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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.

Good leaders know their own limits. They do not try to do it all themselves. They build teams. They create space for people who are strong where they are weak. They understand the importance of checks and balances and the separation of powers. They surround themselves with people who are different from them. They understand the danger of concentrating all power in a single individual. But learning your limits, knowing there are things you cannot do -- even things you cannot be -- can be a painful experience. Sometimes it involves an emotional crisis.

The Torah contains four fascinating accounts of such moments. What links them is not words but music. From quite early on in Jewish history, the Torah was sung, not just read. Moses at the end of his life calls the Torah a song. (Deuteronomy 31:19) Different traditions grew up in Israel and Babylon, and from around the tenth century onward the chant began to be systematised in the form of the musical notations known as ta'amei ha-mikra, cantillation signs, devised by the Tiberian Masoretes (guardians of Judaism's sacred texts). One very rare note, known as a shalshelet (chain), appears in the Torah four times only. Each time it is a sign of existential crisis. Three instances are in the book of Genesis. The fourth is in our parsha. As we will see, the fourth is about leadership. In a broad sense, the other three are as well.

The first instance occurs in the story of Lot. After Lot separated from his uncle Abraham he settled in Sodom. There he assimilated into the local population. His daughters married local men. He himself sat in the city gate, a sign that he had been made a Judge. Then two visitors come to tell him to leave, for God is about to destroy the city. Yet Lot hesitates, and above the word for "hesitates" -- vayitmamah -- is a shalshelet. (Gen. 19:16). Lot is torn, conflicted. He senses that the visitors are right. The city is indeed about to be destroyed. But he has invested his whole future in the new identity he has been carving out for himself and his daughters. The angels then forcibly take him out of the city to safety -- had they not done so, he would have delayed until it was too late.

The second shalshelet occurs when Abraham asks his servant -- traditionally identified as Eliezer -- to find a wife for Isaac his son. The commentators suggest that Eliezer felt a profound ambivalence about his mission. Were Isaac not to marry and have children, Abraham's estate would eventually pass to Eliezer or his descendants. Abraham had already said so before Isaac was born: "Sovereign Lord, what can You give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" (Gen. 15:2). If Eliezer succeeded in his mission, bringing back a wife for Isaac, and if the couple had children, then his chances of one day acquiring Abraham's wealth would disappear completely. Two instincts warred within him: loyalty to Abraham and personal ambition. The verse states: "And he said: Lord, the God of my master Abraham, send me...good speed this day, and show kindness to my master Abraham" (Gen. 24:12). Eliezer's loyalty to Abraham won, but not without a deep struggle. Hence the shalshelet (Gen. 24:12).

The third shalshalet brings us to Egypt and the life of Joseph. Sold by his brothers as a slave, he is now working in the house of an eminent Egyptian, Potiphar. Left alone in the house with his master's wife, he finds himself the object of her desire. He is handsome. She wants him to sleep with her. He refuses. To do such a thing, he says, would be to betray his master, her husband. It would be a sin against God. Yet over "he refused" is a shalshelet, (Genesis 39:8) indicating -- as some rabbinic sources and mediaeval commentaries suggest -- that he did so at the cost of considerable effort. (Tanhuma, Vayeshev 8; cited by Rashi in his commentary to Genesis 39:8.) He nearly succumbed. This was more than the usual conflict between sin and temptation. It was a conflict of identity. Recall that Joseph was living in a new and strange land. His brothers had rejected him. They had made it clear that they did not want him as part of their family. Why then should he not, in Egypt, do as the Egyptians do? Why not yield to his master's wife if that is what she wanted? The question for Joseph was not just, "Is this right?" but also, "Am I an Egyptian or a Jew?"

All three episodes are about inner conflict, and all three are about identity. There are times when each of us has to decide, not just "What shall I do?" but "What kind of person shall I be?" That is particularly fateful in the case of a leader, which brings us to episode four, this time with Moses in the central role.

After the sin of the Golden Calf, Moses had, at God's command instructed the Israelites to build a Sanctuary which would be, in effect, a permanent symbolic home for God in the midst of the people. By now the work is complete and all that remains is for Moses to induct his brother Aaron and Aaron's sons into office. He robes Aaron with the special garments of the High Priest, anoints him with oil, and performs the various sacrifices appropriate to the occasion. Over the word vayishchat, "and he slaughtered [the sacrificial ram]" (Lev. 8:23) there is a shalshelet. By now we know that this means there was an internal struggle in Moses' mind. But what was it? There is not the slightest sign in the text that suggests that he was undergoing a crisis.

Yet a moment's thought makes it clear what Moses' inner turmoil was about. Until now he had led the Jewish people. Aaron had assisted him, accompanying him on his missions to Pharaoh, acting as his spokesman, aide and second-in-command. Now, however, Aaron was about to undertake a new leadership role in his own right. No longer would he be one step behind Moses. He would do what Moses himself could not. He would preside over the daily offerings in the Tabernacle. He would mediate the avodah, the Israelites' sacred service to God. Once a year on Yom Kippur he would perform the service that would secure atonement for the people from its sins. No longer in Moses' shadow, Aaron was about to become the one kind of leader Moses was not destined to be: a High Priest.

The Talmud adds a further dimension to the poignancy of the moment. At the Burning Bush, Moses had repeatedly resisted God's call to lead the people. Eventually God told him that Aaron would go with him, helping him speak (Ex. 4:14-16). The Talmud says that at that moment Moses lost the chance to be a Priest: "Originally [said God] I had intended that you would be the Priest and Aaron your brother would be a Levite. Now he will be the Priest and you will be a Levite." (Zevachim 102a)

That is Moses' inner struggle, conveyed by the shalshelet. He is about to induct his brother into an office he himself will never hold. Things might have been otherwise -- but life is not lived in the world of "might have been." He surely feels joy for his brother, but he cannot altogether avoid a sense of loss. Perhaps he already senses what he will later discover, that though he was the Prophet and liberator, Aaron will have a privilege Moses will be denied, namely, seeing his children and their descendants inherit his role. The son of a Priest is a Priest. The son of a Prophet is rarely a Prophet.

What all four stories tell us is that there comes a time for each of us when we must make an ultimate decision as to who we are. It is a moment of existential truth. Lot is a Hebrew, not a citizen of Sodom. Eliezer is Abraham's servant, not his heir. Joseph is Jacob's son, not an Egyptian of loose morals. Moses is a Prophet, not a Priest. To say 'Yes' to who we are, we have to have the courage to say 'No' to who we are not. Pain and struggle is always involved in this type of conflict. That is the meaning of the shalshelet. But we emerge less conflicted than we were before.

This applies especially to leaders, which is why the case of Moses in our parsha is so important. There were things Moses was not destined to do. He would never become a Priest. That task fell to Aaron. He would never lead the people across the Jordan. That was Joshua's role. Moses had to accept both facts with good grace if he was to be honest with himself. And great leaders must be honest with themselves if they are to be honest with those they lead.

A leader should never try to be all things to all people. A leader should be content to be who they are. Leaders must have the strength to know what they cannot be if they are to have the courage to be truly their best selves. *Covenant and Conversation 5781 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Behold, I send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. And he [Elijah] will turn [back to God] the hearts of the parents through their children and the hearts of the children through their parents" (Malachi 3:23-2) The Shabbat before Passover is called Shabbat Hagadol (the Great Sabbath), a phrase deriving from the last verse of the prophetic portion read on that day which declares that God will send Elijah the Prophet on the "great day" of the Lord right before the coming of the redemption.

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

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

The usual explanation for this is that vegetation emerges in the springtime; Passover is biblically called the Spring Festival, and so we dip a vegetable in salt water, reminiscent of spring renewal emerging from the tears of Egyptian enslavement. Rabbi Shlomo Kluger, in his late 19th-century Haggada, suggests another

interpretation. The Hebrew word "karpas" appears in the opening verses of the Book of Esther, in the description of the "hangings" that were found in the gardens of King Ahasuerus's palace, where the great feast for all his kingdom was hosted; karpas white cotton joined with turquoise wool. Rashi connects the term "karpas" in the sense of material with the ketonet passim, the striped tunic that Jacob gave to his beloved son, Joseph.

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

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

The point of the Seder is the retelling ("haggada") of the seminal experience of servitude and freedom from generation to generation. Through this, all parents become teachers. They must inspire their children to continue the Jewish narrative of identification with the underdog and the outcast. They must imbue in their offspring insistence upon freedom for every individual created in God's image and faith in the ultimate triumph of a world dedicated to peace and security for all.

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

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

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

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

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

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The Torah begins this week's reading with the verbal commandment –Tzav – ordering Moshe to command and demand from his brother Aaron certain fulfillments of ritual and service in the Tabernacle, and later in the Temple in Jerusalem. The verb that is used is one of strength. Just as in a well-disciplined army, an officer's commands are fulfilled to be able to execute grand strategies, so, too, in Jewish life. The only way that the great strategy of connection with the Creator, living a holy life and being a kingdom of priests and a holy nation can be fulfilled is by obeying and observing commandments.

This is true even if the lowly private does not understand or is not even aware of the grand strategy of the general staff supervising the army. So, too, there are many times in Jewish life when we as individuals may question the validity and necessity of following an order, just as the soldier in the army. But just as simply by joining the Army and becoming a part of it forfeits that soldier's right to disobey orders.

The Jewish people at Sinai agreed that they would fulfill God's orders, irrespective of their deeper understanding of those orders themselves. This may sound too authoritarian, even dictatorial, to modern ears and sensitivities. Nevertheless, it was and is the basis for Jewish life throughout the millennia of our existence. There are many things in life that we do simply because we are commanded to do so. If we have belief in the One that commands them despite human questions and doubts, we will always attempt to fulfill our duty and obey the commandment.

The text of all blessings, before performing any of the Torah commandments, explicitly states that God has sanctified us by giving us these commandments, and that He commands that we fulfill them to the utmost extent that we can. Over the centuries, there have been many scholarly explanations and reasons given for

certain Torah commandments. Times change though, as do societal mores, customs, and social viewpoints.

What may have been a perfectly logical and satisfactory explanation for the necessity of a commandment a few centuries ago, may today have no relevance, and be viewed as only hollow words and ideas. But the Torah, which is eternal and given for all times and situations, chose to avoid giving easy explanations as to the reasons for its commandments and demands of the Jewish people.

Instead, it relies upon the fact of the binding covenant that the Jewish people entered at Mount Sinai, that has obligated this special people to the Almighty for now and well over three millennia. We certainly wish to understand everything that we can about the competence, direction, and strategy of the Torah. However, we admit that after all is said and done, our ability to understand everything is limited and often fallacious. The bedrock of Jewish life is that we have been commanded and that we are willing to fulfill these decrees fully.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Parashat 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?

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

Another theme comes to mind. Just as terumah, a small portion of every food grown in Israel, must be given to the priest, so is the priest responsible to remove the terumat hadeshen, the last remains of the sacrificial service. Thus, the entire eating and sacrificial experience is sanctified through a beginning and an ending ritual. Terumah elevates the food as we give its first portion to the priest; terumat ha-deshen elevates the sacrifice as the Kohen respectfully removes its ashes. Not coincidentally, the portion given to the priest and the ashes removed by the priest are given similar names – terumah and terumat hadeshen – as the word terumah comes from the word ruum, to lift.

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

A story reflects this point. Years ago, a husband and wife appeared before Rabbi Mordechai Gifter, Rosh Yeshiva of Telz, asking him to rule on a family dispute. The husband, who was studying at Rabbi Gifter's yeshiva felt that it was beneath his dignity as a Torah scholar to take out the garbage. His wife felt otherwise. The rabbi concluded that while the husband should in fact help his wife, he had no religio-legal obligation to remove the refuse.

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

And that may be the deepest message of terumat hadeshen.

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

Consuming Blood

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

The Torah prohibits the consumption of blood and imposes the punishment of *karet* (excision) on anyone who disregards the prohibition. However, there is a disagreement about the minimum amount a person must consume to become liable to this punishment. Most sources state that the minimum is the volume of a *kezayit* (an olive, approximately 20cc). However, in *Yevamot* 114b, the minimum amount given is a *revi'it* (approximately 86cc) – four times the volume of an olive.

In *Responsa Binyan Tzion* (#49), Rav Yaakov Ettlinger was asked a question relating to this law. A person was ill, and was directed by his doctor to drink animal blood daily. To avoid doing something normally punishable by *karet*, Rav Ettlinger advised him to eat less than the minimum amount required for liability. However, it was unclear to the rabbi whether this minimum was a *kezayit* or a *revi'it*. Some say that the two different measurements apply to two different cases: one is the minimum for eating coagulated blood, and the other for free-flowing blood. However, Rav Ettlinger rejected this distinction.

We may resolve this dispute with a text recently printed by Yad HaRav Herzog (publisher of this book), which lists variant readings of Talmudic texts. There we find that even though the minimum amount is a *revi'it* in our standard Vilna Talmud version of *Yevamot* (as well

as in the Soncino and Venice Talmuds, which were the basis of the Vilna Talmud), nevertheless, in six manuscripts the amount that appears is a *kezayit*. The text found in *Beit HaBechirah* of the Meiri (1249-1306), which was not available in the time of Rav Ettlinger, reads *kezayit* as well.

Now that we are aware of these textual variants, we can easily resolve the contradiction without resorting to casuistic distinctions (*pilpulim*).

RABBI AVROHOM LEVENTHAL

The Pulse on the Finger

The Kopishnitzer Rebbe once phoned a wealthy businessman to make an appointment to meet. The man told the rebbe that there was no need to travel to Midtown Manhattan as he would be honored to come to the rebbe.

The rebbe insisted on coming to the man's office and they set a time for 11:30 that morning.

The man asked the rebbe what was so important to take so much of the rebbe's time to come to Manhattan.

The rebbe went on to describe the difficult financial situation of another of his followers. He was having a difficult time making ends meet causing undue stress. To make matters worse Pesach was fast approaching.

Could the man partner with the rebbe to help this family in their time of crisis?

The man replied, "Of course. I would be honored to sponsor his entire chag and even more! Once again, rebbe, you didn't need to shlep to me. I would have readily come to you for this important mitzva!".

The man took out his checkbook, filled in an extremely generous sum and looked up at the rebbe.

"To whom shall I write the check?"

The rebbe averted his gaze and quietly answered, "your brother"

Our Pesach seder begins with a declaration that is beautiful yet puzzling: הא לחמא עניא…כל דכפין ייתי ויכול, כל דצריך ייתי ויפסח השתא עבדין לשנה הבאה בני חורין

This is the bread of affliction…all those who are hungry come and eat, all those who need should come and (take part) in the Pesach. This year we are slaves, next year we should be free.

Three major questions arise when we examine this paragraph.

Why are we only inviting the hungry now, after we have begun our meal and all are already seated?

Why is this part of the Hagada in Aramaic, while the remainder is in Hebrew?

What does it mean that "this year we are slaves"?

The commentators address these questions with answers relating to the origin of the Haggadah, the philosophical foundation of lovingkindness within Judaism, and many other wonderful answers.

Inspired by the story quoted above, I would like to propose something which speaks to the essence of this awesome (exalted?) evening, and, in fact, to the continuity of the Jewish people.

On Pesach night, we are commanded to retell the story of the Exodus to our children. Period. No matter who they are, how they dress or think, we must ensure that they hear the tale of the night that we became the Nation of Israel. It is incumbent upon us to invest everything possible into making the seder a night to remember. It can't be just another dinner. We have been doing the seder for thousands of years and that is the reason why we are still here, after thousands of years.

Israelis say it best without realizing it. "Hakol Baseder" (literally "everything is ok) which can also mean, "everything is in The Seder". Our children's connection to Judaism, and in some ways, their relation to us as parents, are reflected by the seder experience.

Are we as aware of our children's spiritual and emotional needs as much as we are to their physical ones?

We hear today of so many disenfranchised youth who seek a connection.

Ironically, in our "connected" world, there is more disconnect and alienation than ever before. Relationships have become only "internet deep." The "information highway", created to bring everything closer, has caused more divide than could ever be imagined.

Pesach arrives. An opportunity to connect. No phones. No social media. No distractions.

And this is why our "invitation" to the seder and Pesach experience is uttered only after we are all seated at the table.

Charity and kindness begin in the home and for the home.

Our children are hungry. They crave to be connected to us, to Judaism, to G-d and to higher purposes.

Why Aramaic? Aramaic was the language of the common man. Hebrew was reserved for the scholarly. Everyone understood Aramaic, no matter his/her station in life.

Our language with our children must be on their level, in a tone that fosters love, understanding and acceptance. We must be in tune to what they are saying, asking, and seeking. We should strive to discover the "Aramaic", the language that they will understand and to which they are receptive.

Are we not free?

Humans are plagued by bad habits, poor communication and a lack of empathy. We repeat the same mistakes in our own lives as well as in our relationships with others- even those closest to us.

We are stuck in "doing the same thing and expecting different results".

Pesach gives us the opportunity to go back to our origins, not only on the national level but in our personal lives as well.

We begin the evening enslaved to those old notions and habit. Through the seder we can reconnect to our children, and to ourselves, and start anew.

Our hope and prayer is that through the Pesach experience, we will be, by next year, even tomorrow, free from any form of bondage, and provide our children with the tools to thrive as individuals and links in the chain of Jewish destiny.

We open the seder with a call to all those in need. The needs for the body and for the soul.

The Kopishnitzer Rebbe teaches us that those needy are sometimes right under our nose.

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Dedication & Anointing Oil

The B'nei Yisrael completed the Mishkan and the Kohanim were ready now to serve Hashem in His home. But there was still one final step in order to dedicate both the Mishkan and the Kohanim. The Temple was completed on the twenty third day of Adar. For one week straight, the Temple was erected each day and then taken apart. At the same time, the Kohanim went through a sanctification ritual in preparation for the day on which they would begin their service to Hashem. These days were called the y'mei hamilu'im, the seven days of initiation. Each day sacrifices were brought and Moshe demonstrated the procedure which the Kohanim would follow in the future. Thus, both the Kohanim and the altar were used each day in this demonstration and only on the eighth day were both permanently dedicated. At the end of those seven days of milu'im it was time to sanctify the Kohanim and the altar with the anointing oil.

We find the description of the shemen hamishcha, the anointing oil, in Sh'mot in Parashat Ki Tisa. "And you shall take for yourself spices of the finest: pure myrrh five hundred, of spicy cinnamon in halves of two hundred and fifty, and of spicy rods two hundred and fifty. And cassia five hundred according to the shekel of the Sanctuary and of olive oil one hin (a Biblical measure equivalent to a minimum of just less than a gallon to as much as two gallons). And you shall make it into oil for holy anointment, a perfume compound after the art of the perfumer, a holy anointing oil it shall be." According to HaRav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, this anointing oil was directed to Moshe alone and only he could produce this shemen hamishchah. "The oil which Moshe prepared remained the only anointing oil ever made, and was used for anointing Sha'ul, all the Kings of the dynasty of David, and all the High Priests of all time."

On the eighth day of the assembly Moshe took the shemen hamishchah and sanctified the Mishkan and its vessels. "And Moshe took the anointing oil and anointed the Tabernacle and all that was in it and sanctified them." Moshe then sprinkled the oil on the altar. Rashi remarks that there is no place where this sprinkling of the altar is commanded, yet the Ramban ascertains that Moshe used a kal v'chomer, a comparison between a lesser to a greater concept, to justify this sprinkling. The Ramban points to the command to sprinkle the oil on the Kohanim and their clothes and learns that the altar is certainly not of a lower degree of holiness. Therefore, he justifies the sprinkling of the oil on the altar. The Ramban also explains that the oil was not poured on the altar but sprinkled just like the blood of the sacrifices, which was sprinkled on the altar on Yom Kippur to atone for the altar. HaRav Moshe Sternbuch, in his sefer Ta'am V'Da'at, quotes the Targum Yonatan to explain why the altar needed atonement: "Perhaps the officers of the Children of Israel had taken a gift from their brothers by force and brought it for the service of the Mishkan, and it was not in [the owner's] heart to bring it for the service, but he heard an announcement and was afraid and brought it against his will." HaRav Sternbuch explains that a donation which was made in such a manner could blemish the holiness of the altar and therefore required atonement.

Moshe then dressed Aharon in his priestly garments and anointed him with the shemen hamishchah by pouring it over his head onto his clothes. The Ramban explains that only Aharon had the oil poured over his head, whereas his sons were sprinkled with the oil. The pouring of the oil over Aharon's head was reserved for the Kohein Gadol and the King. The Ramban also explains that Moshe sprinkled the other Kohanim with the oil at this time, even though the Torah does not mention it here. The Torah does mention the anointing of Aharon's sons at the time that the mitzvot for anointing were given in Sh'mot and the Ramban believed that this was the appropriate time for that anointing. The Ramban also mentions that the Torah does not specify either sprinkling or pouring (anointing) in reference to the sons of Aharon, and he therefore felt that only sprinkling was done with them.

What was the purpose of this sprinkling and anointing done for both Aharon and his sons and the altar? The Ramban explains that anointing with oil and the sprinkling and pouring of the blood of the sacrifices both were for purification and atonement. Each affected a renewal of life for the person or object of this sprinkling and a rededication to the service of Hashem. For Aharon and the Kohanim as well as for the altar, the anointing and sprinkling were also done to enable

them to bring about the atonement of others. The shemen hamishchah purified the Kohanim and the altar, and they in turn were able to affect the atonement of others through the korbanot (sacrifices) that served Hashem.

We live in remarkable times. The B'nei Yisrael are once again flourishing in the Land of Israel, and we see a renewal of our dedication to Hashem. It is far from a universal movement within the Jewish people, but we have not seen this large a number of Jews in our history who have rededicated themselves to the mitzvot and Hashem. Against all odds we have survived the exile and have returned to our land. We are far from perfect and our service to Hashem is far from perfect. We must find a way to establish unity within our people so that we can once again be one nation. As we work towards that goal, may Hashem reward us with a new preparation of the anointing oil. May our rededicated Kohanim rebuild the Beit HaMikdash to enable us to return our lives to Hashem and His mitzvot. May we once again witness the glory of Hashem's presence among His people. And may Hashem once again dwell among us in His Temple in Yerushalayim ir haKodesh, Jerusalem the Holy City.

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Lelamed Weekly Dvar

Our Parsha contains a passuk (verse) describing the inaugural Mincha offering as well as the daily Mincha offering, offered twice a day in perpetuity (6:13). If the offering is brought twice-daily, why do we need the added instructions of its being brought on the first day of service? Wouldn't twice-daily be inclusive of the first time it's offered?

Rav Moshe Feinstein extracts a meaningful lesson from this passuk. The kohen brings the same offering as his first day for every day of service to instill in him a sense of humility. While the kohen could easily get carried away with his status as a kohen, this daily mincha is an anchoring reminder that his service is a privilege not to be taken for granted. That initial gratitude of being in a position to contribute should be the prevailing attitude throughout our many roles in life.

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

We made it, thank God. We've made it to another Pesach, something most of us just took for granted two years ago would always be the case. If you were young enough and healthy enough, you could just assume that you'd be back for more Pesach cleaning next year, and yet another Seder.

Not this year. How many people were lost to the virus this past year who thought they'd be here this year? At least WE thought they'd be here this year. Those who made it through this year with their health, and their parnassah as well, will have much to celebrate, b"H. But many may still find it difficult to enjoy themselves this Pesach, having lost loved ones over the last year, or for any reason.

This is just another tough reminder, that the world we live in is not the ideal one we'd like to be living in. It is more like it was in Egypt when the four-fifths died, and it will be like in next week's parsha with the deaths of Nadav and Avihu. The latter, we will see, is alluded to in this week's parsha.

I am talking about the 12,000,000 Jews who died in the Plague of Darkness. The three-day loss of four-fifths of the Jewish population whose crime had "only" been rejection of redemption, must have been a real shocker and heart-breaker for so many of the survivors. Though the Torah ignores this part of the story, and it looks like business-as-usual for the rest of the Jewish people, it is very hard to believe that was so. It had to have affected them, even if they were extremely grateful to have survived.

Thus, at one of the most joyous and long anticipated moments in history, they had to contend with an extremely important and depressing reality. Even relatives who fight with one another feel bad if one of them meets with an untimely death. Certainly a lot of people had to have felt somewhat sad at the great loss.

Then there was the incident of Nadav and Avihu, the two older sons of Aharon HaKohen. The Jewish people had finally atoned for the sin of the golden calf, received a replacement set of tablets, built a Mishkan, and were waiting for the Divine Presence to descend and dwell upon it. It was a historic and awesome moment...that was overturned in a flash by the dramatic deaths of Nadav and Avihu.

It won't happen until the next parsha after Pesach, but the verse: "And he slaughtered [it], and Moshe took..." (Vayikra 8:23)

probably alludes to it. There is a shelsheles cantillation note over the Hebrew word for "and he slaughtered," usually implying some kind of subconscious hesitation. At that stage, Moshe thought that he and Aharon were about to die, as had been foretold to him back in Parashas Tetzaveh.

Within a moment, the Jewish people went from the heights of joy to the depths of shock and mourning. The very same Kohen Gadol appointed to lead the nation in that joy, was the very father who lost his two oldest sons in the midst of it all. How could Aharon HaKohen have been expected to still function in his role to capacity?

Moshe's response was to be expected of a brother and uncle: "Then Moshe said to Aharon, 'This is what God said, 'I will be sanctified through those near to Me, and before all the people I will be glorified.'" (Vayikra 10:3)

It wasn't empty consolation. Moshe meant it. He told Aharon his brother that even though they had erred, and had died by the hand of God, they had been great people. But it was Aharon's reaction that stole the moment: "And Aharon was silent." (Vayikra 10:3)

Sometimes, perhaps even most the time, power and greatness are expressed through words and actions. And on some rarer occasions, they are expressed through silence. It could be that Aharon HaKohen's silence was the most powerful example of this in history, or close to it.

His predecessor was Avraham Avinu himself. He had just returned from passing his tenth and final test, Akeidas Yitzchak. And what was the great thing? He got to have his cake and eat it too, which is not always the case in this world. Avraham had been ready to slaughter his only child from his beloved Sarah, he had pleased God, and then he was told that he didn't actually have to do it.

But when Avraham returned home to share the amazing news with his wife, she was no longer alive. While he had been away doing the will of God, God had taken her soul, and as a consequence of Akeidas Yitzchak: "The account of Sarah's demise was juxtaposed to the binding of Yitzchak because as a result of the news of the 'binding' that her son was prepared for slaughter and was almost slaughtered, her soul flew out of her, and she died." (Bereishis Rabbah 58:5)

Once again, from the heights of joy to the depths of shock and mourning, perhaps this time with a little salt rubbed into the wound. After all, it was Avraham's test that led to her death.

Avraham's reaction? It's encoded in the small Chof of the word "livkosa -- to cry for her" (Bereishis 23:3). It hints that Avraham did not cry excessively for his departed wife, as might have been expected from anyone else. "God forbid," Avraham thought, "that anyone should think that I consider what happened to be unjust in any way!"

Emunah in God is not all or nothing. Some people have a little faith in God, some have more, and some have complete faith in God. Tragically, some have none at all.

Faith in God is always necessary but difficult when life does not go as we hope, when Divine justice does not match of our idea of it. But having emunah at such times is what it really means to "go with God."

We're smart, but not smarter than God. We know a lot, but not nearly as much as God does. Of course. How could anyone think otherwise? Well, we do, a lot more often than we think. The moment we minimize the role of Hashgochah Pratis -- Divine Providence -- in life, and go instead with our own thinking, our own hunch, we do exactly that, some more consciously than others.

This is Olam HaZeh; everything doesn't always add up for us. It always does for God, but not for us. We left Paradise, were expelled from it. We were sent into a world in which bad things happen, seemingly even to good people. Events occur that do not necessarily make sense to us, at least not right away. Rarely is victory 100 percent; there are costs, and there have been for thousands of years now.

It may not be so bad to want to have your cake and eat it too. It's only bad if you define success that way, if you base your willingness to go the next important step upon the success of the previous one. People who thought this way have often never taken that next step, discouraged by their previous failure. Even worse, feeling abandoned by God, they turned their back on Him, instead choosing the comfort of slavery over the pain of freedom.

And yet the matzah sits there on our Seder tables, teaching the same lesson. Halachically it is bread, but certainly not the one of choice for most people. The baking of bread has become an art, and people spend a fair bit of money to eat their bread of choice. Put a fresh baked challah on the table next to a piece of matzah, and the challah will win out just about every time.

As the Maharal points out, matzah is more of a symbol of the World-to-Come than it is of this world. This world is complex, complicated, and bloated. Matzah is the opposite of all three, representative of a world in which we will no longer need material pleasures to remind us that we're alive. God will be the only pleasure we'll need, and the greatest one we'll ever know.

This makes matzah a reminder of the imperfection of this world. It's so imperfect that we're constantly having to compensate with one commodity or another. We need things to make us feel complete, some spiritual, many physical.

But that's okay, because it is what makes us pursue higher levels of living. It makes us think and consider, so that we can add to our sense of personal meaning and existence. It's the people who think that perfection already exists who have difficulty moving forward when they learn otherwise. They miss the point of this world, and stagnate spiritually.

So yes, we will sit down this Pesach and celebrate an imperfect exodus from Egyptian slavery. We may recall all the difficult times the Jewish people have had to endure over the millennia. We will probably recall many of the sad losses of the last year. But if we learn anything at all, it is that we don't know everything, understand only some things, and have to trust in God for everything. The person who lives like this is the truly free person.