought in the same spot because in essence they're not that far apart. It was the sweet Psalmist King David who taught, "From the depths do I call out to thee, O God" (Ps. 130:1). It is only when an individual descends to rock bottom that he realizes the necessity of a divine anchor. Sin can often lead to salvation. The Baal Shem Tov taught that the seed must first rot in the ground

before it can begin to flower.

Shortly after my aliyah, when attempting to learn about Israeli society, I gave a lecture at an Israeli prison with nearly four hundred incarcerated men. On the evening of the lecture, I found out my competition was a "shoot 'em up" action-packed cowboy and Indian John Wayne movie. Perhaps fifty inmates were at the cinema while more than two hundred who came to hear the rabbi.

Where does a rabbi turn in search of a subject when he's placed in front of an audience he never dreamed would want to hear a Torah talk? The answer, of course, is the portion of the week, and since that week happened to be Shemot, naturally I scoured my memory for things to say about the children of Jacob in exile. But someone interrupted me and asked if I'd mind speaking about the previous week's reading, Vayechi. When I asked why, he explained that they loved to hear about Joseph, since Joseph had also been in prison and had been freed! Indeed, it had been in anticipation of hearing about Joseph that so many inmates had come to a Bible lecture instead of a movie about the Wild West.

Some of the prisoners had sauntered in bareheaded, very tough-looking in their garb which emphasized muscle more than anything else, while others wore yarmulkes and tzitzit tucked outside their pants. The contrast was stark, but the intensity of involvement came from all camps. It was an amazing audience, unlike anything I'd ever experienced before.

After the class, we davened Ma'ariv, the evening prayer, and I must confess that I hadn't been so moved since the previous Yom Kippur, and this was just an ordinary week night. I realized that in jail, every day must have an element of Yom Kippur, where sin and punishment are one's daily fare.

The man leading the prayers was a Sephardic Jew who said the words with fear and trembling, his lips enunciating each syllable as if he were carving stone with his teeth. The davening must have taken more than half an hour, three times the usual length. Afterwards, I asked him where he derived his power of prayer and concentration. He told me the following story.

One day he came home unexpectedly and found his wife in bed with his best friend – with their two-month-old baby daughter between them. Since he was employed as a guard, he always carried a gun. He couldn't control his angry passion and meant to shoot at his friend, but actually killed his own child. Now he was sentenced to life imprisonment. He descended into a deep depression and even attempted an unsuccessful suicide. His wife left him, his parents wouldn't even visit him. And then a visiting rabbi, a Moroccan Chacham, lifted him out of it.

The rabbi told him two things: First, he said, apparently you made a mess of this world. But this world is only temporary; the next world is of the spirit, is timeless. This world is really a preparatory vestibule for the ultimate living room of eternal life. And what better place for one's preparation than a prison devoid of many temptations which only cause the individual to fall into an abyss of impurity?

Second, he had felt totally isolated and alone with no one coming to visit him. After all, he had killed his baby! So the rabbi further explained that one of God's descriptive names is Rachum, literally "Compassionate One," a term which comes from the Hebrew word rechem, womb. What is the connection? A mother has no difficulty diapering her baby, accepting the one who emanated from her womb with all of its dirt. After all, the baby is an inextricable part of her – and we each accept ourselves! The mother even kisses the baby as she diapers it. So does the Almighty accept all of His children wherever they may be – physically and spiritually. God will always come to visit you; He will embrace and kiss you, no matter what you have done. He is the God of unconditional love, both and before after you sin. You must only let Him in…!

I came to jail during the week of Shemot and ended up speaking about Vayechi, but what I received from the prisoner was an insight into Tzav: How a prisoner's sin offering can help him feel the deep anguish he should feel about the crime he committed, but also how that very sin offering can lead to a whole new perspective about God and the world which can literally turn sinner into saint.

Perhaps this is what our sages mean when they teach: "Where the penitent stands even the most righteous cannot stand" (Berakhot 34b). *The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin's book Vayikra: Sacrifice, Sanctity & Silence, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid and available for purchase* at bit.ly/RiskinVayikra.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

This year, as is true in most years of the Jewish calendar, the Torah reading of Tzav coincides with the Shabbat preceding Pesach – Shabbat Hagadol. Since on a deep level of understanding there are really no coincidences in Torah matters, the connection between Tzav and Shabbat Hagaol should be explored and explained.

The word "tzav" is one of a mandatory command. It does not present reasons or explanations and does not brook discussion or argument. It is representative of military discipline, of service to a higher purpose even if all of the participants in the project are not really aware of the workings of that higher purpose. A necessary part of living in society is the mandatory obligations, which are part of everyone's

life. If it were not for these rules, mores and practices imposed upon us, life would become so chaotic as to be unlivable. It is the "tzav" part of life that allows all of the other more freedom-of-choice opportunities to be present in our lives. An ordered society demands that there be commands, not only recommendations or suggestions. There is an understandable reflex built into our emotional system that resists and resents commands from others. Any parent of a three-year old can easily testify to the truth of this observation. Nevertheless, the young child must eventually respond to commands in order to grow, mature and become a successful human being. So, "tzav" plays a vital role.

Perhaps there are no two areas of Jewish life and law that are as complexly intertwined with mandatory commands and laws, as are Shabbat and Pesach. The concepts behind these holy days and their observances represent noble values – serenity, leisure, freedom and independence. But noble ideas alone, without detailed instructions as to their realization, are useless in a practical sense. The sons who appear in the Torah and the Haggadah all ask the same question – "What relevance do these laws have in our time?" Is it not sufficient that we honor the ideas that Shabbat and Pesach represent and then ignore all the mandatory commandments that accompany these days, their values and ideals. Without mandatory commandments no commemoratory day, no matter how well meaning and well planned will stand the test of time and changing circumstances. It is the "tzav" component of Shabbat and Pesach that make this Shabbat the Shabbat Hagadol – the great Shabbat that it is.

It is an historical fact that those movements and individuals that ignored or rejected mandatory observances associated with Shabbat or Pesach eventually slipped out of Jewish life and continuity entirely. Again, without "tzav" there can be no Shabbat Hagadol. This is the basic issue that divides much of the Jewish world today. The avoidance of mandatory commandments, attractive and popular as this idea may initially appear, is a sure recipe for Jewish extinction. Shabbat Hagadol comes to remind us of this lesson.

Shabbat shalom and Chag kasher v'sameach!

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.

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

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*).

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

The Hard Fats

Parashat Tzav describes the procedure for each of the offerings brought on the Altar to Hashem. Different offerings had different requirements for the place they were slaughtered, where the blood of the offering was sprinkled or poured on the Altar, and which parts of each animal offering were placed on the fire of the Altar. One standard, however was true for all the offerings: the special fats called cheilev (hard fats) were not to be eaten. These fats were found covering various organs and were to be burned on the Altar. One must not misunderstand and think that cheilev refers to all fat. There is a recognizable difference between regular fat and the fat which was called cheilev.

The Torah states concerning the asham (guilt) offering, "This is the law of the guilt-offering; it is most holy. In the place where they shall slaughter the olah-offering shall they slaughter the guilt-offering; and he shall throw its blood upon the Altar, all around. And he shall offer all of its fat (cheilev); the fat tail and the fat that covers the innards; and the two kidneys and the fat that covers them, which is on the flanks; and he shall remove the diaphragm as well as the liver, as well as the kidneys. The Kohein shall cause them to go up in smoke on the Altar, a fire-offering to Hashem; it is a guilt-offering." HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the fat that is designated as cheilev, hard fat, "is set aside by the body of the animal so as to sustain itself in time of deprivation." Regular fat is integrated within the flesh, whereas cheilev is "set apart unto itself and covered with a thin membrane, which is easily peeled off."

Rashi explains that the eimurim for the asham offering were not specified in last week's parasha, Vayikra. This was not the case for the other types of sacrifices, the olah (elevating), chatat (sin), or the shelamim (peace). HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that the asham offering was a collection of six different categories of guilt: theft (swearing falsely to keep money belonging to someone else), me'ilah (for making personal use of a sacred object), shifcha charufah (sinning with a betrothed-maidservant of a Jewish slave), nazir (brought by a nazir who became impure from a human corpse), metzora (brought upon his purification), and asham talui (brought in a case of doubt whether a sin was committed). HaRav Sorotzkin explains that it would have been unnaturally long to list each category together with their eimurim.

HaRav Hirsch explains that the eimurim (kidneys, the cheilev (fats), the diaphragm, part of the liver, and fatty tail when applicable of the offering) form one idea. "They all belong to the "vegetative" system of the organs of digestion and reproduction. The diaphragm alone, which forms the boundary between the "vegetative" and "animal" systems, can also represent the "animal" functions." In this context, however, it represents the "vegetative" system, protecting the digestive organs and as storage against future needs for nourishing fluids. "It is the saved-up riches of the animal. Hence, we find cheilev as a metaphor for the richest and the best."

Later in this same section dealing with the asham offering, the Torah speaks again about cheilev, "Speak to the B'nei Yisrael saying: 'Any fat (cheilev) of oxen, sheep, or goats – you shall not eat. The fat of an animal that died and the fat of an animal that had been torn (treifa) to death may be put to any use; but you shall not eat it. For anyone who eats the fat of animal species from which one may bring a fire-offering to Hashem – the soul that eats will be cut off from its people.'" The Torah continues and makes the same statement about blood. "You shall not consume any blood, in any of your dwelling places, whether from foul or from animals. Any person who consumes any blood – that soul will be cut off from its people."

HaRav Hirsch explains the importance of the eimurim and the cheilev. "With the conclusion of the service of the blood (sprinkled on the Altar), the

atonement is completed; the nefesh (soul) of the one seeking atonement is re-established on the basis of Judaism in the Sanctuary. Then, through the burning of the eimurim, the nefesh learns the consequence of this reinstatement: Henceforth, even cheilev and clayot (kidneys) and yoteret hakaveid (the parts of the liver) – i.e., even material aims and aspirations – can be raised out of the realm of abject bodily desire; even they can, and should, fuel the fire of Torah. Past error will not stand in the way of a pure and joyous future. Rather, the "gifts (eimurim and cheilev)" of the sin offering, like the gifts of the shelamim (peace) offering, are to be surrendered joyfully and happily to the power of Hashem's guidance…. Subjecting the cheilev and clayot to the ruling power of Hashem's fire is the essence of rectification of sin, which disturbs one's relationship to Hashem's Torah."

Still, what makes the cheilev so important that it is consistently offered on the Mizbeach, the Altar? According to HaRav Hirsch, an example of this special application for the cheilev is the Par Kohein HaMashiach (the sin offering of the Kohein Gadol) and the Par HaElem Davar (the sin of the community which becomes obscure in their eyes). The Torah uses the term "yarim, raises up. The reason for this may be as follows: In the case of Parim haNisrafim, Oxen that are burned completely, only the chalavim reach their true destination – as they attain achilat mizbeach, being consumed on the Altar, like chelvei haSh'lamim, the fats of the Peace Offering. The rest of the offering, however, is burned outside of the camp. HaRamat HaChalavim, the lifting out of the fats, is the antithesis of that burning: they are preserved for their true destination."

One might think that, with the absence of the Temple and the Mizbeach, the laws concerning cheilev no longer are applicable, and would remain unapplicable until the rebuilding of the Temple. This would not be accurate. The laws concerning the separation of the cheilev for burning on the Altar still apply, even though we can no longer burn the cheilev to Hashem. We have already seen that cheilev is different than the other eivarim that were burned on the Altar. Since there were sacrifices that were brought of which some of the eivarim could be consumed either by the Kohanim or by the entire congregation, we do not restrict some of them for our use today.

May our study of cheilev lead swiftly to the rebuilding of the Temple so that we may soon return to burning the cheilev as a pleasant aroma to Hashem.

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

The fourth step in the Seder on Pesach is breaking the middle matza. The larger piece is put away for later, as the afikomen, and the smaller is eaten with the matza after hamotzi. A poor person would always save some of his food as he didn't know where his next meal was coming from. As matza is considered lechem oni, poor man's bread, this makes sense. However, there is another, more inspiring message for us here.

Leaving Egypt, we attained freedom in an atypical sense. Most people believe freedom is the ability to do whatever you want, answering to no one but yourself. That's not what happened to us. We gained a new master, Hashem, and a much larger set of rules than we had before. The difference is that Pharoah's rules were meant to break us down, and Hashem's rules build us up.

The ability to not satiate our desires when the urge strikes, takes character and strength. The mitzvos train us to be in control of our desires, and make resisting temptation easier. We therefore become masters over ourselves, and saving some matza for later reflects that self-control. As Jews, we also know that as much as we enjoy in this world, there is a future world where we will enjoy much more, and that keeps us focused on doing right.

The story is told that Paderewski, the famous Polish pianist, was about to perform, when a young boy wandered onstage, sat down at the piano, and began playing a rudimentary tune. Instead of being outraged at the impudence of the child like the audience was, the musician whispered in the boy's ear, "Don't stop. Keep playing."

He then placed his hands on either side of the boy's hands, and added his own flair to the simple piece. It was a creative masterpiece not only in music, but in making the most of a situation. Even if the story isn't true, it echoes one of the themes of the Pesach Seder – "Don't give up. Keep playing." As long as we seek to improve, Hashem will be there to assist us.

RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

Cross-Currents

An interesting Midrash is cited by Rav Yosef Nechemia Kornitzer (1880-1933), a great-grandson of the Chasam Sofer who served as the av beis din of Cracow before World War II. The Midrash is found in the Tanchuma manuscript discovered by Solomon Buber, published in 1885.

The Midrash speaks about the end of history and quotes Ovadiah (1:18): "And the house of Yaakov will be fire and the house of Yosef flame; and the house of Esav, straw. And they will light them aflame and devour them. And there will remain nothing of the house of Esav..."

Rav Kornitzer quotes its continuation: "And where did Moshe say this? [In the words] 'it is the olah on its mokeid throughout the night until the morning... And the kohein will lift up the deshen [ashes]... and

place it next to the mizbei'ach' " (Vayikra 6, 2-3). A puzzling citation.

To explain it, he quotes his forebear the Chasam Sofer as casting the kohein's lifting of the terumas hadeshen as the need for the kohein to not avert his eyes from the "lowly of worth." He has a responsibility to lift them up and bring them to a holier place.

Rav Kornitzer asserts that the kohein's responsibility is paralleled in our own vis- -- vis the rest of humanity -- that we are in galus (the "night") to spread knowledge of the Torah and to, by our dedication to Torah, attract those among other peoples, the "deshen", to join us. That, he contends, is what will bring about the fulfillment of Ovadiah's prophecy, the destruction of evil.

He then quotes another Midrash: "Rabi Yosi ben Kisma's students asked him when Moshiach will come. He responded 'This is the law of the olah' " (Vayikra 6:2).

Concludes Rav Kornitzer: "When the Jews fulfill their mission and 'lift up the deshen'... Ben Dovid will arrive, may it be soon in our days."

Sadly, the galus didn't end in Rav Kornitzer's days. May it end in ours.

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

One of the biggest yetzer haras we have tells us that we can't be happy until we have more. It tells people that though what they already have might be good, it is not yet great. "Like the billboard said," it pushes, "we're not complete until we have that thing...or that thing...or, etc."

This means, sadly, that for many people, tomorrow is not the only thing "only a day away." Happiness too. For them, happiness is only a day away the rest of their lives. "I will be happy with my portion," they defend, "as soon as I get it." No wonder they go through life dragging their feet and smile-less.

It gets worse. If being unhappy was the only fallout, then it might be manageable. But it is not. It turns out that being happy is instrumental to personal health and productivity, and it has a direct effect on the people around us. Rav Yechezkel Levenstein, zt"l, the Mashgiach of the Mir Yeshivah once berated someone who came to the Bais Midrash with a sad face. He told them that what we feel inside is for us to deal with. But our faces, he explained, belong to the public, and for the public we have to look upbeat.

It even says, "Serve God in joy" (Tehillim 100:2). On a simple level it means, make a point of being happy about what you do for God, which is everything. Fight the urge to be sad and depressed whenever you can, and do your mitzvos with enthusiasm, even when you don't have any.

On a deeper level it means that you can't really serve God if you're not happy. Happy people are aware people, while sad people are usually distracted by their feelings. Happy people tend to be more considerate of others whereas sad people have a difficult time seeing past themselves. Most importantly, happy people sin less than sad people. Happy people tend to be more appreciative, and therefore more willing to do the right thing.

Though these "rules" may not be absolute, they're close to it. In fact, rarely do you ever find happily Torah-observant people decide to turn their backs on God and do something else. If I had a dollar for every time someone told me they left religion because they were miserable, I'd struggle less to pay my bills. The irony was that turning secular didn't make them happier, just their yetzer hara. They were just relieved to no longer have to fight the good battle against it.

"Are you happy?"

Asked this question, a person does a quick self-analysis to see how they feel. If nothing is bothering them at the moment, they'll answer yes. If something does concern them, they will temper their answer to reflect their current mood.

But if you then ask, "No, are YOU happy?" they'll probably start to wonder who the "You" is that you refer to. Until that moment, they probably just assumed, like most people, that "you" is what you see every time you look in the mirror. They probably thought that "you" is what does all the feeling and moving around. They probably rarely considered that their "you" is hidden deep inside, imprisoned in a physical body and abused by its instinctual whims.

The more accurate question, therefore, is: Is your soul happy? Though it is important to keep your body happy, it is crucial that your soul be happy. You can polish your car, but if you don't take care of the engine and it breaks down, what good will polishing your car do? The body matters, but the soul is essential.

The good news is that it is easy to please the soul. Just do mitzvos, and do them well. The bad news is, the body loves physical comfort, which mitzvos are not famous for providing. The additional good news is that the body can be trained to do as the soul says, and learn to love it. Tzaddikim may have started off by going against their natural bodily drives, but they only became tzaddikim once their bodies bought into the soul's approach to life.

That's why we have to start off with tzav. The yetzer hara is like a child who can't yet relate to why doing the right thing is good for them. So, to make sure they do it anyhow, they have to be commanded to do it until they can command themselves. Once they can, they will truly be free...and happy.

Motzei Shabbos we will sit down for the 3,337th time, b"H. We will commemorate and celebrate the

freedom we were given by God when we left Egypt. But the only reason why it is a celebration is because of where we ended up, at Mt. Sinai receiving Torah. As it says in Pirkei Avos, freedom was engraved on the tablets, chiseled out by the 613 mitzvos God gave to us. Leaving Egypt freed our bodies. Receiving Torah freed our souls.

This is the question we are asked each year at the Seder: How do YOU feel? Is your soul free, or still incarcerated inside of a materially-demanding body? If the answer is no, then just sit back and enjoy the ride. But if the answer is yes, as it is for so many, the Seder provides the opportunity to right the wrong, free the soul, and serve God with joy. *© 2025 Rabbi P. Winston and torah.org*

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Drasha

This week's portion begins with Hashem telling Moshe to teach Ahron and his children a few laws. Hashem does not tell Moshe to speak to Ahron, He does not even tell Moshe to teach Ahron. He tells Moshe "Tzav es Ahron." Command Ahron.

"Tzav," Rashi explains, "is a very powerful word. It means command with a charge that is to be executed with speed and diligence. The word tzav," Rashi continues, "is also used only for situations that have eternal ramifications." If we analyze the next few commands, we may be left wondering: why do those charges need the powerful preface Tzav?

The next verse is about the Korban Olah. A Korban Olah is a sacrifice that is committed entirely to Hashem, no part of the animal, save the skin, is left for human benefit or consumption. The person who brings it wants to make sure that it is offered within the highest standards of Halacha. The admonition, tzav surely is appropriate. However, the Torah only spends one verse on the Olah. It proceeds to tell us about the daily cleaning of the ashes of the altar. A Kohen must wear linen vestments, remove the ashes, and place them near the altar.

Why is this menial job mentioned together with the holy Olah? To what end does it merit the powerful command, tzav?

The Steipler Gaon, Rabbi Yisrael Yaakov Kanievski, was a paradigm of holiness. The stories about his sanctity were well known throughout the Torah community. At seventeen, he had already survived the Russian army without compromising Shabbos or Kashrut.

The Steipler was not known for lengthy conversation. He had lost his hearing standing as a sentry on freezing Siberian nights during his tenure in the Czar's army. People would write questions to him or beseech him to pray on behalf of the sick or unfortunate. The Steipler would read the note, hardly lift his eyes from the large volume on his old table, and would start to pray. He would often condense his advice into on or two sentences, but it would be potent. People asked, and he gave answers. Within days miraculous salvation came. And so did the people. They stood in lines outside his modest home, and the very old man would find the time to see anyone who walked in with the problems of the world bearing down on his or her shoulder.

An aspiring young man, whose quest was to be as great a scholar as the Steipler himself, came with a problem. The young man felt that this particular predicament was impeding his spiritual growth and surely a man like Rabbi Kanievski, who persevered in the face of life-threatening problems, could relate to his!

The young man had written the situation in detail for the Steipler to grasp its severity. "Every Friday," wrote the young man, "I come home from Yeshiva, and the scene in the house leads me to despair. The table is not set, the kitchen is hardly clean, and the children are not bathed! What should I do? How can I concentrate on my studies when I have such problems?" The aspiring scholar expected the Steipler to advise him how to deal with a wife that was not keeping to his standard.

The Steipler looked up from the paper and made a grave face. The young man smiled. The Steipler must have realized the severity of the situation. Then he spoke in his heavy Russian-accented Yiddish. "You really want to know what to do?" The young man nodded eagerly. The Steipler looked austere.

"TAKE A BROOM!"

Rabbeinu Yonah of Girondi (1180-1263) explains the juxtaposition of the command to sweep ashes with that of the Korban Olah. A person must realize that sometimes what is considered menial work in human eyes merits the highest accord in Hashem's eyes. The mitzvah of sweeping the Altar is prefaced with the word tzav and placed next to the Korban Olah. One must realize that the little, unglorified acts also yield great sanctity. In the quest for spirituality, one must never demean the simple chores. For no matter how holy one is, there is always room for a broom. *© 2025 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and torah.org*