

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

Why sacrifices? To be sure, they have not been part of the life of Judaism since the destruction of the Second Temple, almost 2,000 years ago. But why, if they are a means to an end, did God choose this end? This is, of course, one of the deepest questions in Judaism, and there are many answers. Here I want explore just one, first given by the early fifteenth century Jewish thinker, R. Joseph Albo, in his *Sefer ha-Ikkarim* (The Book of Principles, 1425).¹

Albo's theory took as its starting point, not sacrifices but two other intriguing questions. The first: Why, after the flood, did God permit human beings to eat meat? (Gen. 9: 3-5). Initially, neither human beings nor animals had been meat-eaters (Gen. 1: 29-30). What caused God, as it were, to change His mind? The second: What was wrong with the first act of sacrifice -- Cain's offering of "some of the fruits of the soil" (Gen. 4:3-5). God's rejection of that offering led directly to the first murder, when Cain killed Abel. What was at stake in the difference between Cain and Abel as to how to bring a gift to God?

Albo's theory is this. Killing animals for food is inherently wrong. It involves taking the life of a sentient being to satisfy our needs. Cain knew this. He believed there was a strong kinship between man and the animals. That is why he offered, not an animal sacrifice, but a vegetable one (his error, according to Albo, is that he should have brought fruit, not vegetables -- the highest, not the lowest, of non-meat produce). Abel, by contrast, believed that there was a qualitative difference between man and the animals. Had God not told the first humans: "Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves in the ground"? That is why he brought an animal sacrifice. Once Cain saw that Abel's sacrifice had been accepted while his own was not, he reasoned thus. If God (who forbids us to kill animals for food) permits and even favours killing an animal as a sacrifice, and if (as Cain

believed) there is no ultimate difference between human beings and animals, then I shall offer the very highest living being as a sacrifice to God, namely my brother Abel. Cain killed Abel as a human sacrifice.

That is why God permitted meat-eating after the flood. Before the flood, the world had been "filled with violence". Perhaps violence is an inherent part of human nature. If there were to be a humanity at all, God would have to lower his demands of mankind. Let them kill animals, He said, rather than kill human beings -- the one form of life that is not only God's creation but also God's image. Hence the otherwise almost unintelligible sequence of verses after Noah and his family emerge on dry land: Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart, "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood . . . Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them . . . Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything . . . Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God, has God made man." (Gen. 8: 29 -- 9: 6)

According to Albo the logic of the passage is clear. Noah offers an animal sacrifice in thanksgiving for having survived the flood. God sees that human beings need this way of expressing themselves. They are genetically predisposed to violence ("every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood"). If, therefore, society is to survive, human beings need to be able to direct their violence toward non-human animals, whether as food or sacrificial offering. The crucial ethical line to be drawn is between human and non-human. The permission to kill animals is accompanied by an absolute prohibition against killing human beings ("for in the image of God, has God made man").

It is not that God approves of killing animals, whether for sacrifice or food, but that to forbid this to human beings, given their genetic predisposition to violence, is utopian. It is not for now but for the end of days. In the meanwhile, the least bad solution is to let people kill animals rather than murder their fellow humans. Animal sacrifices are a concession to human nature (on why God never chooses to change human

Dedicated in loving memory of Alisa Flatow, HY"D on her 31st yahrzeit. She found favor and goodness in the eyes of the Almighty and all who knew her.
Rosalyn and Stephen M. Flatow, and family

¹ Rabbi Joseph Albo, *Sefer Halkkarim* III:15.

nature.² Sacrifices are a substitute for violence directed against mankind.

The contemporary thinker who has done most to revive this understanding (without, however, referring to Albo or the Jewish tradition) is René Girard, in such books as *Violence and the Sacred*, *The Scapegoat*, and *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*. The common denominator in sacrifices, he argues, is: . . . internal violence – all the dissensions, rivalries, jealousies, and quarrels within the community that the sacrifices are designed to suppress. The purpose of the sacrifice is to restore harmony to the community, to reinforce the social fabric. Everything else derives from that.³

The worst form of violence within and between societies is vengeance, “an interminable, infinitely repetitive process”. Hillel (whom Girard also does not quote) said, on seeing a human skull floating on water, “Because you drowned others, they drowned you, and those who drowned you will in the end themselves be drowned” (Avot 2: 7).

Sacrifices are one way of diverting the destructive energy of revenge. Why then do modern societies not practice sacrifice? Because, argues Girard, there is another way of displacing vengeance: Vengeance is a vicious circle whose effect on primitive societies can only be surmised. For us the circle has been broken. We owe our good fortune to one of our social institutions above all: our judicial system, which serves to deflect the menace of vengeance. The system does not suppress vengeance; rather, it effectively limits itself to a single act of reprisal, enacted by a sovereign authority specializing in this particular function. The decisions of the judiciary are invariably presented as the final word on vengeance.⁴

Not only does Girard’s theory re-affirm the view of Albo. It also helps us understand the profound insight of the prophets and of Judaism as a whole. Sacrifices are not ends in themselves, but part of the Torah’s programme to construct a world redeemed from the otherwise interminable cycle of revenge. The other part of that programme, and God’s greatest desire, is a world governed by justice. That, we recall, was His first charge to Abraham, to “instruct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just” (Gen. 18: 19).

Have we therefore moved beyond that stage in human history in which animal sacrifices have a point? Has justice become a powerful enough reality that we no longer need religious rituals to divert the violence between human beings? Would that it were so. In his book *The Warrior’s Honour* (1997), Michael Ignatieff tries to understand the wave of ethnic conflict and violence (Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, Rwanda) that has scarred

the face of humanity since the end of the Cold War. What happened to the liberal dream of “the end of history”? His words go to the very heart of the new world disorder: The chief moral obstacle in the path of reconciliation is the desire for revenge. Now, revenge is commonly regarded as a low and unworthy emotion, and because it is regarded as such, its deep moral hold on people is rarely understood. But revenge – morally considered – is a desire to keep faith with the dead, to honour their memory by taking up their cause where they left off. Revenge keeps faith between generations . . . This cycle of intergenerational recrimination has no logical end . . . But it is the very impossibility of intergenerational vengeance that locks communities into the compulsion to repeat . . . Reconciliation has no chance against vengeance unless it respects the emotions that sustain vengeance, unless it can replace the respect entailed in vengeance with rituals in which communities once at war learn to mourn their dead together.⁵

Far from speaking to an age long gone and forgotten, the laws of sacrifice tell us three things as important now as then: first, violence is still part of human nature, never more dangerous than when combined with an ethic of revenge; second, rather than denying its existence, we must find ways of redirecting it so that it does not claim yet more human sacrifices; third, that the only ultimate alternative to sacrifices, animal or human, is the one first propounded millennia ago by the prophets of ancient Israel. No one put it better than Amos:

Even though you bring Me burnt offerings and offerings of grain,

I will not accept them . . .

But let justice roll down like a river,

And righteousness like a never-failing stream (Amos 5: 23-24) *Covenant and Conversation is kindly sponsored by the Schimmel Family in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel zt”l © 2026 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“If any of the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offering should be eaten at all on the third day, it shall not be accepted...it shall be an abomination (pigul), and the soul that eats it shall bear his iniquity.” (Leviticus 7:18) It has often been said that if an individual was to be incarcerated for his evil thoughts, no one would be living outside a penitentiary. Jewish law (for example, see Nedarim 28a and Kiddushin 49b-50a) strongly corroborates this piece of conventional wisdom: “Thoughts or emotions (devarim shebalev) are not of significance” since only a person’s actions and not his/her fanciful imaginings create culpability.

However, the Torah reading of Tzav, continuing

² On why God never chooses to change human nature, see Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed*, Book III, ch. 32.

³ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 8.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵ Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior’s Honour: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*, 188-190.

our journey into the remote world of ritual sacrifices, specifies an exception to this commonsense rule of the paramount importance of accomplished deed over intentional desire.

According to the biblical command, the meat of the peace offering must be eaten on the same day the sacrifice is brought. When the peace offering is brought to fulfill a vow, then the time period for eating it is extended to the next day, but not to the day after that. Therefore, "...if any of the flesh of the sacrifice of his peace offering should be eaten at all on the third day, it shall not be accepted...it shall be an abomination (pigul), and the soul that eats it shall bear his iniquity" (Leviticus 7:18).

Rashi's comment (7:18) based on the Talmudic interpretation (Kritut 5a) expands the waves of the pigul effect to include thought as well as action; not only is it forbidden to eat a peace offering on the third day, but merely thinking, at the time of the sacrifice, that one will eat it past the proper time disqualifies that particular offering.

And since our prayers are linked to the sacrificial ritual – one view in the Talmud maintains that the three statutory prayers we recite each day correspond to the morning and afternoon sacrifices and the evening incense (Berakhot 26a) – it is no wonder that almost all of our sages insist that improper thoughts or even a lack of internal devotion will disqualify the prayer, no matter how carefully the words may be articulated. Why are prayers and sacrifices so inextricably bound up with the thoughts of the individual – whereas in the case of other commandments, the rule of thumb is that "divine ordinances do not require internal intent (kavana)..."?!

Perhaps the answer to the question can be found in the Midrash Raba (Chukat 8) which reports how a pagan once queried the great sage Rabban Yohanan Ben Zakai about the paradoxical, illogical nature of the biblical commandment of the red heifer – the special, additional portion which is also read in Tzav – arguing that it resembled sorcery:

"You bring a cow, and burn it and grind it up and then take the ashes; if an individual has been defiled by death, you then sprinkle two or three drops on him and you declare him pure! And what is even stranger, while the ashes of this red heifer purify the impure, another pure individual who touches those ashes becomes defiled by them!" (Bemidbar Raba 19:18)

The great sage responded as follows: "By your lives. It's not death which defiles and it's not water which purifies. It is rather the Holy One Blessed be He who declares, 'I made my statutes, I have decreed my decrees.'"

Now, I believe that Rabban Yohanan Ben Zakai is saying something far more profound than merely expressing the arbitrary nature of the commandments.

Let us look at another midrashic commentary, and a fascinating insight will hopefully emerge.

"There were three things over which the Israelites protested, because they brought suffering and tribulation: the incense, the holy ark and the staff. The incense is an instrument of tribulation, because it caused the death of Nadav and Avihu (Lev. 10:2); therefore, God informed Israel that it is also an instrument of atonement on the day of forgiveness. The holy ark is an instrument of tribulation, because when Uzzah touched it, he was immediately struck down (ii Samuel 6:7); therefore, God informed Israel that it is also an instrument of blessing of Oved Edom the Gittite (with which our enemies may be vanquished). The staff is an instrument of tribulation, because it brought the plagues upon Egypt; therefore, God informed Israel that it is also an instrument of blessing when Moses did miracles with it..." (Midrash Tanchuma, Beshalach).

In effect, the midrash is explaining that objects – staffs, incense, a holy ark, sacrifices, words of prayer – are not necessarily sacred in themselves.

Their purpose is to bring one closer to God – and, in order for this purpose to be realized, the individual must wholeheartedly utilize them to bring him/her closer to God. As far as ritual objects are concerned, it is not the object which is intrinsically holy, but it is rather what one does with it and how one relates to it in thought and intent that creates the holiness.

Therefore, the very same ashes of the red heifer can purify or defile, just as the very same holy ark can bring death or blessing, depending on the purpose for which it is utilized.

That is as far as ritual objects are concerned, but the situation is radically different concerning ethical actions. When an individual gives charity, or extends a loan to a person in need, the intent of the donor is of little or no account; his action is intrinsically significant, no matter the motivation. Hence, the Talmud rules that "a person who says 'I am giving a sum of money to charity so that my son may live' is still considered a completely righteous individual, a zaddik gamur" (Pesachim 8a).

Jewish theology is teaching a critical lesson here. The goal of Judaism is ethical and moral action, to walk in God's ways: Just as he is compassionate, so must we be compassionate, etc. Acts of compassion are intrinsically sacred; they are the very purpose of our being. The purpose of ritual, on the other hand, is in order to bring us close to the God of compassion, a means to an end. "You shall build me a Sanctuary, in order that I may dwell in your midst" (Ex. 25:8) commands God. Therefore, only rituals which are accompanied by proper intent will lead to the desired end and will therefore have eternal significance. *The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin's book Vayikra: Sacrifice, Sanctity & Silence, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid and available for purchase at bit.ly/RiskinVayikra. © 2026 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN ZT"l

Wein Online

This year, as is true in most years of the Jewish calendar, the Torah reading of Tzav coincides with the Shabbat preceding Pesach – Shabbat Hagadol. Since on a deep level of understanding there are really no coincidences in Torah matters, the connection between Tzav and Shabbat Hagaol should be explored and explained.

The word “tzav” is one of a mandatory command. It does not present reasons or explanations and does not brook discussion or argument. It is representative of military discipline, of service to a higher purpose even if all of the participants in the project are not really aware of the workings of that higher purpose. A necessary part of living in society is the mandatory obligations, which are part of everyone’s life. If it were not for these rules, mores and practices imposed upon us, life would become so chaotic as to be unlivable. It is the “tzav” part of life that allows all of the other more freedom-of-choice opportunities to be present in our lives. An ordered society demands that there be commands, not only recommendations or suggestions. There is an understandable reflex built into our emotional system that resists and resents commands from others. Any parent of a three-year old can easily testify to the truth of this observation. Nevertheless, the young child must eventually respond to commands in order to grow, mature and become a successful human being. So, “tzav” plays a vital role.

Perhaps there are no two areas of Jewish life and law that are as complexly intertwined with mandatory commands and laws, as are Shabbat and Pesach. The concepts behind these holy days and their observances represent noble values – serenity, leisure, freedom and independence. But noble ideas alone, without detailed instructions as to their realization, are useless in a practical sense. The sons who appear in the Torah and the Haggadah all ask the same question – “What relevance do these laws have in our time?” Is it not sufficient that we honor the ideas that Shabbat and Pesach represent and then ignore all the mandatory commandments that accompany these days, their values and ideals. Without mandatory commandments no commemorative day, no matter how well meaning and well planned will stand the test of time and changing circumstances. It is the “tzav” component of Shabbat and Pesach that make this Shabbat the Shabbat Hagadol – the great Shabbat that it is.

It is an historical fact that those movements and individuals that ignored or rejected mandatory observances associated with Shabbat or Pesach eventually slipped out of Jewish life and continuity entirely. Again, without “tzav” there can be no Shabbat Hagadol. This is the basic issue that divides much of the Jewish world today. The avoidance of mandatory

commandments, attractive and popular as this idea may initially appear, is a sure recipe for Jewish extinction. Shabbat Hagadol comes to remind us of this lesson. © 2017 Rabbi B. Wein zt"l - 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. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

The Peace Offering

One of the most common offerings brought in the Temple was the Shelamim, the Peace Offering.

The primary function of the main offerings was to receive forgiveness for sins that one committed. That was not the purpose of the Shelamim. Professor Nechama Leibovitz quoted Naftali Hertz Weisel, who states: “When the soul is free from trouble and suffering, it is at peace. The peace-offering is motivated by abundance of joy, arising from a sense of gratitude to Hashem for his state of well-being or for his deliverance from trouble. By thanking Hashem for His goodness, he draws down on himself Divine grace, and all will be well with him.” This is a recognition that this feeling of peace is directly given to him by Hashem. Weisel, here, is only speaking of the type of Shelamim that is called Todah, thanks.

The Torah gives us the commandments involved in the bringing of the Shelamim for the individual, not a community Shelamim offering. The individual’s Shelamim offering is kodshim kalim, the less holy offerings. These are eaten by the individual and his guests. The community Shelamim are kodshim kedoshim, the most holy offerings, and are treated differently. The Torah states: “This is the law of the sacrifice of the peace-offering that one will offer to Hashem: If he shall offer it for a (Todah) thanksgiving offering, with the sacrifice of the thanksgiving-offering shall he offer unleavened loaves mixed with oil, unleavened wafers smeared with oil, and loaves of scalded fine flour mixed with oil. With loaves of leavened bread shall he bring his offering, with the sacrifice of his thanksgiving peace-offering. From it he shall offer one from each offering, a portion to Hashem: it shall belong to the Kohen who throws the blood of the peace-offering. And the flesh of the sacrifice of his thanksgiving peace-offering must be eaten on the day of its offering; he may not leave any of it until morning.” The Torah continues with the Shelamim which is brought as a vow or donation. There the meat may be eaten until the third day.

The Shelamim concludes with the following: “Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying, ‘Speak to the Children of Israel, saying: When one brings his sacrifice peace-offering to Hashem, he shall deliver his offering to Hashem from the sacrifice of his peace-offering. His hands shall bring the fire-offerings of Hashem: the fat atop the breast shall he bring it; the breast, in order to

wave it as a wave-service before Hashem. The Kohen shall cause the fat to go up in smoke on the Altar; and the breast shall be for Aharon and his sons as an eternal stipend from the Children of Israel. This is the [portion] of Aharon and the [portion] gift of his sons from the fire-offerings of Hashem, on the day He brought them near to minister to Hashem; that Hashem commanded to be given them on the day that He anointed them from among the Children of Israel.” As R. Yehuda is quoted from the Midrash, “(The Shelamim) contains peace for all parties – the blood and inward parts – for the Altar; the breast and shoulder – for the priests (Kohanim); the skin and meat – for the owners.”

Abarbanel explains that there are two types of peace-offerings: (1) the Todah or thanksgiving-offering, and (2) a Vow or Donation Shelamim. The Todah thanks Hashem for what He has done for the Jewish Nation. This involves giving the Jews the Land of Israel, and “intervening miraculously to rescue us from harm throughout our history.” HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch explains that the Todah Shelamim is an expression of “completeness, lacking nothing (shalem), ... one which arises from the complete condition having been endangered and regained.” The Vow or Donation asks Hashem to intervene on an individual’s behalf, an act which is in the future. “To express gratitude, the individual prepares a festive meal along with the (Todah) offering. The animal’s innards are dedicated to Hashem by being burnt on the Altar; they are considered symbolic of the individual’s inner thoughts, which must be dedicated to Hashem as well.” The Kohen receives a portion so that they may thank Hashem, also. These Kohanim receive the meat from the chest and legs, considered to be the choicest portion of the animals. The one who offers the peace-offering must first wait for the Kohanim to take their portion before he can take his.

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that the Todah offering reminds us that there are many miracles that Hashem provides for us daily which we fail to recognize most of the time. We get sick with a minor cold and are brought back to health; we are accused but set free; a river flows to the sea. Each of these “miracles” are often overlooked in our daily lives. HaRav Sorotzkin points out that the ill person may feel the miracle of a cure more than with other miracles that happen because it is affecting one’s body. Even after the danger passes, his body and his mind may be compromised for a time. That is why the leavened bread is part of that offering. Leavened bread is more soothing and restful to the formally ill person. The Todah, which is a celebration of thanksgiving for past “miracles,” carries with it the festive leavened breads, which are not mentioned with the Vow and Donation offerings since they are requests for the future instead of being thanks for the past.

HaRav Sorotzkin asks why the laws concerning eating from the Shelamim is stricter by a Todah offering than for a Vow or Donation offering. The Todah must be

eaten on the day it is brought, and nothing can be left over for the morning. The Vow or Donation offering may be eaten for two full days until sunrise on the third day. This means that the Todah is treated just like the most holy offerings, even though it is a less holy offering. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that the major aspect of the Todah offering is thanks to Hashem for saving the individual from what could have been life-threatening. It therefore resembles the forgiveness received after a sin, which punishment could be life-threatening. The one who offers the Todah must make a large banquet with the meat from the korban and the forty loaves, which presumably will go to forty men. This community celebration is similar to “benching gomeil,” a public display of thanks to Hashem for saving one from a life-threatening situation, which we perform today since we can no longer bring offerings to our destroyed Temple.

The purpose of the Shelamim, then, is the recognition of Hashem as the only One Who can save us. It is never from our own strength that we are ultimately successful. May we learn to recognize Hashem’s miracles that help us each day, and may we also be saved from life-threatening situations by the saving power of Hashem. © 2026 Rabbi D. Levin

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*). © 2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

If for thanksgiving it is offered, together with the sacrifice of thanksgiving, unleavened cakes with oil..." (Vayikra 7:12) Though most Shelamim offerings were voluntary, the Korban Toda was obligatory for one who had been saved by Hashem. The four categories included one who had crossed the sea, the desert, recovered from an illness, or been released from prison.

Another unique aspect is that it requires loaves of both matzah and chametz, and the increased volume of food is paired with a reduced time to consume it. This effectively requires a person to invite guests to partake in his thanksgiving meal, and thus spreading word of Hashem's kindness.

We see that even though the person is bringing what would normally be considered a voluntary korban, and the commentaries refer to it as his vow, the Torah seems to be telling him that he **MUST** be grateful. Not only that, he must let others know of Hashem's great kindness to him, and praise Hashem, as it says in Hallel, "To You, I offer a thanksgiving sacrifice, and I call out in Hashem's name (to praise Him to others.)"

A key message for us from the Korban Toda is that *hakaras hatov*, a recognition and appreciation of the good Hashem and others do for us, is not something that is up for discussion. We don't get to choose to be grateful. Rather, we are obligated to find ways of making ourselves grateful and appreciative. As Yehudim, gratitude and acknowledgment are part of our spiritual uniqueness and must be cultivated.

The Korban Toda specifically requires that both matzah and chametz loaves be brought. [This is why Mizmor L'Toda is not said in Pesukei D'Zimra on Chol HaMoed Pesach.] The Sforno offers one reason for this which leads to others. He says the chametz represents the *s'or she'b'isa*, the sour of the dough, which reflects a person's negative qualities. Though these loaves are outnumbered by the matzah loaves, they allude to the fact that if one had not had this arrogance or other negative traits, he might not have needed to be saved, as he would not have been put into danger in the first place.

This, therefore, requires one to come to a higher level of appreciation, because he realizes Hashem saved him from himself! And this could very well be why so many types of loaves are required, ten of each of four

types. When trying to be grateful, one must acknowledge and seek out each nuance for which he ought to be thankful.

This is highlighted on Seder night when we sing Dayenu, which identifies so many smaller acts which made up our redemption from Egypt. Though they could have been considered all part of one act, identifying them individually enhances and increases our gratitude. This is something Hashem wants from us, as evidenced by the uniqueness of the Korban Toda.

As a student in the Mirrer Yeshiva, R' Shimon Schwab had occasion to borrow money from his mentor, R' Chatzkel Levenstein. When he arrived at the Mashgiach's office to pick up the money, Shimon began to say 'Thank You.' R' Chatzkel stopped him.

"You may not thank me for a loan," he said. "It is ribis devorim (interest of words) and is forbidden to pay interest on a loan. You may also not thank me when you return the money."

Upon his return, young Shimon brought the money to the Mashgiach's office, silently put the money on the table and turned to leave. "Kafui Tov! Ingrate!" roared R' Chatzkel. "How can it be that you show no gratitude for the loan?!" Stunned, the boy stammered, "B-but the Mashgiach told me I was not allowed to thank him."

"True," said the sage, "but you can show gratitude without saying a word. Though you cannot say, 'Thank You', it should be visible on your face that you are fighting back the urge to do so." © 2026 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

Reflections

The korban todah, or "thanksgiving" offering described in the parsha (Vayikra 7:12), according to the Gemara (Brachos 54b), is the proper response to one of four categories of danger (though other situations may well be incorporated within them) from which one has emerged safely: 1) going to sea, 2) traveling in a desert, 3) enduring a serious illness and 4) being confined to prison. Those categories are based on Tehillim 107.

It's both interesting and timely that the Jewish national thanksgiving which is Pesach involves each of those categories. A sea had to be crossed, a desert, subsequently, had to be traversed, Egypt is described by the Midrash as having been a virtual prison, from which no one had previously escaped, and the Jewish people are described as having sunk to the lowest spiritual level in Egypt -- a sickness of the national soul -- necessitating their immediate exodus from the spiritually decrepit land.

But something is strange here. The korban todah, unique among offerings, requires as an accompaniment four groups of flour-offerings. And, equally unique, one of those groups must be chametz, leavened breads. (Other flour offerings, aside from

Shavuot's shte halechem, are not permitted to rise.)

And on Pesach, of course, chametz is forbidden not only to consume but even to own.

If Pesach is a national parallel of an individual's korban todah, why would the latter include something that is anathema to the former?

What occurs is that the "illness" that a korban todah offerer survived was a physical one, whereas the national malady we experienced in Egypt was entirely spiritual. The inclusion of chametz in the todah-offering might reflect the fact that the danger was to bodies (chametz being associated with physical desires); the dearth of it on Pesach, the fact that the danger was essentially to our souls. (The Alshich, in fact, identifies each of the four flour-offerings with one of the todah-obligating escaped dangers, and associates "enduring illness" with the chametz offering.)

Soon enough, we will be celebrating Hashem's rescue of our ancestors from the illness that was Egypt, a spiritual malady. And when we recount that history at our Pesach seder tables and declare our thanksgiving in Hallel, there will be nary a crumb of chametz to be found in our homes. © 2026 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.org

RABBI YITZCHAK ZWEIG

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

This year Passover begins on Wednesday night, April 1st. This upcoming Shabbat, which is the one immediately preceding the holiday of Passover, is known as "Shabbat Hagadol – or The Great Sabbath." You will probably not be shocked to hear that there are many reasons cited as to why this is. In fact, there are no less than ten reasons given for this designation – keeping in line with the well-known aphorism, "two Jews, three opinions."

The origin of the name Shabbat Hagadol has been explored as far back as the 12th century. The Machzor Vitry – a work attributed to Rabbi Simcha of Vitry (a city that today is considered a suburb of Paris) – simply states that "People have the custom to call the Shabbat before Passover 'Shabbat Hagadol,' and they do not know why."

I am torn between finding it disconcerting and comforting that even some nine hundred years ago people did things without fully understanding the reasons for it.

The Da'at Zekeinim, which (like the Machzor Vitry) stems from the school of the famous Biblical commentator Rashi (1040-1105) and his students, says that the reason for the "Great Sabbath" designation can be attributed to the verse in the Torah, "Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying, in the tenth day of this month they shall take every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for a house" (Exodus 12:3).

The Midrash says that when the Israelites took the lamb for the Passover sacrifice on the 10th of the

Hebrew month of Nissan it was a Shabbat. When the Egyptians saw that they had taken the lamb to slaughter, they gathered against the Israelites in order to attack them, for they worshipped sheep as one of their gods (Exodus 8:22). Thereupon God performed a miracle, and they were saved "and therefore it is called Shabbat Hagadol because of the greatness of the miracle."

According to the Talmud (Moed Kattan 5a) it seems that the Shabbat before each of the festivals and Rosh Hashanah were known as Shabbat D'rigla, and they were a time when the entire community came to the synagogue to study about the upcoming holiday. Some of the commentaries on this passage state all of these Shabbats were given the title "Shabbat Hagadol."

It is quite possible that the term stuck specifically to the Shabbat before Passover because of the special Haftarah (the passage emanating from the Scriptures that is read after the weekly Torah portion) of the Shabbat before Passover. The selection from Malachi 3:4-24 discusses the prophecy of the arrival of the Messiah and refers to the day of his appearance as the "great day of God." Thus, the Shabbat before Passover is called "Shabbat Hagadol."

This week's Torah portion is called Tzav. This name is derived from the very first verse: "Command (tzav) Aaron and his sons saying [...]" (Leviticus 6:2). The word tzav is generally translated as "command" and is the root of the word mitzvah – or commandment.

Yet according to Rashi (ad loc) the verse is instructing Moses to "enthusiastically encourage" (Aaron and his sons) in their responsibilities as members of the priestly caste known as Cohanim.

However, Rashi's comment seems problematic. Have you ever tried commanding your children to clean up their room? Do you think that they felt that you were being "enthusiastic" and "encouraging"? If you do not understand the difference between commanding and encouraging, try "commanding" your spouse to wash the dishes and see how well that works out for you.

Thousands of years before the Torah was translated into English it was translated into Aramaic. The ancient translation of the word tzav in Aramaic was not to "command," but rather to "appoint." This is quite a distinction.

Moses is being told to explain to Aaron and his sons that they have been appointed to a very lofty position – the holy priestly caste of the Jewish nation. But it is a position that comes with responsibilities, and responsibilities cannot be forced on someone – they must be accepted.

This is also the very definition of a mitzvah. Did you ever wonder why God chose to ask the Jewish people if they would accept the Torah and the accompanying 613 mitzvot? Why didn't God just tell them, "I created the world. I am the boss and I demand that you fulfill the Torah and its commandments"? Why did the Jewish people have to willingly accept the Torah

and the mitzvot?

The answer is that fulfilling the Torah is a responsibility that we are taking upon ourselves. The Torah is not merely a book of laws; it is an owner's manual for this world. By accepting it upon ourselves we are taking responsibility for fulfilling God's vision for this world. This responsibility goes far beyond merely fulfilling rituals and it must be accepted upon oneself willingly – there is no “commanding” it.

This is the essence of Passover. Passover celebrates the birth of the Jewish nation; we were slaves to Pharaoh, and the Almighty redeemed us to be His people.

There is a fascinating Rashi on the verse, “And remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and that Hashem your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm [...]” (Deuteronomy 5:15). Rashi explains that the reason we must remember that we were slaves in Egypt is to understand that this is the very reason God took us out of Egypt: “He redeemed you in order for you to be His servant and fulfill His Torah and mitzvot.” In other words, being slaves in Egypt both educated and prepared us to be proper servants to the Almighty.

While the obvious difference between being servants to Pharaoh and being servants to the Almighty is that God has only our best interest at heart, in truth the difference is much, much deeper. God created the world with a mission to be fulfilled: That mankind perfect itself and seek a relationship with Him. It is only through this relationship that we achieve an everlasting existence.

The Jewish people are therefore His ambassadors to the world. This is a very lofty position. We are part of God's “management team” to see that His will for us and the world is fulfilled. But this lofty position comes with real responsibilities. The Torah is both God's operating manual for the world and the path to its perfection. This is why the Almighty, upon our leaving Egypt, marched us straight to Mount Sinai to accept the Torah.

Thus, the Jewish nation is different from any other nation; we are not merely individuals connected to each other by blood, geography, or both. Rather, the Jewish nation is a concept. We are a nation who has agreed to partner with God and take responsibility for seeing that God's vision for this world is fulfilled.

This is undoubtedly why a tiny country buried in the Middle East is such a focus of both devotion and enmity. The entire world – both consciously and subconsciously – recognizes the position that Israel and the Jewish people hold within the world. Some perceive it as a threat, while others are inspired by it. But this also creates a great obligation; to be worthy enough to inspire others to recognize the Almighty and want a relationship with Him.

Passover is when we were born as a nation. Ultimately, the message of Passover is that the Jewish

nation is a concept that transcends time and space. A concept that has survived every effort to extinguish it.
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SHLOMO KATZ

Hama'ayan

"Shabbat Ha'gadol" / "the Great Shabbat" commemorates the day when our ancestors in Egypt first set aside a lamb for the Korban Pesach. Many ask: Why do we commemorate the day of the week when this occurred (Shabbat) rather than the calendar date of the event (10 Nissan)? R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap z"l (1882-1951; rabbi of Yerushalayim's Sha'arei Chessed neighborhood and Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav) explains:

Our Sages teach that Hashem did not redeem Bnei Yisrael until they were on the brink of falling into the lowest level of impurity. Why did He wait? Because He wished to highlight the fact that there is permanent holiness within a Jew. No matter how low he falls, there is an "inner point" which cannot be eliminated. That "inner point" is hidden within all Jews, including many who seem to be lost, but all that is necessary for it to be revealed is for some of the layers that conceal it to be stripped away. This is what our Sages mean when they say: "Anyone who rejects idolatry is called a 'Yehudi'." When our ancestors separated a lamb -- an Egyptian deity -- as an offering, that is what they did: they stripped away that which concealed the "inner point" of holiness that cannot be eliminated.

The day that represents this characteristic of a Jew is Shabbat. Calendar dates and the dates of the festivals are determined by mankind, through the power of the Bet Din to say what day is Rosh Chodesh. In contrast, Shabbat is fixed, built in to creation.

This explains, as well, why Pesach is a holiday that revolves around the family. The Egyptians set out to destroy Jewish families and, as punishment, their families were destroyed. On Pesach, we celebrate the family, recognizing that "inner point" that is passed by heredity from generation to generation. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Mei Marom) © 2017 S. Katz & torah.org

