

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

### Covenant & Conversation

If we put together recent discoveries in neuroscience with Midrashic tradition we may be able to shed new light on the meaning of the central mystery of Yom Kippur: the two goats, identical in appearance, over which the High Priest cast lots, sacrificing one as a sin offering and sending the other, the scapegoat, into the wilderness to die.

In past Covenant & Conversation essays on Acharei Mot, we have looked at the scapegoat as it figures in Jewish tradition and, in a very different way, in other cultures. But there are other dimensions of the rite that cry out for explanation. We argued that there were two goats because Yom Kippur represents a dual process of kappara, atonement, and tahara, purification, directed respectively at guilt and shame. But this does not explain why the two animals were required to be as similar as possible to one another, nor does it account for the role of casting lots (goralot). Presumably, these elements were designed to inspire feelings of awe and penitence on the part of the crowds that thronged the Temple on the holiest day of the year, but how and in what way?

Over the centuries, the Sages sought to decipher the mystery. Two animals, alike in appearance but different in fate, suggests the idea of twins. This and other clues led the Midrash, the Zohar, and classic commentators such as Nahmanides and Abarbanel to the conclusion that in some sense, the two goats symbolised the most famous of all the Torah's twins: Jacob and Esau.

There are other clues too. The word se'ir, "goat," is associated in the Torah with Esau. He and his descendants lived in the land of Seir. The word se'ir is related to sei'ar, "hairy," which is how Esau was born: "his whole body was like a hairy garment" (Gen. 25:25). When Rebecca urged Jacob to pretend to be Esau in order to take Isaac's blessing, Jacob said, "My brother Esau is a hairy [sa'ir] man while I have smooth skin" (Gen. 27:11). According to the Mishnah, a red thread was tied to the scapegoat, and "red" (Edom) was Esau's other name. So there was a tradition that the scapegoat in some way symbolised Esau. Azazel, the mysterious place or entity for which the goat was intended, was Samael, Esau's guardian angel.

In particular, the phrase "two kids of the goats,"

shnei se'rei izim, mentioned in the High Priest's rites, reminds us of the very similar expression, "two kids of the goats," shnei gedi'ei izim, mentioned in Genesis 27, the scene of Jacob's deception. Isaac had asked Esau to catch him some wild game and prepare him a meal so that he could bless him. Rebecca tells Jacob to "Go out to the flock and bring me two choice kids of the goats, so I can prepare some tasty food for your father, the way he likes it. Such verbal parallels are not coincidental in the Torah. They are part of its sustained intertextuality, its finely woven prose in which one verse sheds light on another.

So the two goats of the High Priest's service evoke in multiple ways the figures of Jacob and Esau, and specifically the scene in which Jacob pretended to be Esau, dressing in his clothes so that he would feel and smell like his brother. It was then, answering his father's question, "Who are you, my son?" that Jacob said the words, "I am your firstborn Esau," leading Isaac to say, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau" (Gen. 27:22).

Who then were Esau and Jacob? What did they represent and how is this relevant to Yom Kippur and atonement? Midrashic tradition tends to portray Jacob as perfect and Esau as an evil-doer. However, the Torah itself is far more nuanced. Esau is not a figure of evil. His father loved him and sought to bless him. The Sages say that in one respect -- honouring his father -- he was a supreme role model. (See Shemot Rabbah 46:4, Bamidbar Rabbah 1:15) And in Deuteronomy Moses commands, "Do not despise an Edomite [i.e., a descendant of Esau], because he is your brother" (Deut. 23:8).

Esau in the Torah is not the epitome of evil. Rather, he is the man of impulse. We see this in the scene in which he sells his birthright to Jacob. Coming in one day exhausted by the hunt, he sees Jacob making lentil broth: "He said to Jacob, 'Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!...' Jacob replied, 'First sell me your birthright.' 'Look, I am about to die,' Esau said. 'What good is the birthright to me?' But Jacob said, 'Swear to me first.' So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright." (Gen. 25:30-34)

This vignette of Esau's impetuosity -- selling part of his heritage for the sake of a bowl of soup -- is

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reinforced by the unique description of the action in the staccato form of five consecutive verbs (literally, "he ate, he drank, he rose, he left, he despised"). Every time we see Esau we have the impression of an impulsive figure always driven by the emotion of the moment, be it hunger, filial devotion, a desire for revenge or, at last, generosity of spirit.

Jacob is the opposite. He does not give way to his feelings. He acts and thinks long-term. That is what he does when he seizes the opportunity to buy Esau's birthright, when he works for seven years for Rachel (a period that "seemed to him but a few days"), and when he fixes terms with Laban for payment for his labour. Rebuking his son Joseph for the seeming presumptuousness of his dreams, the Torah tells us that the brothers were jealous of Joseph "but his father kept the matter in mind." Jacob never acts impulsively. He thinks long and hard before deciding.

Not only is impetuosity alien to him, he is also critical of it when he sees it in his children. On his death bed, he curses his three eldest sons in these words: "Reuben, you are my firstborn.... Unstable as water, you will not excel.... Simeon and Levi... Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel!" (Gen. 49:3-7)

Acting on the basis of anger and impetuosity is for him the sign of an unworthy personality with which he does not wish to be associated.

What does all this have to do with sin, transgression, atonement, and two goats?

Recent years have seen a revolution in our understanding of the human brain, and with it, the human mind. One key text was Antonio Damasio's book *Descartes' Error* (New York: Putnam, 1994). Damasio discovered something unusual about patients who had suffered brain damage to the ventromedial prefrontal cortex. Their ability to think remained unchanged, but their ability to feel dropped to almost zero. The result was that they found it impossible to make decisions. They would reason endlessly but fail to make their mind up on one course of action rather than another.

Much subsequent work has shown that Descartes and Kant were wrong in their assertion that we are, first and foremost, rational animals. David Hume was right in his view that we are primarily

emotional beings who make decisions on the basis of feelings, desires, and drives of which we may be barely conscious. We justify our choices, but brain scans show that we may have made those choices before being aware that we had done so.

We are more driven by emotion and less by reason than Enlightenment thinkers believed. This discovery has led to new fields of study like behavioural economics (what people actually do rather than what theory says they do), emotional intelligence, and interdisciplinary studies linking neuroscience to morality and politics.

We have, in fact, a dual-system or twin-track brain. This is what Daniel Kahneman is referring to in the title of his famous book *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011). One track is rapid, instinctive, emotional, and subconscious. The other is slower, conscious, deliberative, and calculating. The former allows us to react quickly to situations of immediate potential danger. Without it, we and our ancestors would not have survived. Many of our instinctive reactions are benign. It is natural to have empathy, and with it the tendency to feel other people's pain and come to their aid. We develop a strong sense of attachment that leads us to defend members of our family or community. But not all instincts are benign. Anger, envy, jealousy, fear, hate, and the desire for revenge may once have been functional, but they are often deeply destructive in social situations. That is why the ability to "think slow," to pause and reflect, matters so much. All animals have desires. Only human beings are capable of passing judgement on desires -- of asking, should I or should I not satisfy this desire?

These recent discoveries in neuroscience and related fields do not tell us something new. Rather, they have vindicated an ancient insight that was often obscured by Enlightenment rationalism. We cannot live, choose, or love without emotion. But one of the fundamental themes of Genesis is that not all emotion is benign. Instinctive, impulsive behaviour can lead to violence. What is needed to be a carrier of God's covenant is the ability to "think slow" and act deliberately. That is the contrast between Isaac and Ishmael (of whom it was said, "He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him," Gen. 16:12). Even more so, it is the contrast between Jacob and Esau.

Which brings us to Genesis 27 and the moment when Jacob dressed up in Esau's clothes and said to his father, "I am Esau your firstborn." The two goats of the High Priest's service and the two goats prepared by Rebecca symbolise our duality: "The hands are the hands of Esau but the voice is the voice of Jacob." We each have an Esau and Jacob within us, the impulsive, emotional brain and the reflective, deliberative one. We can think fast or slow. Our fate, our goral, our life-script, will be determined by which we choose. Will our life be

lived "to the Lord" or "to Azazel," to the random vicissitudes of chance?

This is the moral drama symbolised by the two goats, one dedicated "to the Lord," the other "to Azazel" and released into the wilderness. The power of ritual is that it does not speak in abstractions -- reason versus emotion, instinctual deferral rather than gratification. It is gripping, visceral, all the more so when it evokes, consciously or otherwise, the memory of the twins, Jacob and Esau, together at birth yet utterly divergent in their character and fate.

Who am I? That is the question Yom Kippur forces us to ask. To be Jacob, we have to release and relinquish the Esau within us, the impulsiveness that can lead us to sell our birthright for a bowl of soup, losing eternity in the pursuit of desire. *Covenant and Conversation 5779 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2019 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

**"A**nd God spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they came near before the Lord and died." (Leviticus 16:1) Which is the greater evil in God's eyes – hot sins of passion or cold sins of apathy? Rabbenu Zadok HaKohen of Lublin (1822–1900), in his masterful work *Pri Zaddik* on the portions of the week, cites a famous midrash of an individual walking on a road (life's journey), seductively being summoned either by fire to his right or snow to his left. The wise traveler understands that he must remain at the center, avoiding both extremes of either fanatic passion (fire) or disinterested apathy (snow). But which of the two extremes is more problematic?

A sin of apathy – symbolized by snow – could well describe the infamous transgression of the scouts, tribal chiefs sent by Moses to bring back a report about the land of Israel. Although they did not conceal the positive aspects of the Promised Land (flowing with milk and honey, and grapes so huge eight men were required to carry each cluster), ten of the scouts nonetheless stressed the negative: a race of people descended from giants who would be impossible to conquer. At the end of the day it was their (and the nation's) apathy toward Israel and disinterest in the religious and political challenge and potential of national sovereignty, which led them to take the path of least resistance and either return to Egypt or remain in the desert. Their sin was one of coldness and disillusionment, a lack of idealism bordering on cynicism.

In contrast to the apathy of the spies, the classic example of a sin of passion may be ascribed to Nadav and Avihu, Aaron's sons who died when they

brought an unauthorized offering of "strange fire," referred to in the beginning of this Torah portion. The initial event describes the dedication of the Sanctuary, amidst all of the pomp and circumstance of the priestly ritual, which achieves a climax when the Almighty sends down a fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice of the Israelites and to demonstrate His acceptance of their service. The people become exultant, fall on their faces in worship! And in this moment of ecstasy Nadav and Avihu, sons of the high priest and major celebrants at this consecration, express their passion for God in bringing a "strange fire which had not been commanded." They are immediately killed by God in a fire from above. It seems clear that here is the prototypical "sin of fire," excessive ecstasy which – if not tempered by divine law – can lead to zealous fanaticism which must be stopped in its tracks.

Nevertheless, I would argue that in the scale of transgression, "sins of fire" are generally more forgivable than are "sins of snow." Even if Nadav and Avihu committed a transgression in bringing their strange fire, Moses mitigates their crime when he communicates God's reaction to his bereft brother: "I will be sanctified through them that come near to me, and before all the people will I be glorified." (Leviticus 10:3)

The sense of the verse is that although the transgression had to be punished, the perpetrators of the crime are still referred to as being "near" to the divine. In contrast, the apathy of the spies leads to major tragedies throughout the course of Jewish history, starting with the punishment of the entire desert generation: "They will therefore not see the land that I swore to their ancestors." (Numbers 14:23)

Moreover, the self-imposed passion of Nadav and Avihu, although it leads to the tragic deaths of these two ecstatic celebrants, does not go beyond the "transgressors themselves"; the Bible adds a further commandment several verses after the description of their death: "Drink no wine or strong drink...when you go into into the Tent of Meeting, that you die not..." (Leviticus 10:9)

In effect, the Bible is forbidding unbridled ecstasy within divine service. But this is a far cry from the punishment of the Ninth of Av tragedy (the day of the scouts' report) which portends Jewish exile and persecution for thousands of years!

Finally, one most striking feature of this portion's opening verse, which refers back to the transgression of Aaron's sons who "came near before the Lord and died," is the absence of the names of Nadav and Avihu. Could the Torah be distinguishing the act from the actors, the crime from its perpetrators? Passion that can lead to fanaticism must be stopped and condemned, but the individuals, whose motives were pure, remain close to the Almighty even in their

moment of punishment! And despite the fact that excessive passion resulted in the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, the service in the Temple goes on. Once again, in contrast, when the ten tribal heads refuse to enter the land, they are in effect saying no to the entire plan of God; Jewish history comes to a forty-year standstill because of the apathy, and faithlessness of the scouts.

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#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**T**his Torah reading is inextricably connected to the holiest day of the Jewish calendar, Yom Kippur.

The first half of the reading comprises the very same Torah reading that is read on the morning of Yom Kippur, while the latter part of this reading is read publicly during the afternoon service of that day. The first part deals with the ritual and service of the high priest in the holy Temple on Yom Kippur. The second part deals with those physical relationships between humans that are regulated and, in many cases, considered forbidden by the Torah.

While it is quite understandable why the first part of this Torah reading dealing with the service of the high priest of the Temple on Yom Kippur fits with this theme of Yom Kippur itself, it is somewhat puzzling as to why the second part of this Torah reading, dealing essentially with physical and sexual immorality, should be the theme of the afternoon services on Yom Kippur.

Yom Kippur represents to us the ability to disassociate ourselves from bodily wants and needs and to transcend to be in the company of angels, so to speak. Merely reading about the sins mentioned in the context of this second part of the Torah portion of this week already raises images within our subconscious mind that apparently are not fitting for the holiness of the day of Yom Kippur. Yet the rabbis of Israel who were the wisest judges of human nature and understood the human condition fully, chose that this portion should specifically be read and emphasized on the afternoon of the holiest day of the Jewish calendar.

There are many explanations for the issue that I have raised in the previous paragraph. But one that seems to be most relevant in our time, when there is no longer any definition present for sexual immorality or deviance, is that the Torah does not want to allow ourselves to be fooled by the holiness of the day and by our abstinence from the usual bodily needs of everyday life. Judaism teaches that just as human beings can reach the highest forms of holiness, selflessness and piety, so too can these very same human beings sink to levels of evil, selfishness and incestuous depravity.

The Talmud warns us that there is no guarantee or guardian for human beings when it comes to matters of desire and physical sexuality. No one is above it and only those who think that they are somehow immune to it are the ones who are most

vulnerable.

On Yom Kippur, when we are at our holiest, we are also reminded how low and evil we can be if we do not guard ourselves. To ignore our weaknesses is to constantly live in peril of irreparable damage to ourselves and to others. Even a cursory review of daily events in our time will show us how easily even great and noble people can create the greatest harm to themselves simply because they believed that it could not happen to them. The Torah is the book of realism, the book of humanity. That is how it is to be read, studied and understood. ©2019 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**W**hy were Nadav and Avihu, two of Ahron's (Aaron) sons killed? The Torah states their death came when they brought an eish zarah, a foreign fire into the Temple. (Leviticus 10:1) But what was the nature of this fire?

Some maintain that because the prohibition against drinking is found in the sentences that follow their death, (Leviticus 10:9) the fire alludes to the possibility that Ahron's sons served in the sanctuary while intoxicated. This may be the reason for the punishment of death.

Others insist that the fire relates to their being "hot" in deciding halakhic matters themselves without consulting Moshe (Moses). Note that the preceding sentences (Leviticus 9:23) stresses the leadership role of Moshe and Ahron.

I am convinced that when many answers are offered, it indicates that none are truly compelling. It can be suggested that we cannot comprehend the reason why Nadav and Avihu's actions were deserving of death. Only God can grasp the unfathomable, we cannot.

This may explain why the Torah tells us at the beginning of this week's portion, that the Lord spoke to Moshe immediately after the death of Ahron's two sons. (Leviticus 16:1) The lesson: despite the suffering of sufferings, the horror of an untimely ghastly death, dialogue continues. God tells Moshe to speak to Ahron and Ahron does God's will. In fact this may be the central point of the Nadav - Avihu story. Although not understanding why his son died, Ahron and the priesthood continue on in a relationship to God.

Not coincidentally, soon after the first sentence of our portion, Ahron the high priest is commanded to select two identical goats and, by lots, designate one as an offering to God and the other to be pushed over the cliff for Azazel. (Leviticus 16:6-11) It is extraordinary

that although these goats are identical in every way, they experience different fates. This to teach Ahron and all of us that sometimes life takes tragic twists and turns that are inexplicable.

When confronted with such inexplicable suffering we all ought to remember the words of Esther Wachsmann, mother of Nachshon (the young Israeli soldier murdered by Arab terrorists a number of years ago). She said, "When tragedy befalls us we should not ask 'why?' but rather, 'what shall we do now?'" It is our choice whether to approach our tragedy by only crying 'woe is me' or whether to allow it to elevate us, giving our lives new meaning and direction and bringing us closer to God."

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik makes this very point when distinguishing between "fate" and "destiny." Fate casts each of us into a dimension of life we cannot control. Destiny, on the other hand, "is an active existence in which humanity confronts the environment into which she or he was cast...Humanity's mission in this world is to turn fate into destiny, an existence that is passive and influenced to an existence that is active and influential."

A lesson to think about especially these days when Israel is under attack. Like Nadav and Avihu, no one can explain why it's happening. But like Ahron and the priesthood, against all odds, Am Yisrael will continue to connect with God and, in the end, prevail. © 2019 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

#### ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

## Traditions of the Goyim

*Translated for the Encyclopedia Talmudit by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss*

**T**he Torah in this week's portion states "Uvechukotehem Lo Telechu" 18:3 (don't follow the traditions of the non-Jew) and Rashi states "In other words their theaters and circuses". The Sifra comments that what we are referring to here are those stadiums that are used for idolatry and licentiousness. There are those who claim that one cannot build structures that are similar and have the same goals as these non-Jewish structures. However if an architect or a contractor would build a structure that would resemble the architecture of a non-Jewish building (presuming they do not place any idolatrous paintings or idols in the structure) would not transgress the negative commandment of "following in their traditions". Thus we should not be alarmed to see Synagogues built in Gothic style.

There are those however who state that the issue is not the building of these structures but attendance in these edifices for idol worship and licentiousness. This is indeed the source for the

warning against "a rebellious child" (Ben Sorer U'moreh) not to be a drunkard or a glutton. For without this warning, ("Of not following in their traditions") specifically mentioned in the Torah, we would not be able to punish him.

There are those additionally who derive from this sentence that one may not attend a bull fight in a stadium. This prohibition is not only because it causes pain to the animal (Tzaar Baalei Chayim) but because this is an event that non-Jews attend but Jews should not. To this, our Rabbis in Tractate Avodah Zarah 18b quote the sentence from the book of Psalms 1; 1 "Ashrei Haish Asher Lo Halach Baatzat Reshayim" (praised is the person that does not follow the ways of the sinful), referring to someone who does not attend the theaters and circuses of idolaters, and "U'vederech Chatayim Lo Ammad" (and who didn't follow the ways of sinners) to someone who didn't participate in a hunt.

If all this is valid and one has so much time on their hands, then what should one occupy themselves with? Should we just sleep?

The reply is obvious. Study Torah. © 2019 Rabbi M. Weiss and Encyclopedia Talmudit

#### RABBI BENJAMIN YUDIN

## TorahWeb

**W**ith the taste of matzah still in our mouths, I'd like to share with you an exciting teaching of the Vilna Gaon which appears in Aderes Eliyahu on parshas Acharei Mos. In Vayikra (18:5) we are taught, "you shall observe My decrees and My laws, which man shall carry out and by which he shall live (v'chai bahem) -- I am Hashem." Interestingly, Rashi and Targum Unkelus understand the words v'chai bahem as referring to the world to come; the Torah is assuring and promising reward in the next world.

The Talmud (Yuma 85b), in providing sources for the law that saving a life overrides the Shabbos, teaches that Shmuel used the verse "v'chai bahem" as the primary source that mitzvos are to be lived, and except for the three cardinal sins of idolatry, adultery and murder, all laws of the Torah are suspended to save life. In keeping with this understanding that the verse is referring to life in this world, the Vilna Gaon teaches that mitzvos are the source of life for the Jew. The Zohar (Parshas Tetzaveh 183b) calls matzah, "michla d'asvasa -- bread of elixir" and "michla d'm'hemnusa -- bread of faith." I believe the above may be taken literally, that in addition to the flour and water, one of the benefits of ingesting matzah is Vitamin F -- faith. It helps the Jew believe, and when crises occur throughout the year, the injection of Vitamin F assists in responding with faith. Similarly, the Vilna Gaon teaches us that inherent in all mitzvos is a spiritual reservoir that enriches the soul. This is true not only regarding positive mitzvos but also, as the Talmud (Kiddushin 39b) teaches, regarding one who withstood temptation

and did not violate a negative commandment, for whom it is reckoned On High as if he did a positive mitzvah. However, while this understanding of the hidden treasures found in the mitzvos might be an alluring factor to observe the mitzvos and thereby enrich one's soul, it is for this reason that the verse concludes, "Ani Hashem," to teach that the ideal performance of the mitzvos is for His sake and not for one's personal enrichment.

Indeed, this is how the Gra understands Birkas Hamitzvos. First we acknowledge, "asher kidishanu b'mitzvosav -- that He has sanctified us with His commandments", which is an incredible commitment by Hashem to the Jewish people and perhaps provides sufficient motivation for one to perform a mitzvah -- to derive the personal spiritual elevation and closeness to Hashem. Therefore, the bracha continues, "v'tzivanu -- and He commanded us", teaching us that ultimately we are to perform the mitzvos because He, Hashem ordained their performance. The highest form of service is to focus on serving the Master who commands the mitzvah, rather than how the mitzvah benefits and enriches the performer of the mitzvah. Thus, performance of mitzvos provides a double benefit: it nourishes and enriches one's body and soul, and allows for a personal service and relationship with Hashem.

The Vilan Gaon also teaches that the reverse is true regarding the violation of transgressions. As the mitzvos maintain and nourish the individual, so too in a natural way, aveiros -- sins cause a degeneration and atrophy of the soul. Just as in the natural world if one ingests poison the deadly effect is not a punishment but rather a natural consequence of one's actions, so too the negative action has a deteriorating effect on the soul. This is familiar to us regarding the effect of non-Kosher food on one's soul, as the Torah teaches (Vayikra 11:43), "v'nitmesem" which is understood by our Rabbis (Yuma 39a) as, "v'netamtem -- your soul will be dulled and weakened". This is true regarding all the negative commandments of the Torah.

This conclusion is drawn by the Vilan Gaon from his sharp analysis of the effect of Adam's sin. Hashem advised him to eat of all the fruits in the Garden of Eden. Interestingly, notes the Meshech Chochma, had he eaten from those fruits first, it could have fortified him to withstand the temptation of eating from the forbidden fruit. Hashem warned him that were we to eat from the tree of knowledge, he would die, which is understood by the Ramban to not mean immediate death but rather becoming mortal. Thus when he does eat from the forbidden tree, why is his punishment to work the land with great difficulty, that the land should yield thorns and thistles, and to gain his bread by the sweat of his brow? His punishment should have been simply that he is now you mortal! The answer is as stated above, that his becoming mortal

was not the punishment but the natural consequence of eating from the forbidden tree. Once Hashem said that on the day Adam eats from the tree he will die, the transformation from immortal to mortal became a natural characteristic inherent within the tree and was not a punishment per se. Adam deserved to be punished over and above the natural consequences of his action for not listening to Hashem, and that punishment consisted of the curses above listed.

Thus "v'chai bahem" teaches that the observance of mitzvos is endowed with spiritual vitality, while the effect of aveiros is decay and atrophy of the soul. However, the verse ends with the sublime admonition of "Ani Hashem" -- don't do mitzvos primarily to build yourself and your character, but ideally you should do them to serve Hashem.

Having begun with "v'chai bahem" and the obligation to sustain life, I'd like to close by remembering the Kedoshim of the Shoah who if they could trade with gentile prisoners their ration of bread for soup, did so, as not to violate eating chametz on Pesach. Those who HAD to eat chametz to fulfill "v'chai bahem" note the emotional anguish that accompanied their eating of chametz on Pesach by the prayer composed by the Rabbis in Bergen-Belsen to be recited prior to their eating of chametz:

"Our Father in Heaven, it is known and revealed before Thee that it is our will to do Thy will and to observe the festival of Passover through the eating of matzah and by not violating the prohibition of chametz. For this our hearts are grieved -- that our enslavement prevents us and we are in danger of our lives. Behold, then. We are prepared and ready to fulfill Thy commandment of 'though shall live by them and not die by them' and to carefully heed the warning 'take therefore good heed and guard thy life very much.' Therefore, it is our prayer unto Thee that Thou keep us alive and preserve us and redeem us speedily so that we may observe Thy statutes and do Thy will and serve Thee with a perfect heart. Amen."

May their fulfillment of "v'chai bahem" under the most extreme and challenging conditions inspire us to fulfill and appreciate "v'chai bahem" in happiness and excitement leading up to "Ani Hashem". ©2019 Rabbi B. Yudin and TorahWeb.org

### **RABBI YITZCKOK ADLERSTEIN**

## **Mei Marom**

"**S**peak to Aharon your brother. He shall not come at all times into the Sanctuary, within the Curtain, in front of the Cover that is upon the Aron, so that he shall not die." (Vayikra 16:2) Before there was death, there was still death. Had Man not sinned and eaten from the Tree of Knowledge, people would still have had to transition between life as we know it, and a higher form of consciousness. In that sense, death was part of life from the very beginning.

That transition, however, would have been very different from what we know today as death. The original form of that transition was entirely positive. The leaving behind of concerns and occupations that are part of what we call life would only have strengthened Man, rather than weakened him. It would have equipped him for an enhanced, supercharged life.

Instead, Adam's sin changed death into something negative. The transition now required negation and destruction of the previous life. Specifically, the sin attached itself to aspects of life that involve its continuity: eating, and reproducing. The new death brought cessation where there had previously been continuity.

Yitzchok had hoped to bring about a tikkun of eating through Esav. It is known that Esav had within him the power of remediation and change. That is why his neshamah is said to contain the souls of geirim. Yitzchok sought to harness this ability through the mitzvah of kibud av v'eim, of honoring parents. Yitzchok had Esav hunt and prepare food for him. Through this, Yitzchok sought to reach the potential geirim within Esav's neshamah, and raise them up to where they would join the Jewish people. Yitzchok also thought that this process would begin the tikkun of eating, which had fallen so terribly though Adam's sin. (Esav, however, assumed that one honored parents only with spiritual things. That is why he brought signs of piety to his father, asking how to take ma'aser from salt and straw. Yitzchok, however, insisted that one manifested the honor due to parents specifically through serving them materially, through elevating the physical. This is the idea behind the meals that he had Esav prepare for him.)

This is also the intent of the gemara (Kiddushin 31A) that teaches that the nations of the world were skeptical and critical in listening to the first few of the Ten Commandments. The listeners cynically observed that those commandments seemingly functioned to enhance G-d's honor. Once, however, they heard the commandment about honoring parents, they conceded that all the commandments were just. Their first reaction presupposed that this Torah that was being given to Man concerned itself only with spiritual matters. The non-Jews cynically found this approach wanting. How could such an approach remedy the change in Man and his entire physical world that had been brought about by Man's sin? When they heard the commandment about honoring parents, and realized that it afforded Man an opportunity to take pedestrian matters like food and drink and turn them into kedushah, they recognized the awesome potential of Torah.

Yitzchok's attempt at beginning the tikkun required a major tweak, which came through the insight of Rivka. She realized that Esav's engagement of the physical world would only degrade it further, rather than

elevate it. That elevation would have to come through the descendents of Yaakov.

While Yitzchok and Rivka addressed the tikkun of eating, the parallel tikkun of death waited for Nadav and Avihu. Their story is juxtaposed in our parshah to the avodah of Yom Kippur. In a word, we experience elevation each Yom Kippur through self-imposed privation and negation of our physical wants and desires. This is remarkably similar to the function of death, which also allows us to attain a higher consciousness, but only by eradicating life itself. (As we explained above, precisely that was the change brought about by Adam's sin.)

Nadav and Avihu were determined to take control of this process, and enlarge it beyond the single day of the year model. By entering within their fire, they hoped to achieve the same elevation that ordinarily was available only on Yom Kippur, when the Kohen Gadol entered the Kodesh Kodashim. They did not concern themselves with the fact that they would forfeit their lives thereby; they wanted the elevation available in the transition to a higher state, regardless of the price they would have to that they were after.

The Torah, however, took a dim view to this approach. "He shall not come at all times into the Sanctuary... so that he shall not die." The Torah does not want us to achieve those spiritual heights by negating our physical existence. This is the point of Yom Kippur -- that we reach those heights and live to cherish them. This is available to us only on Yom Kippur. (Based on Mei Marom, Vayikra Maamar 24)  
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#### **RABBI DAVID LEVINE**

### **Death-Interruption-Service**

**T**he death of Aharon's two sons, Nadav and Avihu, took place in Parasha Sh'mini, yet the commandments given to Aharon and the Kohanim concerning the avoidance of consuming alcohol prior to entering their service were not given to Aharon until the next day. The Torah separates our parasha from those deaths with two other parshiot, Tazria and Metzora. When the Torah now returns to the event of the deaths, it continues by teaching Aharon the various procedures that the Kohen Gadol will perform on Yom Kippur. We will try to discover the connection between these three areas of the Torah: (1) the death of Aharon's sons, (2) the separation between our parasha and the death, and (3) the service on Yom Kippur.

There are many questions about the death of Nadav and Avihu. Our parasha begins with the words, "And Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of the two sons of Aharon when they approached before Hashem and they died." In Parashat Sh'mini the Torah tells us, "And the sons of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, took each man his firepan, they put fire in them and placed incense upon it and they brought before

Hashem an alien fire that He had not commanded them. And there went out a fire from before Hashem and it consumed them and they died before Hashem.” Rashi quotes the argument from the Gemara, “R’Eliezer says, ‘the sons of Aharon did not die but for the fact that they rendered a (halachic) decision in the presence of their teacher, Moshe.’ R’Yishmael says, ‘While intoxicated with wine, they entered the Sanctuary.’” The ibn Ezra says that they were punished for entering the Holy of Holies (the Kodesh Kedoshim) without permission. The Ramban argues that they did not enter the Holy of Holies but only the Holy (the Kodesh) and brought their incense onto the Golden Altar where incense was normally brought.

Each of these possible reasons for their deaths is also part of the caution issued to Aharon and the Kohanim. Aharon is warned to avoid drinking before entering to serve Hashem, not to enter the Holy of Holies except when he is required to by the Law, and he alone may enter the Holy of Holies and then only when he brings incense with him. Each of these cautions stem from the requirement that he must perform the service exactly as Hashem. The service is precisely instructed in detail including its order. Aharon may enter the Holy of Holies only at those times and in that order. He is not to change anything unless he is ordered to by Moshe who would have been commanded by Hashem to vary the previous command.

HaRav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch explains the death of Aharon’s sons, the separation of these parshiot, and the instructions given Aharon. Hirsch refers frequently to a phrase “free-willed self-controlling subordination.” Hirsch says that this subordination was the “indispensable condition for existing as a member of this People of the Law even for those members who were nearest to Hashem.” This was the mistake made by Nadav and Avihu. There was nothing wrong with their desire to serve Hashem but they were required to serve Hashem only in the fashion that He prescribed. Whether they entered the Holy of Holies or only stood in the Holy, either way they were not instructed to be there at this time. Whether they offered the appropriate incense or whether the incense was alien, the fact that they offered it at all was not instructed by Hashem. That made it alien.

The two parshiot which intervene between the death of the sons and the admonition of caution to Aharon deal with a person who becomes tamei and is separated from the rest of the community. Even when he has been returned to the people, he must become tahor, pure, before he is permitted to return to the Temple. The Torah warns us, “And you shall separate the B’nei Yisrael from their impurity and they shall not die as a result of their impurity if they make impure my Tabernacle that is among them.” The tamei person who ventures into the Temple courtyard is punishable

by death. Even though this person is only there because he seeks to become closer to Hashem, he lacks that self-control which tells him that he may only become closer to Hashem when Hashem has designated that he is pure once again.

On Yom Kippur, when any of the B’nei Yisrael entered the outer courtyard, the chatzeir, he entered having already made certain that he was tahor, pure. There he could see the Kohanim performing those mitzvot that were centered around the altar that enabled man to rise up and continually improve himself. At the same time, he became aware that he, personally, had not reached this ideal. He is separated from achieving those mitzvot for which he was not commanded. Only the Kohanim were raised to this standard, yet even they were not permitted into the Holy or the Holy of Holies unless they were commanded. Otherwise they assumed a personal level of perfection and achievement which was presumptuous at best. Even the Kohein who was performing a mitzvah in the Holy for which he was commanded could not enter the Holy of Holies, for again, this would assume a level of spiritual achievement that was unrealistic and unproven. Only the Kohein Gadol could go through that curtain that separated him from everyone else. When he entered, he would need to create another separation using the incense to create a cloud that would rise over the Aron Kodesh.

We have been given a wonderful Torah which speaks to all of our needs and which shows us the perfect way in which we may accomplish an ideal. We must not miscalculate the perfection of the Torah and think that in some way we can improve on that perfection. I am reminded of an argument that I once had with myself. I grew up on classical music, both as a clarinetist and as a concert-goer. I was never more relaxed and rejuvenated than when listening or playing Mozart or Beethoven. I understood that Hashem gave us Shabbat in order to rejuvenate our lives each week. What could be better than to sit down on a Shabbat afternoon and listen to Vivaldi? But then I realized that I was desirous of fulfilling Hashem’s “purpose” in a way in which Hashem would disapprove. I was placing my own “ideal” above the “ideal” of Hashem. I was forgetting the ideal of subordination to Hashem. May we always be cognizant of what we must do to subordinate ourselves to the “ideals” given us by Hashem. ©2019 Rabbi D. Levine

