

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L**

### Covenant & Conversation

*Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.*

It should have been a day of joy. The Israelites had completed the Mishkan, the Sanctuary. For seven days Moses had made preparations for its consecration. (As described in Exodus 40.) Now on the eighth day -- the first of Nissan -- one year to the day since the Israelites had received their first command two weeks prior to the Exodus (Ex. 40:2) -- the service of the Sanctuary was about to begin (Lev. 9:1 -- 24). The Sages say that in Heaven it was the most joyous day since Creation (Megillah 10b).

But tragedy struck. The two elder sons of Aaron "offered a strange fire that had not been commanded" (Lev. 10:1) and the fire from heaven that should have consumed the sacrifices consumed them as well. They died. Aaron's joy turned to mourning. "Vayidom Aharon" meaning, "And Aaron was silent." (Lev. 10:3) The man who had been Moses' spokesman could not longer speak. Words turned to ash in his mouth.

There is much in this episode that is hard to understand, much that has to do with the concept of holiness and the powerful energies it releases that, like nuclear power today, could be deadly dangerous if not properly used. But there is also a more human story about two approaches to leadership that still resonates with us today.

First there is the story about Aaron. We read about how Moses told him to begin his role as High Priest. "Moses [then] said to Aaron, 'Approach the altar, and prepare your sin offering and burnt offering, thus atoning for you and the people. Then prepare the people's offering to atone for them, as God has commanded'" (Lev. 9:7).

The Sages sensed a nuance in the words, "Approach the altar," as if Aaron was standing at a distance from it, reluctant to come near. They said: "Initially Aaron was ashamed to come close. Moses said to him, 'Do not be ashamed. This is what you have been chosen to do.'" (Rashi to Lev. 9:7, quoting Sifra)

Why was Aaron ashamed? Tradition gave two

explanations, both brought by Nachmanides in his commentary to the Torah. The first is that Aaron was simply overwhelmed with trepidation at coming so close to the Divine Presence. The second is that Aaron, seeing the "horns" of the altar, was reminded of the Golden Calf, his great sin. How could he, who had played a key role in that terrible event, now take on the role of atoning for the people's sins? That surely demanded an innocence he no longer had. Moses had to remind him that it was precisely to atone for sins that the altar had been made; and the fact that he had been chosen by God to be High Priest was an unequivocal sign that he had been forgiven.

There is perhaps a third explanation, albeit less spiritual. Until now Aaron had been in all respects second to Moses. Yes, he had been at his side throughout, helping him speak and lead. But there is vast psychological difference between being second-in-command and being a leader in your own right. We probably all know examples of people who quite readily serve in an assisting capacity but who are terrified at the prospect of leading on their own.

Whichever explanation is true -- and perhaps they all are -- Aaron was reticent at taking on his new role, and Moses had to give him confidence. "This is what you have been chosen to do."

The other story is the tragic one, of Aaron's two sons, Nadav and Avihu, who "offered a strange fire, that had not been commanded." The Sages offered several readings of this episode, all based on a close reading of the several places in the Torah where their death is referred to. Some said they had been drinking alcohol. (Vayikra Rabbah 12:1; Ramban to Lev. 10:9)

Others said that they were arrogant, holding themselves up above the community; this was the reason they had never married. (Vayikra Rabbah 20:10)

Some say that they were guilty of giving a halachic ruling about the use of man-made fire, instead of asking their teacher Moses whether it was permitted (Eruvin 63a). Others say they were restless in the presence of Moses and Aaron. They said: when will these two old men die and we can lead the congregation? (Sanhedrin 52a)

However we read the episode, it seems clear that they were all too eager to exercise leadership. Carried away by their enthusiasm to play a part in the inauguration, they did something they had not been

commanded to do. After all, had Moses not done something entirely on his own initiative, namely breaking the tablets when he came down the mountain and saw the Golden Calf? If he could act spontaneously, why not they?

They forgot the difference between a Priest and a Prophet. As we have seen in previous Covenant & Conversations, a Prophet lives and acts in time -- in this moment that is unlike any other. A Priest acts and lives in eternity, by following a set of rules that never change. Everything about "the holy," the realm of the Priest, is precisely scripted in advance. The holy is the place where God, not man, decides.

Nadav and Avihu failed fully to understand that there are different kinds of leadership and they are not interchangeable. What is appropriate to one may be radically inappropriate to another. A judge is not a politician. A King is not a Prime Minister. A religious leader is not a celebrity seeking popularity. Confuse these roles and not only will you fail, you will also damage the very office you were chosen to hold.

The real contrast here, though, is the difference between Aaron and his two sons. They were, it seems, opposites. Aaron was over-cautious and had to be persuaded by Moses even to begin. Nadav and Avihu were not cautious enough. So keen were they to put their own stamp on the role of priesthood that their impetuosity was their downfall.

These are, perennially, the two challenges leaders must overcome. The first is the reluctance to lead. Why me? Why should I get involved? Why should I undertake the responsibility and all that comes with it - the high levels of stress, the sheer volume of work, and the never-ending criticisms leaders always have to face? Besides which, there are other people better qualified and more suited than I am.

Even the greatest were reluctant to lead. Moses at the Burning Bush found reason after reason to show that he was not the man for the job. Isaiah and Jeremiah both felt inadequate. Summoned to lead, Jonah ran away. The challenge really is daunting. But when you feel as if you are being called to a task, if you know that the mission is necessary and important, then there is nothing you can do but say, Hineni, "Here I am." (Ex. 3:4) In the words of a famous book title, you have to "feel the fear and do it anyway." (Susan Jeffers, Ballantine Books, 2006.)

The other challenge is the polar opposite. There are some people who see themselves as rightful leaders. They are convinced that they can do it better than anyone else. We recall the famous remark of Israel's first President, Chaim Weizmann, that he was head of a nation of a million presidents.

From a distance it seems so easy. Isn't it obvious that the leader should do X, not Y? Homo sapiens contains many back seat drivers who know better than those whose hands are on the steering

wheel. Put them in a position of leadership and they can do great damage. Never having sat in the driver's seat, they have no idea of how many considerations have to be taken into account, how many voices of opposition have to be overcome, how difficult it is at one and the same time to cope with the pressures of events while not losing sight of long-term ideals and objectives. The late John F. Kennedy said that the worst shock on being elected President was that "when we got to the White House we discovered that things were as bad as we'd been saying they were." Nothing prepares you for the pressures of leadership when the stakes are high.

Overenthusiastic, overconfident leaders can do great harm. Before they became leaders they understood events through their own perspective. What they did not understand is that leadership involves relating to many perspectives, many interest groups and points of view. That does not mean that you try to satisfy everyone. Those who do so end up satisfying no one. But you have to consult and persuade. Sometimes you need to honour precedent and the traditions of a particular institution. You have to know exactly when to behave as your predecessors did, and when not to. All this calls for considered judgement, not wild enthusiasm in the heat of the moment.

Nadav and Avihu were surely great people. The trouble was that they believed they were great people. They were not like their father Aaron, who had to be persuaded to come close to the altar because of his sense of inadequacy. The one thing Nadav and Avihu lacked was a sense of their own inadequacy. (The composer Berlioz once said of a young musician: "He knows everything. The one thing he lacks is inexperience.")

To do anything great we have to be aware of these two temptations. One is the fear of greatness: who am I? The other is being convinced of your greatness: Who are they? I can do it better. We can do great things if (a) the task matters more than the person, (b) we are willing to do our best without thinking ourselves superior to others, and (c) we are willing to take advice, the thing Nadav and Avihu failed to do.

People do not become leaders because they are great. They become great because they are willing to serve as leaders. It does not matter that we think ourselves inadequate. Moses did. So did Aaron. What matters is the willingness, when challenge calls, to say, Hineni, "Here I am." *Covenant and Conversation 5781 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l © 2021 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org*

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## Shabbat Shalom

"**A**nd fire came out from before the Lord and consumed (the two sons of Aaron) and they

died before the Lord" (Leviticus 10:2) the celebration of the dedication of the Sanctuary. Aaron's greatest triumphs turned tragedy. And one of the deepest Biblical mysteries is the reason why God Himself sent down a fire to consume them. Why?

The Midrash (VaYikrah Rabbah 12,1) attempts to provide an explanation: "It seems impossible to understand why God would have caused them to die. And then comes the explanation in the verse which appears immediately after this incident ; 'And the Lord said to Aaron saying, do not drink wine or mead, neither you nor your sons with you, when you enter into the Tent of Meeting so that you do not die. It is an eternal statutes for your generations so that you may distinguish between the holy and the profane, between the impure and the pure'".

Apparently the Midrash is teaching that Nadav and Avihu were given this capital punishment because they had brought a fire unto God which had not been commanded while having become intoxicated with wine. From this perspective, wine – which removes the ability of the individual to distinguish between the Holy and the profane, between the pure and the impure – can lead to evil action and can bring about tragic consequences. And indeed at least according to one Rabbi Meir's view in the Talmud (B.T. Sanhedrin 70A, 70B), "The fruit from which Adam ate was the fruit of the vine because there is nothing which brings greater woe to the individual than wine". And of course it was Noah's planting of the vineyards which caused him to become drunk; The Midrash even goes so far as to suggest that Satan was Noah's partner and convinced him to plant a vineyard and drink from its fruit.

At the same time however we have just concluded the festival of Passover who's first Seder night is punctuated by four cups of the wine which symbolizes redemption. The Talmud goes on to teach "There is no joy without wine since 'wine gladdens the heart of humanity'"(B.T. Pesahim 109A). And further enjoins that we 'Remember (the Sabbath day) on wine' both at the inception of the Sabbath day by means of the Kiddush and at the closing of the Sabbath day by means of Havdallah. Is it not strange that the very wine which has the capability of causing forgetfulness and debauchery drunkenness can also be used as a means towards understanding and distinguishing. After all the very reference to Havdallah (separation between the Holy and the profane) is placed in the blessing in which we ask God to provide us with understanding and the ability to distinguish. In the words of our Sages, "If there is no knowledge how is it possible to distinguish between night and day, the Sabbath and the rest of the week, the holy and the profane. And the blessing of Havdallah is specifically recited over wine!

The Talmud links wine with the hebrew word *Tirosh* which is usually translated as grape; the hebrew *Rosh* means head and the hebrew *Rash* means

poverty. If the individual who drinks the wine has merit, he will become a head; if not he will become a pauper. Wine therefore can lead the individual in two very opposite and even antithetical directions. It depends on the individual drinking the wine.

Maimonides, who first establishes the fact that the joy of the festival must be expressed through meat and wine, goes on to distinguish between drunken frivolity and joyous festivity "Drunkenness and much frivolity and levity is not rejoicing but is foolish hooliganism". We were not commanded to be foolish hooligans but rather to be joyous servant in the service of the creator of all things. The Bible even states that "curses will come upon us because 'you did not serve the Lord your God in joyousness and good heartedness'".(Maimonides Chapter 6 of Laws of the Festival Law 20)

And later on, at the end of his Laws of the Lulav (8:15) "the joy with which the individual must rejoice is by means of the doing of the commandments and loving the Lord; such joy is a great act of divine service".

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik magnificently explains that the more energy the human being expends, the greater will be the sanctity and the deeper will be the joy. Ordinary juice is extracted from the fruit merely by squeezing it, wine is produced by the vine only by a long and arduous process, and therefore wine demands a separate and unique blessing. Apparently Nadav and Avihu, at least according to the Midrash we cited previously, went into the Tent of Meeting of the Sanctuary having already been intoxicated "You shall not drink wine or mead when you come into the Tent of Meeting" (VaYikrah Rabbah 12,1 ) The Sabbath wine on the other hand is a very different experience. We are commanded to "make ( *Laasot* )" the Sabbath, and when we hold aloft the wine goblet of *Havdallah* it is after we have spent at least most of Friday in preparation for the holy day. Wine which is drunk before one has expended energy and accomplished an ideal will lead to drunkenness; only wine which comes to express an inner state of sanctity and accomplishment as a result of successful human effort will lead to great joy. In the words of one of my great teachers Rav Poleyoff : ' If you are empty inside and expect the wine to put in the joy, the wine will only lead to forgetfulness and drunkenness; but if you are filled inside with a deep sense of self worth and accomplishment – and you see the wine as an expression of your own state of human happiness – then the wine will lead to true rejoicing, sanctity and remembrance of the Divine. ©2021 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**O**ne of the more distinguishing life values which Judaism advocates is the type of food that a Jew

eats. There are foods that Jews are commanded to eat such, as matzah on Pesach and continuing with Pesach, there are also forbidden foods such as leavened bread. The laws and customs regarding kosher food are numerous and complex. Perhaps no other area of Jewish life, except for the Sabbath and its laws, has evoked, over the centuries, so much scholarship and divergence of opinions regarding Halacha and practice.

There are clear lines that establish the basic rules regarding kosher food. There have been many explanations and reasons given regarding this facet of Jewish life, concerning permissible and forbidden foods. These reasons range from the mysteries of kabalistic thought to the seemingly practical ideas of good health and proper diet. But, even after all the rational explanations have been expounded upon, the laws of kosher food remain one of the great commandments of the Torah for which we have no completely rational explanation. Therefore, Kashrut belongs in the realm of Chukim -- laws and commandments that we follow simply because that is will, so to speak, of our Creator. Our limited capacity of human understanding makes for the mystery behind the commandment. But the commandment itself stands, and it is binding for whatever reason we may or may not assign to it and its performance.

One thing is crystal-clear and all Jewish history attests to this commandment. The consumption of only kosher food has been one of the main contributors to the survival of Judaism and the Jewish people over the ages. It has created the necessary boundary that delineates us and our faith. By so doing, it has given us a deep realization that being a Jew relates also to the body and internal organs of a person, and not only the cerebral notion of religion that many people have.

It is very important to be a good Jew in heart and mind. But for all the unknown and unseen reasons that lie behind the survival of the Jewish people over the millennia against all odds, it is just as important, if not even more so, to be a good Jew in one's stomach. Difficulties in maintaining proper standards in kosher food and the abandonment by many secular Jews of the entire concept of kosher food, has inevitably contributed the rates of assimilation and intermarriage of their succeeding generations. People who can eat together eventually realize they can socialize together, and the rest is obvious.

One of the great blessings of our modern time is the abundance of all types of kosher food. In Israel and in the United States there is little challenge left in having to observe the commandments of kosher food. Nevertheless, a large section of the Jewish people still has not broken the bad habit of past generations, and we are faced with numerous crises of disappointments in Jewish national life. As the Torah is our friend and protector, we should always be aware of its demands. It

is for our own sake that we should do so. ©2021 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

**B**a'yom hashemini (on the eighth day), Aaron officially begins his holy task of serving as high priest (Leviticus 9:1). Is there any significance to it occurring on the eighth day?

Considering that Moses had been preparing Aaron for seven days to assume the priestly responsibilities, the Torah quite simply states that on the eighth day Aaron's tenure begins. But, does shemini, the very number eight, go beyond this surface account?

Samson Raphael Hirsch suggests that eight is a number indicating that "the condition of the previous period is entirely closed, and with the eight, a new beginning is made."

Thus, it's on the eighth day that circumcision takes place; by entering the covenant, the child experiences a new beginning.

And on the eighth day, we celebrate the holiday of Shemini Atzeret – the day after Hoshanah Rabbah, which falls on the seventh day of Sukkot, when, according to the rabbis, the judgment period of the High Holidays ends – and "a new beginning is made" (Zohar, Tzav 31b).

Similarly, we celebrate Chanukah for eight days, as on the eighth, new, pure oil arrives, marking the dawn of the Temple revitalized.

And so, Aaron is called forth on the eighth; his preparation period has ended, and it is his time to begin serving.

The mystics identify the "newness" that the eighth day represents. Numbers have meaning: six, for example, is commonly associated with physicality. After all, it was in six days, or six stages, that God created the physical world.

Seven represents the spiritual, as on that day God created Shabbat. It is a day set aside to acknowledge God, a Sabbatical day when we step back from the humdrum of our lives and have the time to spiritually work on ourselves and our relationship with others.

Eight, the mystics say, is meta-spiritual; it's the number that transcends and takes us to an even higher plane.

As Aaron begins his service on the eighth day, he begins on this meta-spiritual high.

Rabbi Ari Hart, a young, dynamic rabbi and gifted musician, points out that eight is the "higher octave." The musical cycle contains seven notes, popularly sung to do-re-mi-fa-sol-la-ti. There is,

however, an eighth note – do. The eighth is the same as the first, except it is sung one octave higher.

In this spirit, the Kli Yakar maintains, “All of Moses’s songs begin with az [then],” a Hebrew word with the numerical value of eight, as the songs of Moses were all encompassing, all inspiring, going beyond the seven-note scale, reaching a higher, new plane.

And so Aaron is purposefully called forth on the eighth. The call was that he serve on a higher, new spiritual plane, singing the song of the “higher octave.” ©2021 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

### RABBI AVROHOM LEVENTHAL

## The Stork Reality

**M**any years ago I had the privilege to spend some time in the Zilberman school in Jerusalem's Old City. The Zilberman "method" is a unique system of education implemented throughout many schools worldwide. Tucked within the walls of the Jewish quarter sits their flagship elementary school, run by the sons of Rav Zilberman, Z"L.

I spent 2 weeks there observing the classes, learning the method of teaching and consulting with the educators.

During one recess, I witnessed an incident so beautiful that it is etched in my memory for time immemorial.

A family of European tourists stumbled into the middle of the young students playing ball in the famous square outside the school offices. It was late summer and rather characteristically hot. While the female members of this family were dressed accordingly for the weather, it was certainly not to the standard of modesty for a religious school.

Rabbi Yom Tov Zilberman took notice from his office. Getting up from his desk, he came out with a bottle of cold water, cups and a package of cookies. He found them a seat outside the office and cheerfully offered his refreshing snacks to this grateful family.

The contrast was incredulous. The black and white clad Yerushalmi rabbi and a non Jewish family that didn't speak Hebrew or Yiddish.

It didn't matter.

Chesed transcends people, culture and language.

No request to leave the school area, no admonishment regarding their dress. Pure and simple kindness for a family that was quite different than the students and faculty of the Zilberman school and in need for that cold water.

This week's parsha enumerates those animals, birds and fish which are deemed kosher as well as those that are not.

Included among the non kosher birds is the stork, called חסידה in Hebrew.

The gemara in Chulin tells us that the stork is called חסידה as it performs acts of kindness with its fellow storks. חסד = חסידה.

The Ramban explains that the unkosher birds are so classified based on their traits of cruelty.

If this is so, why would the stork be included with the unkosher birds? Isn't chesed/kindness a sterling characteristic and desired way of life?

The Chidushei HaRim on Parshat Shmini answers this question by clarifying that while the stork does perform acts of kindness, it is ONLY with other storks to the exclusion of all other birds and animals.

If so, the kindness of the חסידה is not pure חסד. When one limits their acts to only those similar, it is more self serving than selfless.

True kindness dictates that we go beyond our comfort zones and help others in need, even when they may look and dress differently than we.

In a similar vein, the Rama (Rav Moshe Isserles) opens our eyes to what constitutes Hachnasat Orchim (inviting guests). In Hilchot Shabbat, Orach Chaim 333 Siman 1, although normally forbidden on Shabbat, one is allowed to clear out his storage room on Shabbat for certain mitzvot. One of the mitzvot for which this is permitted is for the tending to guests. The Rama says, however, that a meal for friends is not considered a meal of a mitzva. True Hachnasat Orchim is only when we host those who are not our relatives or friends.

While it is easy to prepare a meal for our friends or loved ones, the essence of hospitality means troubling ourselves for someone in need no matter who they are to us.

The world as a whole and the Jewish people in particular, were created on the foundation of caring for others. Our forefather Avraham was the pillar of loving kindness. He tended to all those in need even when those people were different than he.

Let us learn from the stork that while helping others may give us a good name, true kindness can only be performed when the care and concern extends beyond the familiar. ©2021 Rabbi A. Leventhal. Rabbi Leventhal is the Executive Director of Lema'an Achai [lemaanachai.org](http://lemaanachai.org)

### ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

## Divine Justice

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

**O**n the day following Yom Tov (*Isru Chag*), we do not recite *Tachanun* (a penitential prayer recited on all non-festive days). In fact, the custom is not to recite it during the entire month of Nissan. During the same time, we also omit eulogies and *Tziduk Ha-din*. (*Tziduk Ha-din* is a prayer which affirms G-d's justice and righteousness, and is recited after a death, usually

at the funeral.) Nevertheless, the *Encyclopedia Talmudit* cites the observation of the *Shibolei HaLeKet* that for mourners on *Isru Chag* “The custom is to recite *Tziduk Ha-din* together (**be-yachad**). The normal way would be more like a eulogy (and thus prohibited).” This makes it clear that there are two styles of reciting *Tziduk Ha-din* at a funeral – either one person reads the words and everyone repeats after him, which is not permitted on *Isru Chag*, or everyone recites it together, which is permitted.

It seems that with the passage of time, people stopped being familiar with these two styles. This leads the *Beit Yosef* (citing the *Agur*) to write, “*Tziduk Ha-din* may be recited only when praying alone (**be-yachid**).” Accordingly, the custom today is that when praying with a congregation, during the month of Nissan we do not say the prayer of *Tzidkat’cha Tzedek* at Mincha on Shabbat. This is because this prayer is essentially *Tziduk Ha-din* for Moshe Rabbeinu, who died on Shabbat at Mincha time. Thus, reciting it in *shul* would be a communal *Tziduk Ha-din*.

It should be noted that Parshat Shemini records the death of two of Aharon’s sons. Aharon reacted with silence (“*Va-yidom Aharon*”). Since Aharon was in effect affirming G-d’s justice, perhaps he did so silently because it was during Nissan. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

#### RABBI DAVID LEVIN

## Kosher Animal Signs

Last year we discussed the “why” of our kosher laws. This year we will focus on the animals that are kosher and the characteristics of these animals. HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch ties the laws of kosher animals to the previous section of the Torah which deals with the death of Nadav and Avihu who did not refrain from wine before entering the Temple and were unable to have a clear understanding of their emotions which negatively affected their judgment. From this incident, the Kohanim and other scholars were cautioned to avoid those pleasures which would affect their judgment when performing service to Hashem. But “pleasure” is a positive part of our lives and at times is even a sanctification of our lives. It is significant that Hashem should restrict which food we may eat and which we must refrain from eating. This is the basis for the kosher laws.

The Rambam in his sefer *Moreh Nevuchim* explains that those animals which are tamei, impure, are also unsafe to eat as they carry diseases or are unwholesome. “The principal reason why the Torah forbids swine’s flesh is to be found in the circumstance that its habits and its food are very dirty and loathsome.” The Akedat Yitzchak strongly disagrees. If these foods were unhealthy for Jews why would they not be unhealthy for non-Jews? Hashem would have forbidden these animals for them also because He is

concerned for the well-being of all His creatures. Today our medicines could counterbalance any of the negative effects of the impure animals. But that would render the Torah a changeable document that would now be outdated. Our Rabbis tell us that this cannot be so. The Torah is a universal document for all times and the laws contained therein are not limited to any time-period. Since the laws of kashrut were given without any stated reason, any reason that we might assign for these laws is speculative at best.

Let us examine some of these laws more carefully. The Torah writes, “These are the animals that you will eat from all of the animals that are on the earth.” The first reference to animals is a *chaya*, a wild animal, whereas the second reference is to *b’heimah*, a domestic animal, one that subjugates itself to its master. The Torah could have limited its discussion to domestic animals alone since the slaughtering process indicates that even a “kosher” wild animal, such as the deer, would have to be subjugated by man in order to slaughter it properly. We learn two things from the word *chaya*. First we learn that a *b’heimah* is a subcategory of *chaya* and secondly that any animal that we eat must be *chai* (alive) when we slaughter it. That is why we examine the animal thoroughly to determine that there was no other possible cause of death. In *Sefer Devarim* we find the opposite order, the term *b’heimah* appears first followed by the term *chaya*. The reversal of order teaches us that the terms are interchangeable. Both wild and domestic animals must be living, yet able to be subjective to man.

The Torah uses two different terms to describe the hoof of an animal: (1) *mafreset parsah*, forms a hoof, and (2) *shosa’at shesa parsah*, its one hoof divides into two. Both a horse and a camel have hooves but they do not properly divide. The second characteristic is *ma’alat geira*, chews its cud. The animal must be a true “ruminant”. These animals lack incisors in the upper jaw. In place of the incisors there is a hard palate which enables the lower jaw to grind food against it in a circular motion to break up the food. False “ruminants” such as the shafan and arnevet (rabbit and hare) do have incisors and the adult camel has partial incisors which disqualify all three from being acceptable as kosher animals.

As described by Hirsch, the true “ruminant” has four stomachs which enable the food to be digested. Food which is masticated incompletely is swallowed into the first stomach (*keres* or paunch) where it is softened and passed into the second stomach (*bet hakosot*) then formed into balls which are pressed up into the mouth again to be properly chewed. Then they pass into the third stomach (*hamses* or tripe) and finally into the rennet bag (*keiva*) where it is digested by the rennet juices. The process of bringing the balls of food up from the second stomach into the mouth again results in the chewing of the cud. The ruminant nature

of these animals prevents them from eating other animals as they would be unable to chew their prey. Kosher animals only eat grasses and grains. It is not in their nature to harm their fellow animals.

One of the reasons for the Rambam's assessment of the animals that were forbidden as being unhealthy or unwholesome stems from the use of the word *tamei* to describe them. The word *tamei* can mean unclean or impure. Since the animal is described in this fashion, it would appear that there is something inherently improper about this animal whether or not the signs of *kashrut* are present. It is the animal itself which is improper, not the fact that it is missing one or more of these signs. Yet everything that comes from a pure animal is pure and everything that comes from an impure animal is impure. Thus if a cow gives birth to an animal that has the appearance of a pig in that it does not appear to chew its cud even though it has split hooves, the animal is kosher and may be eaten because the mother of that animal is kosher. The nature of the animal follows the nature of the mother. The animal is considered kosher even without the appropriate signs. Thus the signs are only an indication of the character of the animal but are unnecessary in and of themselves.

There are also the laws that determine which fish are kosher, which birds, and which creeping animals. Because of time and space factors, these will have to wait for another opportunity. Kosher laws do not harm anyone else whether we observe them or not. They primarily affect our relationship with Hashem, but not necessarily our relationship with our fellowman. Still we often face difficult decisions in life which can affect many other people as well as ourselves. These decisions demand restraint, sacrifice, and avoidance of harm to others. Our decisions must be based only on what is right, not on our own desires. The will power that we achieve in practice of our kosher laws enables us to withstand temptations in other areas. There is no question that we are better off when we learn to control ourselves on a daily basis. May we learn to control our desires through the message of the Kosher animal signs. © 2021 Rabbi D. Levin

**RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ**

## Migdal Ohr

"Moshe and Aharon came to the Ohel Moed; they came out and blessed the people, and the glory of G-d appeared to the entire nation." (Vayikra 9:23) The blessing they gave the Jews was that Hashem's countenance should rest on the work of their hands, meaning that Hashem should imbue all their efforts with holiness. Rashi, here, gives us a bit of a backstory.

For the previous seven days, Moshe Rabbeinu had put together and taken apart the Mishkan each day. He had done the required Avoda service each day,

and yet, the Shechina, Hashem's holy countenance, did not rest on the Mishkan. The Jews feared that despite all their toil for the Mishkan, they were not forgiven for the sin of the Golden Calf. Moshe responded that his brother Aharon was worthier than he and through his service, Hashem would rest His countenance on the Mishkan.

If the point was to show the Jews they had been forgiven, why not bring the Shechina down right away? If it would only come down for Aharon, why have Moshe serve for the first week? While there are many possible answers, we'd like to suggest one which offers us a unique perspective and message.

The Jews were concerned that the sin of the Golden Calf would prove unforgivable. Who played a key part in that sin? Aharon. Had the Shechina come down right away, the Jews might have thought it was only in Moshe's merit and still suspected Aharon of being tainted. Had Aharon done the avoda from the beginning and the Shechina came down, they would have assumed it to be a given, despite Aharon's faults. Because Moshe served without the Shechina coming down but it came for Aharon, they recognized that Aharon was, in fact, completely absolved of the sin of the Golden Calf and he could lead them to complete forgiveness as well.

Carrying this idea further, that it was crucial for Aharon to be seen in the best light possible, it may be that the deaths of Nadav and Avihu had something to do with this as well. Though Chazal offer many explanations, the fact that their "offering" might somehow take the spotlight off of Aharon and thus reduce his honor, may have contributed to the egregiousness of their act.

We see from here how important it is to give someone their due, and enable them to feel good about what they achieve. We don't need to insert ourselves in the equation and detract from their glory. It is with this approach that we can answer a question that was asked just this past Pesach at a Seder in Australia.

At the Seder, the Rasha, the wicked son, asks, "What is this work to YOU" and removes himself. Yet, we find that Moshe Rabbeinu (Devarim 4:34) asks, "Has any god taken his people out like YOUR G-d did for YOU?" Hasn't Moshe excluded himself too?

The difference is that in this case, Moshe was praising the Jews. He was telling them, "You don't need me in order to come close to Hashem. The leader is only great because of the nation." He was reinforcing the lesson that when someone is successful, we can be proud of them and not need to find some role in that success. That is the way of the Torah.

*Besides for being an insightful rabbi and Talmid Chacham, R' Abba Zalka Gewirtz z"l was a master fundraiser, raising tens of millions of dollars for supporting Torah study in America. When asked how he did it, he explained that his formula was simple.*

He would essentially tell people, "Torah is great. And YOU are great. Now let's find a way to bring those two great things together!" ©2021 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr

### RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

## White Noise

It was the last day of the Mishkan's inauguration. The joy was immeasurable, somewhat akin to the ribbon-cutting ceremony of a cherished king's new palace—in this case, a shrine to the glory of the King of kings and to the splendor of His reign. But in a tragic anticlimactic sequence, the celebration went terribly wrong. The children of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, entered into the realm of the outer limits, the Holy of Holies, the Kodesh HaKedoshim. They offered incense, something they assumed would surely bring joy to their Creator. But it was their own recipe.

Uncommanded, and uncalled for, something went terribly wrong. "A fire came forth from before Hashem and consumed them, and they died before Hashem" (Leviticus 10:1-2). It's hard for us, here, to fathom the pain. Remember that picture of a smiling schoolteacher and her fellow astronauts, waving in anticipation of another successful mission on America's galactic pride and joy, only to be vaporized into a mist of memories plunging toward the ocean in a disastrous fate? The beloved children of a beloved leader on a beloved day in a beloved service were gone in an instant, from glory to death. Yet their own father did not react in open agony, rather only through silence and acceptance. "And Aaron was silent" (ibid v. 3). That silence was not only commended, but extolled. As a reward for that stoic reaction of acceptance, the next command in the Torah is offered directly to Aharon without Moshe, who normally was the principal in receiving Heavenly directives.

Yet despite the praise meted to Aharon for his silence, the nation is commanded to react in a diametrically opposed manner. Moshe commands the nation, "the entire House of Israel shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited" (Leviticus 10:6). Aharon is praised for his silence, yet the nation is told to openly bewail the tragedy. What is the difference?

Back in the 1800's, the Magid of Trisk and Reb Mendel of Vorke were dear friends living next to each other.

But, unfortunately Rav Mendel had to move to the other side of the forest, a distance of a half-a-day's walk. Seeing his agony, Reb Mendel's sexton,



Moishele, anxiously offered to make the three-hour trip each Friday to deliver correspondence.

And so it went. Every Friday morning, Moishele would set out across the forest and deliver Reb Mendel's letter to the Trisker Magid. He would wait for the Magid to read the letter and reply. Often it would take a while until the Magid returned from his study, eyes red from tears, his quivering hand holding the magnificently crafted response in a special envelope. Moishele would deliver the response to the Vorke Rebbe, and that letter, too, evoked the same emotional response: tears of joy and meaning filled the Rebbe's eyes.

After a year as a faithful envoy, Moishele's curiosity overtook him. "What possibly can those letters contain? Would it be so bad if I took a peek?" Therefore, one Friday he carefully opened the envelope—without disturbing the seal. He saw absolutely nothing. Just a blank paper rested between the walls of the envelope.

Shocked, Moshe carefully, placed the so-called letter back into the envelope and delivered it to the Trisker Maggid. Like clockwork, the Rebbe went into the study, and a half-hour later, bleary-eyed and shaken, he returned a letter to be delivered to his friend Reb Mendel of Vorke.

At this point, Moishele could not wait to leave the house and race back into the forest, where he would secretly bare the contents of the envelope, hoping to solve the mysterious exchange.

Again, blank paper. Moishele was mortified. "Have I been schlepping six hours each week with blank papers? What is this a game?" he wondered.

The entire Shabbos he could not contain his displeasure. Motzoai Shabbos, Reb Mendel called him in to his study. "You seem agitated, my dear shammass," he asked. "What seems to be the problem?"

"Problem?" he responded. "You know those letters I've been carrying. I admit it. I looked, this Friday. There was nothing in them! They were blank! What kind of game is this?"

Reb Mendel, did not flinch. "The Torah," he said, "has black letters on white parchment. The black contain the words we express. The white contains a message that is deeper than letters. Our feelings are often expressed through black letters. This week, we wrote with the white parchment. We expressed an emotion that transcends letters."

It is very important to realize one cannot equate the reaction required by a mourner to that of the responsive community. Not everyone is on the level to keep quiet. For those who can make their statement of faith and strength through silence, that is an amazing expression. For the rest of us, who are not on that level, we must express our sorrow and exclaim it in a human way as afforded by the dictates of Moshe. ©2001 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org