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Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

The first words we are taught to say each morning, immediately on waking, are Modeh/modah ani, "I give thanks." We thank before we think. Note that the normal word order is inverted: Modeh ani, not ani modeh, so that in Hebrew the "thanks" comes before the "I." Judaism is "gratitude with attitude." And this, according to recent scientific research, really is a life-enhancing idea.

The source of the command to give thanks is to be found in this week's parsha. Among the sacrifices it itemises 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 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. This is defined by the sages (on the basis of Psalm 107), as one who has survived a sea-crossing, or travelled across a desert, or recovered from serious illness, or been released from captivity.[1]

For me, the almost universal instinct to give thanks is one of the signals of transcendence[2] in the human condition. 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 sometimes describe natural catastrophes as "acts of God". Human emotion tends to do the opposite.[3] God is in the good news, the miraculous deliverance, 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. Though not a proof of the existence of God, it is nonetheless an intimation of something deeply spiritual in the human heart. It tells 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 there is something within us that reaches out to Someone beyond us: the soul of the universe, the Divine "You" to whom we offer our thanks. That is what was once expressed in the thanksgiving offering, and still is, in the Hagomel prayer.

Not until the early 1990s did a major piece of medical research reveal the dramatic physical effects of thanksgiving. It became known as the Nun Study. Some 700 American nuns, all members of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in the United States, agreed to allow their records to be accessed by a research team investigating the process of ageing and Alzheimer's Disease. At the start of the study the participants were aged between 75 and 102.[4]

What gave this study its unusual longitudinal scope is that in 1930 the nuns, then in their twenties, had been asked by the Mother Superior to write a brief autobiographical account of their life and their reasons for entering the convent. These documents were analysed by the researchers using a specially devised coding system to register, among other things, positive and negative emotions. By annually assessing the nuns' current state of health, the researchers were able to test whether their emotional state in 1930 had an effect on their health some sixty years later. Because

[1] Berakhot 54b.

[2] On this idea, see Peter Berger, A Rumor of Angels, New York, Doubleday, 1990.

[3] Not always, of course. There was a memorable episode of The Simpsons in which Bart Simpson, before beginning his Thanksgiving meal, turns to heaven and says in place of grace, "We paid for all this stuff ourselves, so thanks for nothing."

[4] See Robert Emmons, Thanks!: How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007.

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they had all lived a very similar lifestyle during these six decades, they formed an ideal group for testing hypotheses about the relationship between emotional attitudes and health.

The results, published in 2001, were startling.[5] The more positive emotions – contentment, gratitude, happiness, love and hope – the nuns expressed in their autobiographical notes, the more likely they were to be alive and well sixty years later. The difference was as much as seven years in life expectancy. So remarkable was this finding that it has led, since then, to a new field of gratitude research, as well as a deepening understanding of the impact of emotions on physical health.

Since the publication of the Nun Study and the flurry of further research it inspired, we now know of the multiple effects of developing an attitude of gratitude. It improves physical health and immunity against disease. Grateful people are more likely to take regular exercise and go for regular medical check-ups. Thankfulness reduces toxic emotions such as resentment, frustration and regret and makes depression less likely. It helps people avoid over-reacting to negative experiences by seeking revenge. It even tends to make people sleep better. It enhances self-respect, making it less likely that you will envy others for their achievements or success. Grateful people tend to have better relationships. Saying "thank you" enhances friendships and elicits better performance from employees. It is also a major factor in strengthening resilience. One study of Vietnam War Veterans found that those with higher levels of gratitude suffered lower incidence of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Remembering the many things we have to be thankful for helps us survive painful experiences, from losing a job to bereavement.[6]

Jewish prayer is an ongoing seminar in gratitude. Birkot ha-Shachar, 'the Dawn Blessings' said at the start of morning prayers each day, are a litany of thanksgiving for life itself: the human body, the physical world, land to stand on and eyes to see with.

Gratitude also lies behind a fascinating feature of the Amidah. When the leader of prayer repeats the Amidah aloud, we are silent other than for the responses of Kedushah, and saying Amen after each blessing, with one exception. When the leader says the words Modim anachnu lakh, "We give thanks to You," the congregation says the a parallel passage known as Modim de-Rabbanan. For every other blessing of the Amidah, it is sufficient to assent to the words of the leader by saying Amen. The one exception is Modim, "We give thanks." Rabbi Elijah Spira (1660–1712) in his work Eliyahu Rabbah,[7] explains that when it comes to saying thank you, we cannot delegate this away to someone else to do it on our behalf. Thanks has to come directly from us.

Hence the transformative idea: giving thanks is beneficial to the body and the soul. It contributes to both happiness and health. It is also a self-fulfilling attitude: the more we celebrate the good, the more good we discover that is worthy of celebration.

This is neither easy nor natural. We are genetically predisposed to pay more attention to the bad than the good.[8] For sound biological reasons, we are hyper-alert to potential threats and dangers. It takes focussed attention to become aware of how much we have to be grateful for. That, in different ways, is the logic of prayer, of making blessings, of Shabbat, and many other elements of Jewish life.

It is also embedded in our collective name. The word Modeh, "I give thanks," comes from the same root as Yehudi, meaning "Jew." We acquired this name from Jacob's fourth son, named by his mother Leah who, at his birth said, "This time I will thank God" (Gen. 29:35). Jewishness is thankfulness: not the most obvious definition of Jewish identity, but by far the most life-enhancing. *Covenant and Conversation 5778 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The Sabbath before Pessah is called "The Great Sabbath" (Shabbat Hagadol) after the last verse of the reading from the prophets (haftara) for that day: "Behold I send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord" – the day of Redemption (Malachi 3:23). It is certainly

[5] Danner, Deborah D., David A. Snowdon, and Wallace V. Friesen. "Positive Emotions in Early Life and Longevity: Findings from the Nun Study."Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 80.5 (2001): 804-13.

[6] Much of the material in this paragraph is to be found in articles published in Greater Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life @ http://greatergood.berkeley.edu. See also Sonja Lyubomirsky, The How of Happiness, Sphere, 2007, 87-124.

[7] Eliyahu Rabbah, Orach Chayyim 127:1.

[8] The classic study of this is Roy Baumeister and others, "Bad is stronger than good," Review of General Psychology, vol. 5, no. 4, 2001, pp. 323–370.

logical that Elijah the herald of the redemption features before Pessah, the "time of our freedom" and redemption from Egyptian servitude.

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

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

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

After the better part of a day of fruitless prayers, incantations and orgiastic immolations by the prophets of Baal, Elijah drenches his offering in water and then calls out to God. A fire descends from heaven, consuming his offering together with the wood, the stones, the water and the earth. The Israelites cry out: "The Lord! He is God!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

And this is precisely what Malachi says at the conclusion of his prophecy. There is the possibility that "the end of days" will be awe-some and awe-ful, replete with war, destruction and the bare survival of the faithful remnant; but the preferred possibility is that the end of days come as a result of national repentance for ignoring the voice of God, and the return of Israel to our heavenly Father in love and gratitude rather than out of fear. Elijah must "turn back the hearts of the parents to their children and the hearts of the children to their parents" with the still, silent sound of unconditional love. God does not want to "strike the land with utter destruction" at the end of days (Malachi 3:24).

The rabbis of the Midrash go one step further. God is teaching Elijah that the prophet wanted to punish Israel only because he grossly misjudged them when he said, "They rejected Your covenant." Elijah will be "taken to heaven" (II Kings 2: 11, 12), but he will have to shuttle between heaven and earth, he will attend every Pessah Seder where Jews celebrate God's promise of redemption, and be present at every circumcision where Jews demonstrate their willingness

to shed blood for the covenant. The prophet will transform his people not by judging (or misjudging) them, but only by loving them with the still, small sound of our Father's unconditional love.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The entire relationship between God and Israel is reflected in the opening verb of this week's Torah reading. The word "tzav" reflects an attitude of command and of subservience. Even though explanations for the command may be given and understood, the command itself remains viable and imperative no matter what.

The Lord called the Jewish people "an army of God." An army operates on commands and discipline, on following orders and executing them faithfully and accurately. Though individual initiative is always to be treasured and admired, an army that operates completely on that initiative is doomed to defeat and destruction.

In all relationships in life a command structure is necessary in order for achievement and accomplishment to occur. By the nature of human society there must exist those who will command and those who in turn will obey and execute those commands. That is why the word for an imperative fulfillment of a positive act of spirituality – mitzvah - has as its root the word for command.

The difference throughout the ages, between traditional Judaism and those groups within the Jewish people who created for themselves new and different ways of Jewish thought and observance, has always been this concept of command. We are commanded to observe the Torah in a detailed and sophisticated manner. By substituting our own whims, ideas and political correctness for God's command we invariably slip down the road of historical extinction.

At Sinai we declared that we would do and obey and only then submit the command to rational explanation. In an age when loyalty and obedience to any authority has become rare and even subject to being looked at askance, the triumph of traditional Judaism is based, now as always, on obeying commandments and executing them faithfully.

Judaism has a moral code that prevents it from obeying the commandments and orders that are within themselves intrinsically evil and immoral. The explanation given by all of the Nazi war criminals for their bestiality and atrocities committed in World War II has always been that they were only following orders.

Judaism does not allow for obeying immoral orders of murder and the deprivation of other human beings. Even at the risk of sacrificing one's own life, one is not allowed to kill others wantonly. The Torah therefore emphasizes that one is not permitted to add or detract from the Godly commandments ordained for us.

The rabbis of the Talmud and of later generations built a fence around those commandments to protect them and preserve them. But there is no change in the value and method of observance of the commandments. A commandment that can be countermanded or ignored at one's own whim is in reality no commandment at all.

In a society where there are no fixed commandments and all morality is relative and subject to change, chaos and immorality will undoubtedly eventually prevail. All of history, both Jewish and general, testifies to this immutable truth. We are sanctified by obeying God's commandments and Jewish tradition.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

This week's portion continues the theme of the sacrificial service. There are many suggestions as to the reasoning behind this enigmatic, yet important element of our tradition.

Ramban understands the Mishkan (tabernacle) as a kind of portable Mt. Sinai. Mt. Sinai was a physical mountain through which the Jewish people were able to feel God's presence more powerfully. This was also the purpose of the Mishkan, where God's presence was integrated into human souls.

There are many similarities between Mt. Sinai and the Mishkan. As Am Yisrael (the people of Israel) surrounded Mt. Sinai, the place from where the voice of God was heard, so too, did Israel encamp around the Mishkan from where the presence of God was especially felt. In this sense, the Mishkan was a constant ratification of the covenant at Mt. Sinai between God and the Jewish people that was validated at Mt. Sinai. The covenant is reaffirmed through the tabernacle.

With this concept of the Mishkan in mind, the sacrifices can be understood. The two major covenants in the Torah – the covenant of the pieces and the covenant at Sinai are accompanied by sacrifice. (Genesis 15:9,10; Exodus 24:5) Indeed, as God appears at Mt. Sinai, the covenant reaches its crescendo when the Jewish people eat and drink. (Exodus 24:11)

The presence of a sacrifice in these covenantal experiences can be looked upon as a celebration of this glorious moment of meeting between God and his people. Much like a seuda (a lavish meal) celebrates our relationship with God on Shabbat or Yom Tov, so

too the korban (sacrifice) celebrates the covenant. The covenant is eternalized through rituals associated with the sacrificial service.

In his book "The Temple," Rabbi Joshua Berman notes that salt was always used on the korban and is called brit melach. (Leviticus 2:13) As salt gives sharpness and longer life to food, so too is the covenant blessed with eternity. In Rabbi Berman's words, the salt marks "the eternal nature of the covenant...[it is] a statement about the lasting duration of the covenantal bond."

Flour (mincha) and wine (nesachim), which are also often associated with sacrifices, teach the message of the importance of tradition coupled with freshness. The best wine is the wine that is old, wine that is rooted in the past. Flour, on the other hand is edible if it is new, if it is fresh. Continuity in the sacrificial service depends upon the bridging of the past with the present forging a new and profound future.

While we do not celebrate the covenant with sacrifices today, we must constantly see to it that the covenant seems new and fresh. While maintaining the tradition of the past, it should always be a creative, stirring, and exciting shir chadash (new song) - otherwise the love with God becomes stale.

The korbanot offered in the Mishkan, together with its fine ingredients, are glorious reminders of our endless love of the Ruler of rulers. It is the ultimate State Dinner. But this time, the honoree is truly worthy – it is, after all, God Himself.

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.

RABBI DAVID S. LEVIN

Compassion & Kindness

As part of the discussion in this week's parasha of the korban olah we find, "The Kohen shall don his fitted linen tunic and he shall don linen trousers on his flesh, he shall raise the ashes which the fire will consume of the olah-offering on the altar and place it next to the altar. And he shall remove his garments and don other garments and he shall remove the ashes to the outside of the camp to a pure place." This law is known as T'rumat Hadeshen and was performed daily in the Temple. The process was done in two separate steps which were distinguished by this change in clothing. Each day a portion of the ashes were taken from the fire of the mizbei'ach, altar, and placed on the ground by the side of the altar. The rest of the ashes were placed into a pile (called the tapu'ach, or apple) which remained on the altar until the pile became too large. When this occurred the Kohen would change his clothes and remove the ashes of the tapu'ach to a place outside of the camp or outside of Jerusalem (at the time of the Temple). This part of the service was not done every day but only when the tapu'ach became too large.

The timing of the T'rumat Hadeshen was also important. HaRav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the fires of the altar continued to burn throughout the night even though the last korban could be placed on the altar only up until sunset. The fires remained overnight so as to consume those parts which were not consumed before sunset. The T'rumat Hadeshen was performed in the early morning before the kindling of the fire for the main fire of the altar. The T'rumat Hadeshen was not part of the preparation for the new day's service but was considered the last part of the previous day's service. The Kohen who had the responsibility for this service that day would dress in the special clothes of the Kohanim and take a kometz

(handful) of the ashes and carefully place them on the ground by the east side of the altar next to the ramp. Hirsch saw this action as a sign of continuity; that the new mission each day was begun with the task to "carry out, ever afresh, the mission that yesterday too was to accomplish." Hirsch understood this as a message of continuity of the generations; that the tradition is passed from one generation to the next.

Hirsch primarily discussed the act of taking the kometz of ashes and placing them on the ground next to the mizbei'ach. He did not discuss here the second part of this service, the removal of the ashes from the tapu'ach. There is a machloket, difference of opinion, among the commentators about the second set of clothes. The Torah says that the Kohen who was handling the ashes would take off his special clothes and don other clothes to handle these ashes. These second clothes were of an inferior nature to the standard special clothes of the Kohen. Rashi implies that the garments are not the Bigdei Kahuna, the clothes of the Kohen but other clothes that the Kohen wore when not serving in the Temple. The Ramban disagrees as he understands the Torah to mean that the clothes that the Kohen wore when performing the first part of the T'rumat Hadeshen needed to be clean. This was a regular part of the service of the Kohen. However, when the Kohen took the ashes outside of the Temple (the ashes that were gathered from the tapu'ach pile) he should wear an inferior set of the Kohen's special garments. Though the Ramban does acknowledge that there are some Rabbis mentioned in M'sechet Yoma (23b) who do support the opinion that non-Kohanic clothing could be worn for this purpose, he stands firm that these must be of the special clothes.

The Aznayim L'Torah, HaRav Zalman Sorotskin, explains the significance of the service of the T'rumat Hadeshen. There were different foods that comprised the various offerings that were brought to the altar. Most offerings were from either large or small animals, mostly bulls, sheep, and goats. There were also times when a person could offer certain birds as his korban. Often accompanying these korbanot there were offerings of flour, olive oil, wine, and spices. Thus we see that representatives of the foods and drinks that we have were brought as korbanot or libations to the Temple and the altar. The flour that was brought to the Temple was baked or fried in several different ways depending on the type of offering which it was accompanying.

The Aznayim L'Torah continues by asking why the Torah only discusses the T'rumat Hadeshen after the korban olah when the ashes could come from all of the various korbanot that were brought that day. He explains that Hashem teaches us by example by following the laws of the Torah in the Heavens. Yaakov prayed to Hashem, "lest he (Esav) come and kill me, mothers and children." Hashem reacted by decreeing, "You may not take a mother (animal) with her children." And Hashem also decreed, "a mother (animal) and her child you shall not slaughter on the same day." Our Rabbis said that it is common for man to teach others what not to do but exempt himself from that same prohibition. That is why the Torah says "His laws and His statutes," for He, Hashem, does not exempt Himself from these laws. Just as Hashem asks from Man to offer terumah from his vineyards, orchards, and from his flocks and cattle, so Hashem offers terumah from His offerings to be placed onto the Earth. This T'rumat Hadeshen is a blessing to the Earth for each of these sources of food which are brought to the altar. Dovid Hamelech spoke of Hashem assigning the angel Michael to bring the korban olah in the Heavens to match the korban olah that was brought in the morning and in the evening as the daily korban of the B'nei Yisrael. The Aznayim L'Torah explains that for this reason the ceremony of the T'rumat Hadeshen was only mentioned in conjunction with the korban olah even though it consisted of the ashes of the other korbanot as well.

Though we no longer have the Temple and we cannot witness the bringing of the korban olah on a daily basis we can witness Hashem's compassion and kindness even today. As we devote ourselves to the study of His Torah and the performance of the mitzvot we gain the insight that we need to navigate in this world. May Hashem reward our efforts with the building of the Third Bet HaMikdash where we will be able to perform the mitzvah of T'rumat Hadeshen and may we once again witness Hashem's blessing which accompanied this mitzvah.

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

"For whoever eats chometz, that soul shall be cut off from the Jewish people." (Shemos 12:15) If a piece of treif meat becomes accidentally mixed together with two identical pieces of kosher meat, making it impossible to know which is which, the entire mixture is kosher. The rabbis tell us to not eat at least one of three, but the Torah permits it.

Likewise, if you were stirring your hot fleishig cholent on Erev Shabbos with one hand while drinking milchig coffee at the same time with the other hand, and someone bumped into you causing some of your coffee to jump into the cholent, you may not have to panic. If the milk disappears into the cholent and you know that it was only one-sixtieth or less in proportion, everything is still kosher. You can eat that cholent on Shabbos with a clear conscience.

"Bittul," the halachic nullification of a forbidden substance is a remarkable concept and rather counter-intuitive. Who cares if there is more kosher meat than treif meat? When the person eats the third piece of meat, he will DEFINITELY have eaten the treif one! So

out of doubt, it makes more sense not to eat ANY of the three pieces of meat, and indeed, some have that opinion.

Not because they disagree with the Torah, God forbid, but because they know how people think. Why is the Torah is telling us that in such a situation of bittul the treif becomes kosher? How? Only God knows, and maybe a few Kabbalists a well. But since the average person cannot get their head around that, they will THINK that the Torah has allowed them to eat a piece of treif meat, which is wrong, COMPLETELY wrong.

Therefore, one opinion tells us to throw away at least one piece, so the person can't know he is CERTAINLY eating what was once a treif piece of meat. Some say throw away two, and some say three. They don't want people thinking that they can go against the Torah with the Torah's permission. If any of this happens to a person, they should consult their local Orthodox rabbi for a decision.

An exception to this rule is chometz. From the time Pesach comes in to when it goes out seven days (eight in the Diaspora) later, any chometz mixture is forbidden. It could be 10 million portions of kosher l'Pesach food to one portion of chometz, and the mixture is still forbidden. There is no bittul of actual chometz during Pesach. It is in the halachic vernacular, "assur b'mashahu," forbidden even in the tiniest of quantities.

Why is that? Why are we super-stringent about chometz as opposed to other issurim? Because chometz on Pesach is an "Issur Kares" (a person is cut off from the Jewish people)? There are other "Issurei Kares" that can be nullified in the right amount. Is there even a halachic basis for such a stringency, other than the fact that the rabbis insist on it?

If they insist on it, there is a reason. And though it may not have to do with the halachic parameters of bittul, it does have to do with the reality of chometz itself, which is something quite Kabbalistic. After all, Kabbalists describe the rectification of Creation being, the result of God breaking the letter Ches of "chometz" (spelled, Ches-Mem-Tzaddi) into the letter Heh of "matzah" (spelled, Mem-Tzaddi-Heh). That has to mean something important.

This alone tells you that chometz, as delicious and seminal a thing it is to life, represents "tohu," the null that preceded Creation. If the word was transformed into "matzah" to make Creation, then chometz, or the spiritual basis of chometz, has to be associated with the null and void that came before "Tikun Ma'aseh Bereishis," the "Rectification of the Act of Creation."

On and even simpler level, we know that chometz represents the yetzer hara, man's evil inclination. It's not only about food. It's about anything that satiates the body, be it something we take in through our mouths or through our experiences in life. If it's materialistic in any way, it is "chometzdik," at least in the conceptual sense. The only question would be, then why is it permissible the rest of the year, and even in generous quantities?

The answer of course is back in time, when the Jewish people were still in Egypt. Something happened back then that WE take for granted, but "others" do not. DANGEROUS others and, it turns out, chometz makes us vulnerable to them.

There is a rule in Creation. It says that when a person acts morally, they are protected from evil spiritual forces. The "mitzvos" they perform not only guard them against the Klipos, the Kabbalistic name for the source of evil in Creation, but the mitzvos even weaken the Klipos. Theoretically, enough mitzvos performed can even ELIMINATE them altogether, but so far that has only been wishful thinking,.

Sins do the opposite. They draw the Klipos to a person, and strengthen the Klipos in the process. If a person does not do teshuvah and take care against the Klipos, then the Klipos have permission from God to spiritually attack the person, as they have done on so many occasions.

Unfortunately, such attacks aren't easy to recognize or defend against. On the contrary, the person under attack may merely feel "free" of religion. They FEEL as if they're MORE in charge of their lives, when in fact they are really more enslaved, bound to do the bidding of the Klipos. It is something that tragically only becomes clear to a person once it is too late to fix the situation, like moments before their departure from this world.

This only explains why chometz should be a problem ALL year round. Why is it only an issue during Pesach?

Because a great injustice was done against the Klipos during this time of year. The Jewish people had been holding on the 49th level of spiritual impurity until the Ten Plagues started. By all rights, they should have fallen completely into the hands of the Klipos -- for good. The Jewish people should not have been saved.

Instead, because of the promise made to Avraham Avinu that the eighth generation would go free, God bent the rules. He sent Moshe Rabbeinu down to Egypt to not only free the Jewish people, but to increase their merit. He artificially sensitized them to the reality of God, by performing increasingly more spectacular miracles. With each passing plague, the Divine light only became more intense until the Jewish people had to quickly leave Egypt to save the Klipos, not themselves.

If you think the Klipos forgot about this "injustice," think again. Quite the contrary, every year at this time they are reminded of what should have been, and what was instead. It makes them vengeful, and they look to take back now some of what they lost back then.

As a long a Jew remains COMPLETELY chometz free during Pesach, the Klipos cannot get to them. The light of Pesach once again keeps them away, allowing the person to live instead, enveloped by the liberating light of God. The Klipos can do nothing but helplessly watch from afar.

But if a person has even a speck of chometz on Pesach, it's like whistling and yelling, "Hey Klipos! I'm over here!" It's like putting a tracking device on yourself that attracts the Klipos right to you. The person becomes a "Korban Pesach" for the Klipos instead. Not a very appealing option, and certainly good incentive to make sure the house is well cleaned and properly checked in advance of the "Holiday of Freedom."

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 korban todah, 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*

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Our Parsha, Tzav, 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?

Rabbi Avi Weiss explains that 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 positions separate themselves from the people and abandon the everyday menial tasks. By starting the day with ash-cleaning, the Torah insists it shouldn't be this way.

A few years ago a couple appeared before Rabbi Gifter, 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 no legal religious obligation to remove the trash. The next morning, before the early services, Rabbi Gifter 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. This message comes to us courtesy of the sacrificial ashes.

SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

"This is the law of the olah / elevation-offering-it is the olah on the flame..." (6:2) The word that the Torah uses for "it" spelled "hu" (which means "he") but pronounced "he" (which means "she"). R' Chaim Yosef David Azulai z"l ("Chida"; Eretz Yisrael and Italy; 1724-1806) writes about this as follows: Any leader, whether the leader of the generation or the head of a household, must be capable of imposing his will on his followers (or household members). This may require haughtiness. However, any such haughtiness must be an act. In his heart, a leader must feel subdued. Also, he must be sure that he his acting only for the honor of the Torah, and not for his own honor.

"This is the law of the olah / elevation offering"- i.e., this is the law for those occasions when you act in an elevated (haughty) manner. Remember "She, the Torah, is the olah-the thing which is elevated." However, if "he," the person himself, considers himself elevated, then, says the verse, "on the flame." If one's "elevation" (haughtiness) is for his own honor, he is worthy of being consumed by fire. (Quoted in Torat Ha'Chida)