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Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"L

Covenant & Conversation

At the height of the drama of the Golden Calf, a vivid and enigmatic scene takes place. Moses has secured forgiveness for the people. But now, on Mount Sinai yet again, he does more. He asks God to be with the people. He asks Him to "teach me Your ways," and "show me Your glory" (Ex. 33:13, Ex. 33:18). God replies: "'I will cause all My goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim My Name, the Lord, in your presence... I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But,' He said, 'you cannot see My face, for no one may see Me and live.'" (Ex. 33:20)

God then places Moses in a cleft in the rock face, telling him he will be able to "see My back" but not His face, and Moses hears God say these words: "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished." (Ex. 34:6-7)

This passage became known as the "Thirteen Attributes of God's Mercy."

The Sages understood this episode as the moment in which God taught Moses, and through him all future generations, how to pray when atoning for sin (Rosh Hashanah 17b). Moses himself used these words with slight variations during the next crisis, that of the spies. Eventually they became the basis of the special prayers known as Selichot, prayers of penitence. It was as if God were binding himself to forgive the penitent in each generation by this self-definition.

(The Talmud in Rosh Hashanah 17b says that God made a covenant on the basis of these words, binding Himself to forgive those who, in penitence, appealed to these attributes. Hence their centrality in the prayers leading up to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, and on Yom Kippur itself.)

God is compassionate and lives in love and forgiveness. This is an essential element of Jewish faith.

But there is a caveat. God adds: "Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished." There is a further clause about visiting the sins of the parents upon the children which demands separate attention and is not our subject here. The caveat tells us that there is forgiveness but also punishment. There is compassion but also justice.

Why so? Why must there be justice as well as compassion, punishment as well as forgiveness? The Sages said: "When God created the universe He did so under the attribute of justice, but then saw it could not survive. What did He do? He added compassion to justice and created the world." (See Rashi to Genesis 1:1.)

This statement prompts the same question. Why did God not abandon justice altogether? Why is forgiveness alone not enough?

Some fascinating recent research in diverse fields from moral philosophy to evolutionary psychology, and from games theory to environmental ethics, provides us with an extraordinary and unexpected answer.

The best point of entry is Garrett Harding's famous paper written in 1968 about "the tragedy of the commons." (Vol. Science 162, no. 3859 pp. 1243-1247) He asks us to imagine an asset with no specific owner: pasture land that belongs to everyone (the commons), for example, or the sea and the fish it contains. The asset provides a livelihood to many people, the local farmers or fishermen. But eventually it attracts too many people. There is over-pasturing or overfishing, and the resource is depleted. The pasture is at risk of becoming wasteland. The fish are in danger of extinction.

(Long before Garrett Hardin, there was an old Hassidic story about a village where the people were asked each to donate an amount of wine to fill a large vat to present to the King on his forthcoming visit to the village. Each villager secretly contributed only water instead of wine, arguing to themselves that such a small dilution would not be noticed in the large gift. The King arrived, the villagers presented him with the vat, he drank from it and said, "It's just plain water." I guess many folk traditions have similar stories. This is, in essence, the tragedy of the commons.)

What then happens? The common good demands that everyone from here on must practice restraint. They must limit the number of animals they graze or the number of fish they catch. But some individuals are tempted not to do so. They continue to over-pasture or overfish. They justify to themselves that the gain to them is great and the loss to others is small,

since it is divided by many. Self-interest takes precedence over the common good, and if enough people act on these instincts, the result is disaster.

This is the tragedy of the commons, and it explains how environmental catastrophes and other disasters occur. The problem is the free rider, the person who pursues their self-interest without bearing their share of the cost of the common good. Because of the importance of this type of situation to many contemporary problems, they have been intensively studied by mathematical biologists like Anatol Rapoport and Martin Nowak and behavioural economists like Daniel Kahneman and the late Amos Tversky.

One of the things they have done is to create experimental situations that simulate this sort of problem. Here is one example. Four players are each given $8. They are told they can choose to invest as much or as little as they want in a common fund. The experimenter collects the contributions, adds them up, adds 50% (the gain the farmer or fisherman would have made by using the commons), and distributes the sum equally to all four players. So if each contributes the full $8 to the fund, they each receive $12 at the end. But if one player contributes nothing, the fund will total $24, which with 50% added becomes $36. Distributed equally it means that each will receive $9. Three will thus have gained $1, while the fourth, the free rider, will have gained $9.

This, though, is not a stable situation. As the game is played repeatedly, the participants begin to realise there is a free rider among them even if the experiment is structured so that they don't know who it is. One of two things then tends to happen. Either everyone stops contributing to the fund (i.e. the common good) or they agree, if given the choice, to punish the free rider. Often people are keen to punish, even if it means that they will lose thereby, a phenomenon sometimes called "altruistic punishment."

Some have linked participants to MRI machines to see which parts of the brain are activated by such games. Interestingly, altruistic punishment is linked to pleasure centres in the brain. As Kahneman puts it:

"It appears that maintaining the social order and the rules of fairness in this fashion is its own reward. Altruistic punishment could well be the glue that holds societies together." (Thinking, Fast and Slow, pg. 308)

This, though, is hardly a happy situation. Punishment is bad news for everyone. The offender suffers, but so do the punishers, who have to spend time or money they might otherwise use in improving the collective outcome. And in cross-cultural studies, it turns out to be people from countries where there is widespread free-riding who punish most severely. People are most punitive in societies where there is the most corruption and the least public-spiritedness. Punishment, in other words, is the solution of last resort.

This brings us to religion. A whole series of experiments has shed light on the role of religious practice in such circumstances. Tests have been carried out in which participants have the opportunity to cheat and gain by so doing. If, without any connection being made to the experiment at hand, participants have been primed to think religious thoughts by being shown words relating to God, for example, or being reminded of the Ten Commandments they cheat significantly less. (Ara Norenzayan, Big Gods: How Religion Transformed Cooperation and Conflict, pg. 34-35.)

What is particularly fascinating about such tests is that outcomes show no relationship to the underlying beliefs of the participants. What makes the difference is not believing in God, but rather being reminded of God before the test. This may well be why daily prayer and other regular rituals are so important. What affects us at moments of temptation is not so much background belief but the act of bringing that belief into awareness.

Of much greater significance have been the experiments designed to test the impact of different ways of thinking about God. Do we think primarily in terms of Divine forgiveness, or of Divine justice and punishment? Some strands within the great faiths emphasise one, others the other. There are hellfire preachers and those who speak in the still, small voice of love. Which is the more effective?

Needless to say, when the experimental subjects are atheists or agnostics, there is no difference. They are not affected either way. Among believers, though, the difference is significant. Those who believe in a punitive God cheat and steal less than those who believe in a forgiving God. Experiments were then performed to see how believers relate to free-riders in common-good situations like those described above. Were they willing to forgive, or did they punish the free-riders even at a cost to themselves. Here the results were revelatory. People who believe in a punitive God, punish people less than those who believe in a forgiving God. (Ibid. pg. 44-47) Those who believe that, as the Torah says, God "does not leave the guilty unpunished," are more willing to leave punishment to God. Those who focus on Divine forgiveness are more likely to practice human retribution or revenge.

The same applies to societies as a whole. Here the experimenters used terms not entirely germane to Judaism: they compared countries in terms of percentages of the population who believed in heaven and hell. "Nations with the highest levels of belief in hell and the lowest levels of belief in heaven had the lowest crime rates. In contrast, nations that privileged heaven over hell were champions of crime. These patterns persisted across nearly all major religious faiths, including various Christian, Hindu and syncretic

religions that are a blend of several belief systems." (Ibid. pg. 46)

This was so surprising a finding that people asked: in that case, why are there religions that de-emphasise Divine punishment? Azim Shariff offered the following explanation:

"Because though Hell might be better at getting people to be good, Heaven is much better at making them feel good." So, if a religion is intent on making converts, "it's much easier to sell a religion that promises a Divine Paradise than one that threatens believers with fire and brimstone." (Ibid.)

It is now clear why, at the very moment He is declaring his compassion, grace and forgiveness, God insists that He does not leave the guilty unpunished. A world without Divine justice would be one where there is more resentment, punishment, and crime, and less public-spiritedness and forgiveness, even among religious believers. The more we believe that God punishes the guilty, the more forgiving we become. The less we believe that God punishes the guilty, the more resentful and punitive we become. This is a totally counterintuitive truth, yet one that finally allows us to see the profound wisdom of the Torah in helping us create a humane and compassionate society. *Covenant and Conversation 5775 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"When you lift up the heads of the children of Israel to count them (in a census), let each one give an atonement offering for his soul when they are counted, so that there not be a plague in the counting of them" (Exodus 30:12) This opening verse of our Biblical portion teaches that it is forbidden to take a number count of the Israelites – a census activity which Jewish organizations are constantly involved in doing. This prohibition is reinforced by the prophet Hosea (chapter 2), when he declares: "The number of the children of Israel shall be as the sands of the sea, which cannot be numbered and cannot be counted…" And historically even King David learned the bitter lesson of the power of this command, when – against the will of his Chief Commander Joab – he ordered a census, and the Israelites suffered a plague (II Samuel, 24).

Why can't we count Jews? What is the meaning of "give an atonement offering for his soul"? And didn't Hosea realize that we are not now – and were not in his day nor in any other time in Jewish history – as numerous as the sands of the sea?

The answer is to be found in a very strange incident during the judgeship of Gideon, great leader of Israel, against the Midianite enemy (Judges 6-7), which is cited by Chief Rabbi Sacks in his "Covenant and Conversation". God encourages war against Midian, Gideon assembles 32,000 soldiers, and God says they are too many for Him to place Midian in their hands (sic)!? Gideon allows exemption for those who are frightened and wish to return home; only 10,000 remain. God believes that there are still too many and orders Gideon to take his men to a waterway and have them drink. Ninety-seven hundred kneeled down on their knees to drink and three hundred lapped up the water with their hands, remaining in an upright position. God has Gideon wage the battle only with the 300 who did not kneel – with those soldiers who understood that it is only permissible to kneel before God. Even though the opposing Midianite forces were "innumerable (unable to be counted) like the sand at the edge of the sea in large quantity (Judges 7:12)", the small band of 300 – waging a surprise nocturnal battle accompanied with great victorious sounds of the Shofar – won the day!

The message is indubitably clear. A census presupposes that in battle and when compared to other nations, there is strength in numbers, numbers count. The Divine commandment forbidding a census comes to teach that if God is with Israel, then numbers become totally unimportant; to be alone with God is to always be with a majority of one. And to be with God means to be righteous, to be committed to the cause, to believe in oneself, in one's nation and one's mission.

A small band of dedicated people willing to sacrifice one's life to a Divine cause – such as a Jewish homeland poised and inspired to teach the world about a God of love, morality, pluralism and peace – is automatically as numerous as the sands at the edge of the shores of the sea. Such an army is as united as are the sands of the sea, and such an army contains soldiers each of whom is willing to give up his life (soul) as an atonement for God. That is why we successfully defeated all of the Arab hordes with a population of barely 600,000 in our War of Independence. Jews who lack the faith to risk their lives meaningfully in a just war for the sake of peace may well find that their lives will be taken absurdly by plague, God forbid.

And if our Biblical portion begins by teaching that it is forbidden to count Jews in a census for the sake of comparison to other nations, it continues on to teach that nevertheless, every single Jew within Israel certainly does count. Moses is atop Mr. Sinai (or in the supernal heavens) receiving the Decalogue of morality from God, while the panicking Israelites – having expected their great prophet to return on the fortieth day when he planned his return for the forty-first day – are worshipping the golden calf. God commands Moses: "Get down, because your nation whom you took up from the land of Egypt is acting perversely" (Exodus 32:7)

The Sages of the Talmud expand on God's

words: “Get down from our exalted state. I only gave you greatness because of your nation. Now that your nation is sinning, what do I need you for?” (B.T. Berakhot 32a). Picture the scene: here is the greatest Kollel (Rabbinical Seminary) in history, with the Almighty as Dean of the Academy (Rosh HaYeshiva) and Moses as disciple (avrech). Nevertheless, God explains that He did not enter into a covenant with the elite, most dedicated Jewish scholars; no, God entered into a covenant with every single Jew, from the elders and judges to the choppers of wood and the drawers of water.

Just as a Holy Torah Scroll is invalidated by a single letter which is missing, so is historic Israel (Knesset Yisrael) invalidated if even one Jew is disaffected. Moses must go down to his errant nation and lift up each of the Israelites, restore every Jew to the commitment of the Divine message and mission. Yes, the Jews must not be counted, but each and every Jew certainly counts!

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The sin of the Golden Calf remains one of the great mysteries in the story of the Jewish people throughout the ages. Flooded with miracles on all sides, unbelievably redeemed from Egyptian bondage, and being sustained daily in a desert, the Jewish people somehow revert to idolatry and paganism. As illogical as this is, it is, nevertheless, not as surprising as later generations may assess the events.

Human beings are not only influenced, but, to a greater extent, are limited and bound by the norms of the general society in which they exist. How can millions of North Koreans weep at the death of someone who was a tyrant and a murderer over them? Yet that is exactly what happened when the two previous Kingdoms finally passed from this earth. It is exceedingly difficult to maintain one's individual beliefs, no matter how correct and logical they may be, in the face of contrary opinion held by the majority general society.

There was a phrase in Yiddish and translates as "the general society is malleable and foolish". Even the most outlandish of ideas -- such as paganism itself -- somehow will gain traction, even amongst intelligent people, if it is somehow the prevailing attitude that permeates the general society. In a world of belief and sacrifice for paganism, it is not that difficult to understand that this should affect the Jewish people as well, in spite of their own personal and national history of monotheism, miracles and Godly deliverance.

The Talmud records that one of the great rabbis of the time saw the wicked king Achov in one of his dreams. The Rabbi asked the tyrant for his help in answering a question in Jewish law, over which the rabbis of the study hall were struggling. The king answered promptly and correctly, as to what the law is according to Jewish tradition. The rabbi in wonderment asked the king that if he is such a scholar, how could he follow idolatry and allow it to be rampant in the Jewish kingdom that he ruled? Achov answered: "If you would have lived in my generation, you would have picked up the hem of your robe in order to run more quickly to serve that false idol."

We look back at so many false idols and beliefs that litter the landscape of human history, and especially those of Western civilization. We wonder how people could have been so nave and foolish and so wrong about such basic matters of faith and perspective? Yet we ourselves live in a society dominated by what we realize to be false ideas, bad policies and the foolish denial of facts and realities, let alone the obvious lessons of history and tradition. We know, for instance, that cancel culture is wrong, evil, and counterproductive to the human spirit and belief. Nevertheless, we are all careful not to say and certainly not to publish what we know to be true, because of our trepidation that we will somehow be canceled because of it.

To be a Jew requires a great moral strength and fortitude. We have not always been able to swim against the current tide, and, tragically, we always pay a price for that failing.

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Important lessons about the Torah’s perspective on giving charity can be culled from the way money was collected to build the Tabernacle (Exodus 30:11–16). Three times the word terumah is mentioned, alluding to three gifts given in biblical times (30:13, 14, 15): a voluntary Tabernacle building pledge of any amount; a mandatory half-shekel contribution to pay for the sockets of the Tabernacle; and another mandatory machatzit hashekel (half shekel) to underwrite the cost of maintaining the Tabernacle – specifically, the communal sacrifices.

Unlike the building pledge and socket payment, the maintenance contribution was annual. Tractate Shekalim opens by declaring that on the first of Adar, the call would go out for everyone to donate their half shekels (Shekalim 2a).

Why the first of Adar? Bearing in mind that the Jewish New Year begins thirty days later, on Rosh Chodesh (the new moon) of Nissan, the month in which we celebrate our exodus from Egypt, money was needed for the Tabernacle expenses of the new year. Only new money could be used for the communal

sacrifices of the coming year. In other words, no one could claim, "I already gave last year." Every year, a new contribution had to be made.

Once the announcement was made, donors deposited their machatzit hashekel in receptacles placed everywhere. The receptacles were called shofarot, as they were shaped like a shofar, narrow at the top and then broadening. This shape ensured that no one could reach in to steal (Shekalim 15b). Appointed leaders would then collect the monies and deposit them in containers in the Tabernacle.

Contributions were solicited not only in Israel, but all over the world. Thus, all of Am Yisrael was involved. There was 100 percent participation. In fact, everyone contributed the same amount: a half shekel, no more, no less. All played an equal role.

One wonders why the contribution was a half shekel and not a whole. Perhaps it is a reminder of an individual's limitations. Only with an additional half shekel given by an "other" is one whole, teaching our dependency upon each other.

On the first of Nissan, fifteen days before Passover, the half shekels were removed from the Tabernacle chambers. Rules were established so no one would be suspected of stealing. One could not even wear tefillin when removing the money, as the half shekels could theoretically be hidden in the boxes of tefillin (Mishnah, Shekalim 3:2). The rabbis realized that not every ritually-observant person behaves ethically.

Shortly before the other major holidays of Sukkot and Shavuot, more half shekels were removed (Mishnah, Shekalim 3:1). In this way, the monies that arrived late from far-off places could still be used. No one was excluded.

Although there is no Temple and no communal sacrifice today, our custom is to read the machatzit hashekel paragraph on Parashat Shekalim, the Shabbat before the onset of Adar. And on Purim, which falls in the middle of Adar, there is to this day a custom for everyone to donate three halves of the local currency, as a reminder of what once was and hopefully will one day be.

The manifold precise regulations governing the giving of the machatzit hashekel coincide with Judaism's unique approach to charity. The Hebrew word tzedakah, often translated as "charity," actually comes from the word tzedek and literally means "justice." There is an important difference between the English translation and Hebrew meaning: tzedakah as charity is associated with performing a good deed beyond what one is expected to do. Tzedakah as justice is based upon responsibility. Giving, in Judaism, is not only the charitable thing to do, but the just thing to do.

Our challenge is to weave the two approaches together. While giving is our responsibility, we ought to give as if our contribution were optional – overflowing with love. *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 DAVID LEVIN

More than Light

As the Torah completed the final instructions for building the portable Temple in the desert, the Mishkan, we are told, "And Hashem said to Moshe saying. And you shall speak to the B'nei Yisrael saying, 'Just (see later) observe My Sabbaths for it is a sign between Me and between you for your generations to know that I am Hashem Who sanctifies you. You shall observe my Shabbat for it is holy to you, those who profane it shall be put to death, for whoever does work on it, that soul will be excised from among its people. Six days work will be done, and on the seventh day is a Shabbat of cessation (from work), holy unto Hashem, whoever does work on the Shabbat day will be put to death. The B'nei Yisrael will observe the Shabbat, to make the Shabbat an eternal covenant for their generations. Between Me and between the B'nei Yisrael it is a sign forever that in six days Hashem made the Heavens and the Earth and on the seventh day He relaxed and He rested."

HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that no new laws about Shabbat were issued in this section, as the law of Shabbat was already taught both in Parashat Yitro and with the introduction of the manna in Parashat B'shalach. Here, what is necessary is a clarification of the priority of Shabbat over the important task of building the Mishkan. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that there are two kinds of holiness that must be balanced: (1) the holiness of Time, and (2) the holiness of Place. The key word which separates these two forms of holiness and sets one over the other is ach, which was translated previously as "just" but which has other possible translations. Rashi sees the meaning of "ach" as "just," restricting the building of the Mishkan by the times and rules of Shabbat. The problem with Rashi's definition is that the word is contained in the phrase about Shabbat and would seem to restrict the Shabbat: keep the Shabbat except when it interferes with the building of the Mishkan. Professor Nechama Leibovits demonstrates that this understanding is opposed to the Ramban and the Gur Aryeh, namely that the word ach here restricts the previous phrase: build the Mishkan, but do not build when it is Shabbat. The building of the Mishkan then becomes the antithesis of observing the Shabbat. The Oral Laws make this even clearer. There are two terms for work, m'lachah and avodah. The Torah is careful to use only m'lachah when referring to the type of work forbidden on Shabbat. M'lachah is also the form used to describe the type of work to produce the Mishkan. Oral Law tells us that the type of work forbidden on

Shabbat is limited to the type of work which was used to build the Mishkan. As an example, grinding of spices for the incense or as part of various sacrifices could be done before Shabbat and were forbidden on Shabbat. The slaughtering of sacrifices which could only be done on the day on which they were to be used, was permitted on Shabbat, but only those sacrifices which were necessary for that day.

The Torah speaks of Shabbat as an ot, a sign, between Hashem and the B'nei Yisrael. This sign, which Hashem has given the B'nei Yisrael, is a sign of the holiness of the people. In previous d'rashot we have discussed that the term kodesh, holy, also indicates uniqueness and set aside for a purpose. It is through the Shabbat that Hashem makes the Jewish people unique, "because I am Hashem Who makes you holy." The next pasuk gives this a more intense understanding of this uniqueness. "You shall observe my Shabbat for it is holy to you, those who profane it shall be put to death, for whoever does work (m'lachah) on it, that soul will be excised from among its people." Rashi explains that if a person profanes the Shabbat in front of witnesses who warn him of the consequences, he is brought to the Courts, where he would be sentenced to death. If, however, there were no witnesses or the witnesses did not warn the profaner that his actions are breaking the laws of Shabbat, the sinner cannot be brought before the courts and punished by Man, but this person would still be "excised", cut off, from the Jewish people. HaRav Sorotzkin is troubled by Rashi's comments that appear to say that death by the Courts is harsher than excising, as death at the hands of the Court is final, yet excising at the hands of Hashem can be mitigated by atoning for one's sins. The truth of the matter is somewhat different. A person who receives death at the hands of the Court has automatically paid for his "crime" and is then eligible for the world to come (an afterlife). Kareit, excising, without teshuvah is final; this soul will be permanently cut-off from the other Jewish souls. One caveat is necessary, we are speaking of a person who realizes the importance of observing the Shabbat and not someone who has never understood its importance.

The Chafetz Chaim asks why Shabbat is a sign forever. He explains that the normal practice of an artisan is to hang a sign outside his shop which indicates his skill, so that he will attract customers. One knows that he is still in business and is still practicing his profession because the sign is still displayed. If the artisan's sign is no longer visible, his customers know that he has left. Shabbat is that same sign displayed between Hashem and the Jewish people. As long as the Jewish People observe Shabbat, the Shabbat is a sign of their close relationship and uniqueness to Hashem.

The Kli Yakar quotes the Yalkut on this parasha. Rebbi Natan says, from where do we know that anyone who observes the Shabbat has garnered for himself the reward as if he had observed every Shabbat from the Creation up to the time of the resurrection of the dead? It is because there is a hint in this section of the Creation and of the end of time and the resurrection of the dead. But more than that, it is a promise of our daily and weekly connection to Hashem.

One would think that the Temple is especially important because it is Hashem's dwelling place among us. Yet we see that we are restricted from building the Temple on Shabbat, and the forms of work to build and maintain the Temple are limited by the Shabbat. We see that even though we might not understand the importance of the Shabbat and the Temple, it becomes clear to us that they are interrelated. We are then surprised to learn that different laws within the functioning of the Temple (slaughtering animals, lighting the incense, burning animals on the altar) require that the Temple needs override the laws of Shabbat but only for the avodah, the service to Hashem. We are reminded of the distinction between m'lachah and avodah. We understand that there is much more to learn about this unique relationship. May we be successful in our efforts to comprehend this mystery.

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"The Children of Israel shall guard the Shabbos, to make the Shabbos for their generations a covenant of peace." (Shmos 31:16) Most people view the requirement to "keep" Shabbos as referring to following the list of prohibitions on actions you "may not do" on Shabbos. However, that doesn't really work with the syntax of the posuk, which continues, "to do (or make) the Shabbos," implying positive action and not merely the abstention from melacha/work.

Some say this means being careful to take care of whatever you need to during the other days of the week so you don't violate the Shabbos, while others say it means to anticipate Shabbos's arrival earlier in the week, much as the Torah says, "And his father guarded the thing," referring to Yosef's dreams of greatness, which Yaakov looked forward to seeing.

In this vein, the word 'V'shamru,' doesn't refer to the prohibitions, per se, but rather to the act of guarding Shabbos because of its innate holiness. In fact, the Midrash states that when the six days of Creation ended, Hashem infused a 'nefesh,' a life-force into Shabbos. Because one appreciates Shabbos and recognizes its special significance, he guards it not because he was told to, but because he understands what he is guarding.

A watchman guarding a storehouse of grain or items of less importance may not be so quick to sacrifice himself to do his job right. However, the body

guard of a President or Prime Minister will put himself in harm's way to protect the leader because he recognizes the magnitude of his charge and the necessity of this leader for the country.

The guideline we are given here is that the Children of Israel, the one who fought with the angel of Esav in mortal combat, should grow to love and appreciate Shabbos, "to make it," into something they and their children live to protect because of its sheer value and importance in their lives.

They are to recognize the covenant it strikes between them and their G-d, a unique relationship that no other nation has. They are to marvel at its ability to bring blessing into their lives, and to uplift them above the minutiae of humanity and its worries.

If they do this, they will automatically do their best to defend and protect it, by desisting from anything that would profane it, and by looking forward to it all week long.

Someone once asked R' Moshe Feinstein z"l why so many people in America became secular and did not keep Shabbos, when their parents expressed such mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice, for Shabbos, even losing their jobs and suffering in order not to desecrate it.

R' Moshe sighed and said, "It is precisely because they had mesiras nefesh." When questioned, R' Moshe explained: "Self-sacrifice is fine for one's self, but it cannot be transmitted to the next generation.

In order for the next generation to develop its own self-sacrifice, the love of Shabbos must be conveyed with joy and happiness; realizing its tranquility, beauty, and pleasure. Then the Shabbos will become a part of them. But, if one looks at Shabbos merely as a day when one cannot do things, why would the next generation want anything to do with it?"

RABBI AVROHOM LEVENTHAL

Fragrance of the Flagrant

"All that is gold does not glitter,
Not all those who wander are lost.
The old that is strong does not wither,
Deep roots are not reached by the frost."-J.R.R. Tolkien

The "recipe" that Moshe was given for the ktoret (incense) was an interesting combination. קַח־לְךָ סַמִּים נָטָף ו וּשְׁחֵלֶת וְחֶלְבְּנָה סַמִּים וּלְבֹנָה זַכָּה בַּד בְּבַד יִהְיֶה

"Take for yourself spices: stacte, onchya and galbanum, spices and pure frankincense, they should be equal to one another."

While the other spices are all sweet smelling, the חלבנה (galbanum), is known to be foul smelling. Why would G-d command to include such an ingredient for the incense in the most holy of places?

The Talmud in Kritot 6b says on this that the equal inclusion of this unusual smell teaches us that we should not consider it insignificant to include the sinners with us as members of the congregation during fasts and prayers so that they should be counted among us. The understanding is that the success of our fasts and prayers actually depends on the inclusion of such people.

In fact, Kol Nidrei, perhaps the most recognized prayer in Jewish liturgy begins with a request to include the sinners in our supplications of Yom Kippur.

The obligation to include חלבנה is not only a symbolic gesture. It clearly states that there must be a part equal to any of the other spices.

On a simple level, one might say that yes, we include this bad smelling plant, but it will be overpowered by the strong sweetness of the others, mitigating its inclusion.

In fact, the lesson of the ktoret is so much deeper to understand and appreciate the value and potential of others.

Rav Kook, Zt"L, says that the inclusion of חלבנה teaches us that there is no such thing as something or someone that is totally bad. Inherently, everything that G-d created in this world has the potential to be and to do good. Our goal is to recognize those strengths and bring them forth. The purpose of the other spices of the ktoret is not only to neutralize the bad odor, but also to turn it into something that is a pleasant flagrance.

The Kli Yakar explains this in context of the specific obligation to include the sinners in our fasts and prayers. He offers that the inclusion is so essential that without them the fast may be worthless and even a sin. כל ישראל ערבים זה בעד זה All Jews are guarantors for one another. Therefore, we must ensure that everyone is included in our fasting and prayers.

The goal of fasting and prayer is teshuva, repentance. The return to "factory settings" of the soul of a person. These tools are so powerful that when properly offered, they can transform sins into merits. The inclusion of those considered "bad" presents the opportunity to not only erase their past but actually turn them into productive members of society.

The Gemara in Sanhendrin (37a) expounds on this: ריש לקיש אמר מהכא (שיר השירים ו, ז) כפלח הרמון רקתך אפילו ריקנין שבך מלאין מצות כרמון ר' זירא אמר מהכא (בראשית כז, כז) וירח את ריח בגדיו אל תיקרי בגדיו אלא בוגדי

Reish Lakish says from here: "Your temples [rakkatekh] are like a pomegranate split open" (Song of Songs 6:7), even the "empty" [reikanin] among you are as full of mitzvot as the pomegranate is full of seeds. Rabbi Zeira says that the source is from here: The verse states concerning the occasion when Isaac blessed Jacob: "And he smelled the smell of his garments, and blessed him, and said: See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field that the Lord has blessed" (Genesis 27:27). Do not read "his garments [begadav]"; rather, read: His traitors [bogedav], meaning that even traitors and sinners among the Jewish people have qualities "as the smell of a field that

the Lord has blessed."

It is not by coincidence that this teaching stems from Reish Lakish, himself a former criminal who returned to Torah and an upstanding life. He, more than anyone, realized that there is potential in everyone. It is simply a matter of recognizing it and then bringing it forth.

There is a well-known story, recounted by Professor Yaffa Eliach in her book, Chassidic Tales from the Holocaust.

On Yom Kippur Eve in the Janowska Concentration Camp, where the Bluzhever Rebbe, zl, and his Chasidim were under the command of a notorious Jew, Schneeweiss, a cruel and flagrant Torah violator. The Nazis took perverse pleasure in terrorizing the Jews, and even inflicting death, especially during the holiday season, since this had a powerful effect on breaking their spirit. These Chasidim were acutely aware that every day could be their last, and that the upcoming Yom Kippur would probably be their final one on this world. They went over to the Rebbe and asked him to implore Schneeweiss that they not be forced to carry out any of the 39 primary categories of labor, which are prohibited on Shabbos. This way, their transgression of the law on Yom Kippur would not be major.

Impressed by their request, the rebbe approached Schneeweiss, despite knowing that he had contempt for anything Jewish.

"You probably remember me. I am the Rav of Pruchnik, Rabbi Israel Spira." Schneeweiss did not respond. "You are a Jew like me," the rabbi continued. "Tonight is Kol Nidrei. There is a small group of young Jews who do not want to transgress any of the 39 categories of labor. It means everything to them. Can you help?"

The rabbi noticed that a hidden shiver went through Schneeweiss as he listened to the request. The rabbi took Schneeweiss's hand and said, "I promise you, as long as you live, it will be a good life. I beg you to do it for us, so that we may still find some dignity in our humiliating existence." The stern face of Schneeweiss changed. For the first time since his arrival at Janowska, there was a human spark in it.

"There is nothing that I can do tonight," Schneeweiss said. "I have no jurisdiction over the night brigade, but tomorrow, on Yom Kippur, I will do for you whatever I can." The Rebbe shook Schneeweiss's hand in gratitude and left.

The next day he (Schneewiss) took them to the S.S. Quarters in the camp, to a large wooden house: "You fellows will shine the floor without any polish or wax. And you, Rabbi, will clean the windows with dry rags so that you will not transgress any of the thirty-nine major categories of work." He left the room abruptly without saying another word.

The Rebbe was standing on a ladder with rags in his hand, cleaning the huge windows while chanting prayers, and his companions were on the floor polishing the wood and praying with him. "The floor was wet with our tears. You can imagine the prayers of that Yom Kippur," said the Rebbe.

At noontime, the door opened wide, and into the room stormed two angels of death, S. S. men in their black uniforms. They were followed by a food cart filled to capacity. "Time to eat bread, soup and meat," they announced. The room was filled with an aroma of freshly cooked food, such food as they had not seen since the German occupation: white bread, steaming hot vegetable soup, and huge portions of meat.

The S. S. man commanded in a high-pitched voice, "You must eat NOW; otherwise, you will be shot on the spot!" None of them moved. The rabbi remained on the ladder, the Chasidim on the floor. The German repeated the orders. The Rebbe and the Chasidim remained glued to their places. The S. S. men called to Schneeweiss. "Schneeweiss, if the dirty dogs refuse to eat, I will kill you along with them." Schneeweiss pulled himself to attention, looked the German directly in the eyes, and said in very quiet tone, "We Jews do not eat today. Today is Yom Kippur, our most holy day, the Day of Atonement."

"You do not understand, Jewish dog," roared the taller of the two. "I command you in the name of the Fuhrer and the Third Reich, fress!"

Schneeweiss composed himself, held his head high, and repeated the same answer: "We Jews obey the law of our tradition. Today is Yom Kippur, a day of fasting."

The German took out his revolver from its holster and pointed it at Schneeweiss's temple. Schneeweiss remained calm. He stood still, at attention, his head high. A shot pierced through the room. Schneeweiss fell.

The Rebbe and Chasidim could not believe what they had just witnessed. Schneeweiss, the former public sinner, had just sanctified Hashem's Name, dying a martyr's death for the sake of Jewish honor.

"Only then, on that Yom Kippur day in Janowska," said the Rebbe, "did I understand the meaning of the statement in the Talmud: 'Even the transgressors in Israel are as full of good deeds as a pomegranate is filled with seeds' (Berachos 57a)."

The lesson of the חלבנה is as potent as its smell. When including those seemingly less pleasant into our realm, we have the opportunity to reveal their potential, tap into it and turn flagrancy into fragrance. *© 2022 Rabbi A. Leventhal, noted educator and speaker, is the Executive Director at Lema'an Achai lemaanachai.org*