

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

In her recent "The Watchman's Rattle", subtitled 'Thinking our way out of extinction', Rebecca Costa delivers a fascinating account of how civilisations die. Their problems become too complex. Societies reach what she calls a cognitive threshold. They simply can't chart a path from the present to the future.

The example she gives is the Mayans. For a period of three and a half thousand years, between 2,600 BCE and 900 CE, they developed an extraordinary civilisation, spreading over what is today Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Belize with an estimated population of 15 million people.

Not only were they master potters, weavers, architects and farmers. They developed an intricate cylindrical calendar system, with celestial charts to track the movements of the stars and predict weather patterns. They had their own unique form of writing as well as an advanced mathematical system. Most impressively they developed a water-supply infrastructure involving a complex network of reservoirs, canals, dams and levees.

Then suddenly, for reasons we still don't fully understand, the entire system collapsed. Sometime between the middle of the eighth and ninth century the majority of the Mayan people simply disappeared. There have been many theories as to why it happened. It may have been a prolonged drought, overpopulation, internecine wars, a devastating epidemic, food shortages, or a combination of these and other factors. One way or another, having survived for 35 centuries, Mayan civilisation failed and became extinct.

Rebecca Costa's argument is that whatever the causes, the Mayan collapse, like the fall of the Roman Empire, and the Khmer Empire of thirteenth century Cambodia, occurred because problems became too many and complicated for the people of that time and place to solve. There was cognitive overload, and systems broke down.

It can happen to any civilisation. It may, she says, be happening to ours. The first sign of breakdown is gridlock. Instead of dealing with what everyone can see are major problems, people continue as usual and simply pass their problems on to the next generation. The second sign is a retreat into irrationality. Since people can no longer cope with the facts, they take

refuge in religious consolations. The Mayans took to offering sacrifices.

Archeologists have uncovered gruesome evidence of human sacrifice on a vast scale. It seems that, unable to solve their problems rationally, the Mayans focused on placating the gods by manically making offerings to them. So apparently did the Khmer.

Which makes the case of Jews and Judaism fascinating. They faced two centuries of crisis under Roman rule between Pompey's conquest in 63 BCE and the collapse of the Bar Kochba rebellion in 135 CE. They were hopelessly factionalised. Long before the Great Rebellion against Rome and the destruction of the Second Temple, Jews were expecting some major cataclysm.

What is remarkable is that they did not focus obsessively on sacrifices, like the Mayans and the Khmer. Instead they focused on finding substitutes for sacrifice. One was gemillat chassadim, acts of kindness. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai comforted Rabbi Joshua, who wondered how Israel would atone for its sins without sacrifices, with the words, "My son we have another atonement as effective as this: acts of kindness, as it is written (Hosea 6:6), 'I desire kindness and not sacrifice'" (Avot deRabbi Natan 8).

Another was Torah study. The sages interpreted Malachi's words (1:11), "In every place offerings are presented to My name," to refer to scholars who study the laws of sacrifice. (Menachot 100a). "One who recites the order of sacrifices is as if he had brought them" (Taanit 27b).

Another was prayer. Hosea said, "Take words with you and return to the Lord... We will offer our lips as sacrifices of bulls" (Hos. 14:2-3), implying that words could take the place of sacrifice. "He who prays in the house of prayer is as if he brought a pure oblation." (Yerushlami, Perek 5 Halacha 1)

Yet another was teshuvah. The Psalm (51:19) says "the sacrifices of G-d are a contrite spirit." From this the sages inferred that "if a person repents it is accounted to him as if he had gone up to Jerusalem and built the Temple and the altar and offered on it all the sacrifices ordained in the Torah" (Vayikra Rabbah 7:2)

A fifth was fasting. Since going without food diminished a person's fat and blood, it counted as a substitute for the fat and blood of a sacrifice (Berachot 17a). A sixth was hospitality. "As long as the Temple

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stood, the altar atoned for Israel, but now a person's table atones for him" (Berakhot 55a). And so on.

What is striking in hindsight is how, rather than clinging obsessively to the past, sages like Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai thought forward to a worst-case-scenario future. The great question raised by Tzav, which is all about different kinds of sacrifice, is not "Why were sacrifices commanded in the first place?" but rather, given how central they were to the religious life of Israel in Temple times, how did Judaism survive without them?

The short answer is that overwhelmingly the prophets, the sages, and the Jewish thinkers of the Middle Ages realised that sacrifices were symbolic enactments of processes of mind, heart and deed that could be expressed in other ways as well. We can encounter the will of G-d by Torah study, engaging in the service of G-d by prayer, making financial sacrifice by charity, creating sacred fellowship by hospitality and so on.

Jews did not abandon the past. We still refer constantly to the sacrifices in our prayers. But they did not cling to the past. Nor did they take refuge in irrationality. They thought through the future and created institutions like the synagogue and house of study and school that could be built anywhere and sustain Jewish identity even in the most adverse conditions.

That is no small achievement. The world's greatest civilisations have all, in time, become extinct while Judaism has always survived. In one sense that was surely Divine Providence. But in another it was the foresight of people like Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai who resisted cognitive breakdown, created solutions today for the problems of tomorrow, who did not seek refuge in the irrational, and who quietly built the Jewish future.

Surely there is a lesson here for the Jewish people today: Plan generations ahead. Think at least 25 years into the future. Contemplate worst-case scenarios. Ask what we would do, if... What saved the Jewish people was their ability, despite their deep and abiding faith, never to let go of rational thought, and despite their loyalty to the past, to keep planning for the future. *Covenant and Conversation 5777 is kindly*

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RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Behold, I send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. And he [Elijah] will turn [back to G-d] the hearts of the parents through their children and the hearts of the children through their parents" (Malachi 3:23-24). The Shabbat before Passover is called Shabbat Hagadol (the Great Sabbath), a phrase deriving from the last verse of the prophetic portion read on that day which declares that G-d will send Elijah the Prophet on the "great day" of the Lord right before the coming of the redemption.

Let us attempt to link Elijah to our Passover Seder in a way more profound than merely opening the door for him and offering him a sip of wine.

Our analysis begins with another Seder anomaly, the fact that we begin our night of freedom with the distribution of an hors d'oeuvre of karpas (Greek for vegetation or vegetable, often parsley, dipped in a condiment).

The usual explanation for this is that vegetation emerges in the springtime; Passover is biblically called the Spring Festival, and so we dip a vegetable in salt water, reminiscent of spring renewal emerging from the tears of Egyptian enslavement. Rabbi Shlomo Kluger, in his late 19th-century Haggada, suggests another interpretation. The Hebrew word "karpas" appears in the opening verses of the Book of Esther, in the description of the "hangings" that were found in the gardens of King Ahasuerus's palace, where the great feast for all his kingdom was hosted; karpas white cotton joined with turquoise wool. Rashi connects the term "karpas" in the sense of material with the ketonet passim, the striped tunic that Jacob gave to his beloved son, Joseph.

The Jerusalem Talmud additionally suggests that we dip the karpas in haroset (a mixture of wine, nuts and dates), adding that haroset is reminiscent of the blood of the babies murdered in Egypt. In our case, the karpas would become symbolic of Joseph's tunic, which the brothers dipped into goat's blood and brought to their father as a sign that his son had been torn apart by wild beasts when in fact they had sold him into Egyptian slavery.

Why begin the Seder this way? The Talmud criticizes Jacob for favoring Joseph over the other brothers and giving him the striped tunic. This gift, a piece of material with little monetary value, engendered vicious jealousy resulting in the sale of Joseph and the eventual enslavement of the Israelites for 210 years.

The point of the Seder is the retelling ("haggada") of the seminal experience of servitude and

freedom from generation to generation. Through this, all parents become teachers. They must inspire their children to continue the Jewish narrative of identification with the underdog and the outcast. They must imbue in their offspring insistence upon freedom for every individual created in G-d's image and faith in the ultimate triumph of a world dedicated to peace and security for all.

This places an awesome responsibility on the shoulders of every parent: to convey the ethical monotheism, rooted in our ritual celebrations and teachings, to their children and eventually to all of humanity. Hence, parents must be warned at the outset not to repeat the tragic mistake of Jacob, not to create divisions and jealousies among their children. Instead, we must unite the generations in the common goal of continuing our Jewish narrative.

What has this to do with Elijah the Prophet, who is slated to be the herald of the Messiah, the announcer of the "good tidings of salvation and comfort"? Our redemption is dependent on our repentance and the most necessary component of redemption is "loving our fellow as we love ourselves" – the great rule of the Torah taught by Rabbi Akiva.

Loving humanity must begin with loving our family; first and foremost our nuclear family. We read in the prophetic portion of this Shabbat that Elijah will bring everyone back to G-d by uniting parents with their children and children with parents. The biblical source of sibling hatred (the Joseph story), which has plagued Jewish history up to and including the present day, will be repaired by Elijah, who will unite the hearts of the children and the parents together in their commitment to G-d.

Toward the end of the Seder, we open the door for Elijah and welcome him to drink from the cup of redemption poured especially for him. But if Elijah can visit every Seder throughout the world, surely he can get through even the most forbidding kind of door.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menahem Mendel Schneerson, teaches that we open the door not so much to let Elijah in as to let ourselves out. The Seder speaks of four children; But what about the myriad "fifth children" who never came to a Seder? We must go out after them and bring them in – perhaps together with Elijah, whom we will need desperately to unite the entire family of Israel around the Seder table.

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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 of the mandatory commandments that accompany these days, their values and ideals.

Without mandatory commandments no commemorative 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



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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. ©2017 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 KALMAN PACKOUZ

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states regarding the offering of a specific sacrifice: "If for thanksgiving he offers it, then he shall offer with the sacrifice of thanksgiving unleavened cakes mingled with oil, and unleavened wafers spread with oil, and fine flour soaked and made into cakes mingled with oil" (Leviticus 7:12). What possible lesson can we learn from the bread brought with the sacrifice?

When a person's life is in danger and he is saved, it is incumbent upon him to bring a korbantodah, a thanksgiving offering. Together with the offering he also brought forty loaves of bread in four different forms. One of each kind was given to the Kohen. The remaining thirty-six were his to eat -- however, there was a time limit. He had the remainder of the day and the following night to consume them.

The Sforno, the great 16th century Italian commentator, comments that the purpose of this extremely short time period was to ensure that he would share the bread with others. This would ultimately publicize the fortunate event. The lesson for us: Publicize your joy and gratitude to the multitudes for the Almighty's kindnesses, but seek one sympathetic and understanding listener for the problems. Share joy with others and your life will be more joyous. *Dvar Torah based on Growth Through Torah by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin* ©2017 Rabbi K. Packouz and aish.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Our parsha informs us that the priests' first task of the day was to remove the ashes from the offering sacrificed the previous day. (Leviticus 6:3) Is there any significance to this being the priests first order of business with which to start the day?

Samson Raphael Hirsch suggests that this mandate serves as a constant reminder that service of the new day is connected to the service of the previous day. After all, it was the ashes from the remains of yesterday's sacrifice that had to be removed. In one word: even as we move forward in time and deal with new situations and conditions it is crucial to remember that all that is being done is anchored in a past steeped with religious significance and commitment.

Another theme comes to mind. Just as a small

portion of every food grown in Israel must be given to the priest (terumah), so is the priest responsible to remove the last remains of the sacrificial service (terumat ha-deshen). Thus, the entire eating and sacrificial experience is sanctified through a beginning or ending ritual. Terumah elevates the food as we give its first portion to the priest; terumat ha-deshen elevates the sacrifice as the kohen maintains contact even with the remains of the sacrificial parts. Not coincidentally, the portion given to the priest and the ashes removed by the priest are given similar names—terumah and terumat ha-deshen—as the word terumah comes from the word room, to lift.

One last thought. The priest begins the day by removing the ashes to illustrate the importance of his remaining involved with the mundane. Too often, those who rise to important lofty positions, separate themselves from the people and withdraw from the everyday menial tasks. The Torah through the laws of terumat ha-deshen insists it shouldn't be this way.

A story reflects this point. A few years ago a husband and wife appeared before Rabbi Gifter, Rosh Yeshiva of Tels, asking him to rule on a family dispute. The husband, a member of Rabbi Gifter's kollel (an all day Torah learning program) felt that as one who studied Torah it was beneath his dignity to take out the garbage. His wife felt otherwise. Rabbi Gifter concluded that while the husband should in fact help his wife he had not religio-legal obligation to remove the refuse.

The next morning, before the early services, the Rosh Yeshiva knocked at the door of the young couple. Startled, the young man asked Rabbi Gifter in. No, responded Rabbi Gifter, I've not come to socialize but to take out your garbage. You may believe it's beneath your dignity, but it's not beneath mine.

And that may be the deepest message of terumat ha-deshen. ©2017 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

HARAV SHLOMO WOLBE ZT"L

Bais Hamussar

After Bnei Yisrael were commanded to bring the korban Pesach, the Torah tells us, "Bnei Yisrael went and did as Hashem commanded Moshe and Aharon, so did they do" (Shemos 12:28). Rashi explains that the superfluous "so did they do" refers to Moshe and Aharon. They also fulfilled Hashem's commandment to designate a sheep to be used for the korban Pesach. The Maharal elaborates that the korban Pesach was a mitzvah given to Bnei Yisrael as a merit to make them worthy for redemption.

Thus, one might think that Moshe and Aharon, who were Hashem's emissaries to carry out the redemption, need not perform this mitzvah. Therefore,

the Torah informs us that they too fulfilled this commandment.

It would seem that the original assumption is correct. Why should Moshe Rabbeinu have to fulfill this mitzvah if he was never enslaved in Mitzrayim and did not need to be redeemed? It would also appear that he did not need the mitzvah to advance his spiritual level since he had already reached the high level where he was speaking to Hashem as one converses with a friend.

Rav Wolbe (Daas Shlomo Geulah 323) explains that the korban Pesach was consumed exactly at the time when Hashem passed through Mitzrayim and smote the firstborn.

This final plague was an incredible, almost tangible, display of Hashgacha Pratis as Hashem killed only the firstborn and only the Egyptians. Bnei Yisrael also prepared themselves for this moment of revelation in a very tangible way. They "hurriedly ate the korban Pesach with their loins girded, their shoes on their feet and their staffs in their hands." The spiritual impact achieved through witnessing an overt display of Hashgacha Pratis is so great that even Moshe Rabbeinu could gain from it. Therefore, he too prepared himself for the revelation by fulfilling the commandment of korban Pesach.

Leil HaSeder is all about trying to experience that awesome revelation that took place on that very night way back in Mitzrayim. The goal is to achieve a level of clarity where Hashem's hashgacha pratis in our world and our lives, is evident to our corporal eyes. This avodah starts now. Look for Hashem's involvement in your life -- and it's not hard to find -- and you'll be better prepared for the Seder Night.

It's a unique night during which we are given Heavenly assistance to reach levels of emunah -- an assistance that is unavailable during the rest of the year!

The Ramban at the end of Parashas Bo (Shemos 13:16) explains that Hashem does not perform earth shattering miracles in order to demonstrate His Omnipotence to every scoffer. Therefore, He commanded us to perform numerous mitzvos as a remembrance for Yetzias Mitzrayim so that we should frequently remember how He clearly demonstrated His Omnipotence in Egypt. The constant commemoration allows us to relive, to a certain extent, the spiritual level that Bnei Yisrael achieved when they witnessed those miracles in Mitzrayim.

Rashi seems to explain the mitzvos in a different light. The Torah instructs us, "You shall tell your son on that day, 'It is because of this that Hashem acted on my behalf when I left Egypt'" (Shemos 13:8). Rashi explains that "this" refers to the matzah and maror set out on the Seder table, i.e. we were taken out of Egypt to perform His mitzvos.

The Ramban understands that the mitzvos

were given to remember the redemption, while according to Rashi's explanation the exact opposite is true: The entire redemption was to create a nation that would perform His mitzvos.

Rav Wolbe explains that the Rashi and the Ramban are not arguing. There are two aspects to the mitzvos. As Rashi explained, the purpose of Yetzias Mitzrayim was to forge Bnei Yisrael into a nation that would serve Hashem, and their subservience manifests itself with the performance of His commandments. The Ramban is merely adding a reason behind the specific mitzvos given. They were given with the intent of raising Bnei Yisrael to the spiritual levels attained during Yetzias Mitzrayim.

The Seder is a manifestation of our subservience and an expression of our desire to tap into the spiritual revelations which connect us to our Creator. May our service be accepted and our desires be fulfilled! ©2017 Rabbi S. Wolbe zt"l and The AishDas Society

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Tzav includes a Passuk (verse) scarcely commented on, describing how the Kohen (Priest) needs to remove the clothes he wore when he gathered the ashes of the Olah offering, put on "other clothing" (6:4) and remove the ashes. Why would a change of clothing be required for simply walking ashes?

Rashi explains that it's not proper to mix a cup of wine for one's superior in the same clothing in which one cooked a pot. Rav Moshe Feinstein points out how the Torah considers the rules of proper decency and etiquette so important that it included laws to that effect in the Torah. Being decent and acting properly isn't just a good idea, it's the (Jewish) law. ©2017 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Blood Fest

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

With reference to the consumption of Blood (Dam) which the Torah prohibits and imposes the punishment of "karat" (one's life is shortened), the minimum amount to be liable for the punishment of "karat" is equal to the volume of an olive (approximately 20cc). However in tractate Yevamot 114b, the minimum amount sited is a "Riviit" (approximately 80cc) four times the amount of an olive.

In the Responsa of Bnai Zion (Responsa 49) a question was posed regarding a person who was ill and was directed by his physician to eat daily the blood of an animal. In order that this person would not receive the punishment of Karat, Rav Etlinger advised him to eat less than the minimal amount sited above. However it was unclear to him whether it should be a kazayit or a

Reviit. Some wanted to differentiate between eating coagulated or clear blood; however he did not accept this explanation.

To settle this dispute we must use the text which was recently printed by the "Yad Harav Herzog" on the alternate versions (Nuschaot) in the Talmud. There we find that even though in the same Tractate sited before (Yevamot) on our printed Vilna version, the words that appear are "but blood until there is a Riviit" (This was also the text in the Soncino Talmud which was the basis of the Vilna Talmud), in the written additions (a total of six) it reads, "until there is a "Kezayit". It also appears this way in the Beit Habichira of the Meiri, a text of the Rishonim (those Rabbis who lived approximately during the tenth to the fourteenth century) which was not available in the time of Rabbi Etlinger.

Using this text showing the various versions we can now explain and understand easily the truth without resorting to difficult Talmudic discussions ("pilpulim"), to explain the contradiction. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Bloodsport

Blood. At worst, it invokes ghastly images of death and war. At best, it represents life-saving transfusions. On any scale it is not appetizing. It is for that reason that it is difficult to comprehend the repeated warnings and admonitions that the Torah makes concerning the consumption of blood. Beginning this week, there are three warnings in the Torah concerning the prohibition of consuming blood. There is a specific verse that tells parents to admonish their children and discourage any thought they may have of eating or drinking blood.

Leviticus 22:26-27: "You shall not consume blood... from fowl or animal. Any soul that consumes blood will be cut off from his people."

Leviticus 17:10-12: "Any man of the House of Israel and of the proselyte who dwells among them, consume any blood -- I shall concentrate My attention upon the soul consuming blood, and I will cut it off from its people."

Deuteronomy 12:23: "Only be strong as not to eat blood..."

Rashi quotes the words of Rav Shimon Ben Azai: "if blood, which is so repulsive, needs such dire warnings surely one must take great precaution not to succumb to sins that are appealing." Rabbi Yehudah explains the repetitive admonitions in the context of history. During that era, many nations would actually indulge in blood-drinking ceremonies. Thus the Torah exhorts the Jewish nation on that matter. In any case, it is quite apparent that both Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Yehudah were bothered by repeated warnings, which should be unnecessary. It is difficult to comprehend

why the Torah spends more energy warning, admonishing, and exhorting the Jews against blood-consumption than against most other prohibitions that are much more alluring.

Also, why is this one of only two prohibitions that our sages interpreted an extra verse, as "a warning for parents to admonish their children." Why does this prohibition surpass the norm of parental supervision that is required by any other Mitzvah?

An old Jewish story has a devoutly religious woman running into a Chasidic Rebbe as she was crying uncontrollably. "Rebbe," she cried, "it's my son. He went absolutely meshuga. He started acting totally insane. Even you won't be able to help him. He needs a psychiatrist!"

"What's the matter?" Asked the Rebbe.

"The matter?" She cried. "He's crazy! He's acting like a gentile! He dances with gentile women and began dining on pig!"

The Rebbe looked to the poor woman as he tried to put her problems in perspective. "If he would dance with pigs and dine on women, I would say that he is crazy. But the way you describe him he is not crazy at all. I'd just say that he is becoming a very lascivious young man. And I can deal with that."

On a homiletic note, perhaps, we can explain the Torah's passionate admonitions about blood. The Torah understood the test of time. Acts that are considered vile and obscene by today's standard may be accepted as the norm tomorrow. Societies change and attitudes change with them. The ten greatest problems of the 1950's public school class may be considered decent, if not meritorious, behavior today. The Torah understood that society changes. Therefore it admonishes us on the lowest form of behavior with the same intensity as if it would be the normal custom. And it tells us to pass these specific admonitions to our children. We can not dismiss the warnings by thinking, "drinking blood is bizarre behavior. Why should my children need to worry about it?" The Torah says, even if something may be base and bizarre to our generation, if it's Torah it must be told to our children. It is impossible to know what the next generation will consider repulsive and what it may consider fashionable. Today's revulsion may be tomorrow's bloodsport. Times change and people change, but Torah remains eternal. ©2017 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & *torah.org*

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

*by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg
Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavne*

The Todah Sacrifice has a unique element, that it includes bread which is chametz, in spite of what is written in general, "No leavening and no honey should be offered as a sacrifice to G-d" [Vayikra 2:11].

Another unique aspect of the Todah is noted by the sages: "All the sacrifices will cease to exist in the future except for the Todah Sacrifice" [Vayikra Rabba 9].

"The purpose of the Todah Sacrifice is to acknowledge the good things that take place after bad beginnings have been overturned" [Rav Kook, Ein Ayah, Berachot Chapter 1, 62]. Our sages taught us that in the future we will bless the coming of bad things just as we bless good things. But what does this mean, isn't it true that there will be no bad in the future? The answer is that in the future our viewpoint will change, and what appeared to be evil (and for which we recited the blessing, "Dayan Ha'Emet ") will be recognized as part of a process of good. We will then retroactively recite the blessing "Hatov V'Hameitiv," thanking G-d for the good. "In the future, G-d's hand will show us that everything was for the good, and that all the evil was involved in setting the framework for true good."

When life flows properly and everything goes as planned, we do not notice this principle. However, when something bad happens we fall into deep shock, and a person can begin to feel that there is no true justice in the world. But in the future, when everything will be clearly seen as leading to absolute good, the belief in Divine guidance will be strengthened. And this is the essence of the Todah Sacrifice, and therefore "the Todah will still exist, because it is only through the Todah can we recognize the fact that evil is necessary in order to arrive at perfect good. And that is why this sacrifice includes chametz, as opposed to all the other sacrifices, since chametz signifies something bad and spoiled." And that is why the Todah will not cease to exist in the future. Just the opposite -- it will remain in order to teach us this vital principle, that the reason for all the evil is to strengthen and perfect the good when its time comes.

A classic example of this principle is the exile in Egypt. While the events were taking place even Yaacov did not understand the ramifications. He therefore scolded his sons: "Why did you do bad to me, telling the man that you have another brother?" [Bereishit 43:6]. The sages teach us that this was the only erroneous statement that Yaacov ever made. "The Holy One, Blessed be He, said: I am busy arranging for his son to be a royal power in Egypt, how does he still say, 'Why did you do bad to me?' That is the meaning of, 'Why should you say, Yaacov, and speak Yisrael, my path is hidden from G-d?' [Yeshayahu 40:27]." But in the end, everybody recognized the Divine guidance. And that is what Yosef said to his brothers: "You thought evil against me, but G-d meant it for good" [Bereishit 50:20]; "You did not send me here, G-d did" [45:8].

G-d did not only send them to Egypt to rescue them from the famine, but rather for them to pass through the melting pot and to fashion them into a cherished nation. "And He took you out of the iron

furnace" [Devarim 4:20]. And that is why on the night of the Seder we thank Him not only for taking us out of Egypt but even for bringing us down to there. And that is why "whoever tells more and more about the redemption from Egypt is worthy of greater praise" [Haggadah]. This is not only in order to expand the time of telling deep into the night, but also in order to broaden the limits of the event. We begin the story not only with "We were slaves in Egypt and He took us out," but rather further back, with "At first, our fathers were idol worshippers." This explains why we thank G-d for the exile itself, for its role in ridding us from the impurities of idol worship. ©2017 Rabbi M. Goldberg & Machon Zomet

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

The centerpiece of many a Seder is the asking of the Four Questions by the children, one after the other. Expectations run high as parents anticipate beaming with pride and joy as their children/grandchildren/great-grandchildren perform the time-honored tradition of reciting the "Mah Nishtanah."

And they usually do a great job. Teachers work hard to make sure that their students are ready to put on a good show Seder night. It is a reflection of their own hard efforts to put their little protege on the same page as their parents, literally.

Why is this such a central part of the Seder? Not because how wonderful the children seem to perform. It is not about performance. It is about the questions, and even more about the answer that follows.

In fact, if a parent suspects that a child may fall asleep before they get to the answer ("We were slaves to Pharaoh, etc."), they should jump to that part for the children. After they have made sure that the children received and understood the answer they should return to the proper order from where they skipped.

How many children even care about the answer, or that they have to stick around to hear it? After they have done their job and received their praise, most probably assume that they're off for the night. They don't realize that they were the warm-up act to get things going. Their finish is really their start.

It stems from the mitzvah to teach one's children. One of the most difficult things to do is to secure the safety of a tradition from one generation to the next. People change. Attitudes change, and the world changes. Against such a backdrop of change, it is hard for anything to remain the same.

Remarkably, the Jewish people have kept this tradition for over 3,000 years. The mitzvah to pass the word of G-d from parent to children, from teachers to students, has made this possible. Many other societies only educate. Torah society educates and protects, as if the world depends upon it, which in fact it does.

Creation has a purpose. As long as the purpose is fulfilled, even partially at times, then it justifies its existence. If that purpose is lost to man, then G-d tends to reboot history, usually at great cost to mankind.

That's why it is precarious when so many Jews lose sight of the Divine purpose for Creation. Only a couple of million live by Torah, and even many of them don't understand what Torah does for Creation. They think mostly in terms of going to the World-to-Come and avoiding Gehinom. They think that they have all that covered with this alone.

The point of the Haggadah is to put everyone through a refresher course. To realign our purpose in life with G-d's purpose for Creation. He didn't just free the Jewish people from Egyptian slavery. He did so with a specific task in mind, and end for which Torah and mitzvos are the means.

The Leshem sums it up this way. He reminds us that if freedom had been the only issue, then a non-spectacular plague would have done the job. Rather, he explains, G-d did it miraculously, VERY miraculously to make a point. It was to show the Jewish people how He is prepared to bend the laws of nature to help a Jew fulfill the purpose of Creation.

What is that purpose? To reveal G-d. To praise Him. Not for HIS sake, He doesn't need our praise). It's for OUR sake. Revealing G-d in Creation perfects it. Find something that approaches perfection in Creation, and it will seem G-dly. Revelation in G-d reveals the perfection of Creation, and accesses it. This is good for man.

The prophet Yechezkel warned that the Final Redemption will come, but not because we will have earned it. It will happen, the prophet said, just to end the terrible profanation of G-d's Name while living in the Diaspora. G-d will end the exile to end the Chillul Hashem.

How did that happen? How will we have lost our way so dramatically, even while learning Torah and performing mitzvos?

It will be because, somewhere down the line, someone did not do an adequate job of transferring information. Somewhere, at some point in time. the tradition became altered, and then altered some more, until it was lost. Generations then grew up not clear about what to do with life and how Torah is supposed to facilitate.

Man has become so obsessed with keeping time that we now do so atomically with phenomenal accuracy and consistency. Yet, when it comes to the transition of ideas and educations, we are less fastidious. We seem to think small errors do not matter that much. That's why educators make such low salaries. Their jobs aren't valued enough.

Today's world is the proof that they indeed matter a tremendous amount. It is also proof that small

errors in education make a huge difference, if not immediately then down the line. It's a confused and divided world with many dangerously conflicting opinions. How can any even believe that there is some ultimate purpose to life?

So, this when you make your Seder, make sure to focus on passing the baton to the next generation. Give it a lot of thought, and pay a lot of attention. This is not just a time honored tradition we are continuing. It is the future of the Jewish people, and the right of Creation to continue. ©2017 Rabbi P. Winston & torah.org

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

"Shabbat Ha'gadol" / "the Great Shabbat" commemorates the day when our ancestors in Egypt first set aside a lamb for the Korban Pesach. Many ask: Why do we commemorate the day of the week when this occurred (Shabbat) rather than the calendar date of the event (10 Nissan)? R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap z"l (1882-1951; rabbi of Yerushalayim's Sha'arei Chessed neighborhood and Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav) explains:

Our Sages teach that Hashem did not redeem Bnei Yisrael until they were on the brink of falling into the lowest level of impurity. Why did He wait? Because He wished to highlight the fact that there is permanent holiness within a Jew. No matter how low he falls, there is an "inner point" which cannot be eliminated. That "inner point" is hidden within all Jews, including many who seem be lost, but all that is necessary for it to be revealed is for some of the layers that conceal it to be stripped away. This is what our Sages mean when they say: "Anyone who rejects idolatry is called a 'Yehudi'." When our ancestors separated a lamb -- an Egyptian deity -- as an offering, that is what they did: they stripped away that which concealed the "inner point" of holiness that cannot be eliminated.

The day that represents this characteristic of a Jew is Shabbat. Calendar dates and the dates of the festivals are determined by mankind, through the power of the Bet Din to say what day is Rosh Chodesh. In contrast, Shabbat is fixed, built in to creation.

This explains, as well, why Pesach is a holiday that revolves around the family. The Egyptians set out to destroy Jewish families and, as punishment, their families were destroyed. On Pesach, we celebrate the family, recognizing that "inner point" that is passed by heredity from generation to generation.

(Haggadah Shel Pesach Mei Marom)
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