

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI MORDECHAI WILLIG

TorahWeb

“**V**ayehi bayom ha'shemini" refers to the eighth day of the dedication of the Mishkan, Rosh Chodesh Nissan, when the Mishkan was established (Rashi, Vayikra 9:1). This day was the day on which Hashem's heart was joyful (Rashi Shir haShirim 3:11).

When Adar enters, we increase joy (Ta'anis 29a) commemorating the miracles of Purim and Pesach (Rashi). In a leap year, we read Shemini between Purim and Pesach, as we approach the midpoint between these two yomim tovim, -- Rosh Chodesh Nissan-which is the day on which Hashem and Am Yisrael rejoiced.

How do we increase joy on Purim and Pesach? On Purim, we should increase gifts to the poor, "as there is no joy as great and splendid as gladdening the hearts of the poor, orphans, and strangers. One who gladdens the heart of these unfortunates resembles Hashem, "Who revives the spirit of the lowly and the heart of the crushed" (Rambam, Hilchos Megilla 2:17. Also see "Purim: The Holiday of Giving," TorahWeb 1999). On Pesach, experiencing the authentic joy demanded by the mitzvah of "v'samachta b'chagecha" requires assisting the poor as well (Rambam, Hilchos Yom Tov 6:18). Rashi (Kiddushin 34b) goes further and reads v'samachta b'chagecha (Devarim 16:14) as v'seemachta, indicating that you must make others happy. Alternatively, only by making others happy can one himself be happy.

Despite the emphasis on achieving joy by helping the less fortunate, the primary obligation of joy on holidays is that a family be joyful together (Rambam, Hilchos Yom Tov 6:17, Ra'avad Chagiga 1:1). Furthermore, the requirement to be joyful as a family, "rejoice-you and your household" (Devarim 14:25), which is quoted in the context of the yomim tovim, applies year round as well (Tosafos Pesachim 109a). Indeed, one who dwells without a wife dwells without joy, as it says "Rejoice, you and your household" (Yevamot 62b).

"Vayehi bayom ha'shemini"-the word vayehi teaches that the joy was incomplete (Yalkut Shimoni 520) because on that very day, Nadav and Avihu died (Vayikra 10:2) as a punishment for bringing before Hashem a fire (aish zara) that He had not commanded them to bring (Vayikra 10:1).

Nadav and Avihu were great people, perhaps greater than Moshe and Aharon (Rashi 10:3). They were passionate in their love of Hashem and went so far as to pursue it without the limitation of the law by offering the ketores, which brings one extraordinarily close to Hashem. This, however, was against Hashem's will and led to their death (Ha'emek Davar 9:6, Harchev Davar 10:1).

Nadav and Avihu were unsatisfied with their exalted status and attempted to raise it in an unauthorized manner. Perhaps their unhappiness was connected to their not having established families of their own (as noted earlier from Yevamot 62b), as we are taught that they were punished for not having fulfilled this mitzvah (Yalkut Shimoni 524). This unhappiness led them to seek both spiritual heights which Hashem did not authorize them to experience as well as greater authority to rule over the people in place of Moshe and Aharon (ibid).

As the Rambam taught, gladdening others is a wonderful way to emulate Hashem and to achieve heights of joy which obviate the need for prohibited or inappropriate manifestations of religious fervor. This mandate is not limited to gladdening the poor on Purim and Pesach; as noted above, it applies within a family all year.

Raising children is the most important religious undertaking one can engage in (Igros Moshe 4:49). The satisfaction of serving Hashem in this critical manner, in a home which is imbued with the mandated simcha shel mitzvah discussed above, should protect against repeating the mistake of Nadav and Avihu who pursued a relationship with Hashem via an aish zara (halachically unauthorized religious activity) rather than through the authentic simcha shel mitzvah accessible through having and raising a family.

In these days of increased joy, may we all serve and cleave to Hashem appropriately, and by resembling and emulating Him, reach the greatest levels of simchah. © 2011 Rabbi M. Willig & The TorahWeb Foundation

RABBI BEREL WEIN

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The events described in this week parsha occur on the eighth day-after the seven day dedication period of the Mishkan and the installation of the kohanim/priests that would serve in that sanctuary. And

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this eighth day turns into a day of challenge and eventually sad tragedy. By emphasizing that all of this occurred on the eighth day, the Torah teaches us a vital lesson in life.

The seven days of dedication are days of exhilaration and accomplishment. But such feelings and emotions cannot usually be maintained indefinitely. In life there always is the day after, the eighth day, which is one of challenge, struggle and even of pain. This day, though, can define and determine one's life and future.

I have often thought that this is perhaps one of the more subtle messages implied by the Torah when fixing the day of circumcision of a Jewish infant boy to be on the eighth day of his life. It is the day that imprints on him his Jewishness forever. It is a day of joy and commemoration for parents and the family, but also one of pain-with the drawing of blood from the infant.

It is therefore a day of solemnity and dedication and it teaches that sacrifice, consistency and determination all are part of one's lot in life. One of my revered teachers in the yeshiva put it to us starry eyed teenagers quite succinctly, if not somewhat ironically, many decades ago. He said: "Life is like chewing gum-a little flavor and the rest is simply chew, chew, chew." And so it is.

My beloved grandson, Binyamin Gewirtz, the youngest of all of my beloved grandsons, is celebrating his Bar Mitzva this Shabat. Happily, parshat Shmini was also my bar mitzvah parsha. I remember that my father of blessed memory said to me in his synagogue sermon that Shabat, that what I would make out of my life on the eighth day-after all of the bar mitzvah celebrations had receded-was the important challenge in life.

It is certainly correct that the challenge of the eighth day is the true test in life. I pray that the Lord grant my Binyamin all of the blessings of life but my main prayer is that he, like all of us, realizes that the challenges of life lie in the everyday mundane behavior which we can, if we so desire, transform with purpose and holiness.

That is the message that is transmitted here in the parsha to Aharon and his sons. Steadfastness, belief, obedience to Torah law and Jewish values is what is asked of them. The seven days of celebration and dedication have ended and now the task of caring for the holy Mishkan is entrusted to them.

And perhaps that is what the rabbis meant when they indicated that the two sons of Aharon who were killed in the Mishkan died because they were inebriated from wine. They were still in the seven days of celebration mode which had ended and not in the eighth day mode which now descended upon them. Such errors in life can be fatal and often disastrous. © 2011 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

Certain practices are just too vile and despicable for civilized people to endure, especially when it comes to food. The thought of chewing and swallowing the repulsive little vermin that live under rocks or in stagnant pools of water would make anyone gag. And yet, when the Torah in this week's portion delineates the organisms we are forbidden to eat there is a detailed mention of all sorts of reptiles, vermin and other loathsome creatures. Why does the Torah find it necessary to forbid something we would find repulsive in any case?

The Talmud addresses this problem and explains that Hashem wanted the Jewish people to accumulate additional reward. Therefore, He forbade them to eat vermin, so that they would be rewarded for their abstention. But the questions still remain: Why would we deserve to be rewarded for refraining to do something we find despicable and revolting and would never do anyway? Aren't we rewarded for overcoming our natural inclinations in order to comply with Hashem's will? In the case the prohibition against vermin, however, can we in all honesty claim that our compliance shows our high regard for Hashem's commandments or does it rather show our concern for our own fastidious nature?

The answer to these questions reveals one of the fundamental paradoxes of human nature. "Forbidden waters are sweet," proclaims the wise and ever insightful King Solomon in Proverbs. We seem to have a peculiar fascination with anything that is forbidden to us. And the more stringent the prohibition the greater the attraction. Are we ever more inclined to run our forefinger along a wall than when we see a sign declaring "Wet Paint"?

Why does the forbidden exert such a strong attraction to us? Because it triggers our inherent egotistical conviction that we are in control of our own lives, that we are the masters of our destiny. Therefore, we automatically view every prohibition as a challenge, an assault on our supposed independence and self-sufficiency, and we are drawn to violate the prohibition simply to prove to ourselves that we can do whatever we please, that no one else can tell us what to do.

In this light, we can well understand why we deserve to be rewarded for refraining from eating vermin. Certainly, we are not naturally predisposed to eating the slime of the earth. But when the Torah imposes a legal prohibition on these selfsame vermin they suddenly become strangely appealing. And when we resist this temptation generated by the commandment itself we are rewarded for our compliance. In this way, the Talmud tells us, Hashem rewarded us with additional merit simply by imposing a prohibition on the most loathsome foods imaginable.

Two mothers brought their young sons to the seaside on a warm summer day. They placed the children in a sandbox and gave them pails and shovels. Then they walked a short distance away to sit and enjoy the balmy weather.

Before walking off, one of the mothers bent down to her child and said, "Remember, my precious little one, don't go near the waves. They're very dangerous. You might get hurt."

No sooner had she sat down, however, than her little boy was off to stick his toes into the surf. The mother ran to retrieve him. She brought him back to the sandbox and repeated her admonition, more sternly this time. Minutes later, the little boy was off to the water once again. During all of this commotion, the other child remained in the sandbox, completely focused on the castle he was building.

"I don't understand," the frustrated mother said to her friend. "You didn't say a word to your son, and yet he hasn't even looked at the water. But my son keeps running to the water even though I explained to him how dangerous it is."

Her friend smiled. "That's it exactly. You forbid your son from going to the water, so he has to prove himself by going. I didn't say anything to my son, so he couldn't care less. He is far more interested in the sand."

In our own lives, we can all recognize this tendency in ourselves, whether in issues as momentous as the challenges of Torah observance or as relatively minor as exceeding the speed limit. Somehow, we feel diminished when we subject ourselves to restrictions imposed upon us by others. But if we were truly honest with ourselves, we would realize that accepting the authority of the Torah does not diminish us in any way. On the contrary, it allows us to be directed by the Divine Wisdom rather than our own limited vision and rewards us with serenity and fulfillment that would otherwise be far beyond our reach. © 2011 Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd it was on the eighth day, Moshe called to Aharon, and to his sons, and to the Elders of Israel" (Vayikra 9:1). It is obvious why Moshe called Aharon and his sons, as they were instructed to

bring special offerings on this special day, the inauguration of the Mishkan, its first full day of operation. The Elders were called because the nation also brought special offerings (see Chizkuni), and they were the nation's representatives. However, it was Aharon who told the nation about their offerings (9:3, with "speak" being in the singular form, i.e. only one person told them), so there would seem to be no need for the Elders to be "called" to hear about these offerings from Moshe. Even if there was an advantage to hearing it directly from Moshe (despite Aharon being the one to tell the rest of the nation), or if, as Ramban suggests, each individual Elder was told to speak to the people they represented (easier to understand if it were the 12 Nesi'im, Heads of Tribe, called rather than the 70 Zekainim, Elders), there would seem to be no reason to have them sit through Moshe's instructions to Aharon and his sons about their offerings before hearing about the nation's offerings. Why did Moshe call the Elders, together with Aharon and his sons, so that they could hear Moshe's instructions to Aharon?

Rashi, based on Midrash Tanchuma, says the Elders were called so that they would know it was G-d's idea that Aharon "enter and serve as the Kohain Gadol" (High Priest), and wouldn't accuse Aharon of "entering on his own." The commentaries are puzzled by this, as Rashi had told us (8:5) that Moshe had already told the nation that everything he did was commanded to him by G-d, so they shouldn't suspect anything was done for his (Moshe's) honor or for his brother's honor. If Moshe had already told them that G-d chose Aharon to be the Kohain Gadol, why would anyone think Aharon had taken the position for himself, on his own?

There are numerous suggestions made by the commentators to answer this question, but most of them leave us with additional questions. (Because he apparently found no satisfactory answer, Kli Yakar has a completely different approach to explain why the Elders were called.) Nevertheless, by taking a closer look at the possible shortcomings of these suggestions, perhaps we can build upon them and find an approach that does not share their deficiencies.

Taz says that even though there was no longer any doubt that G-d had chosen Aharon and his sons to be the kohanim (priests) who would perform the services in the Temple (and Mishkan), the nation might have thought that there was no specific requirement that certain services (such as the offerings brought that day and those brought on Yom Kippur) be done only by Aharon (or whomever would succeed him as Kohain Gadol), and that Aharon had decided on his own to be the one to do them (rather than any of his sons). Therefore, Moshe called the Elders so that they should know G-d specifically wanted Aharon to perform these services. However, the term "entering" implies taking the status of, or doing something, he was authorized for; there is no reason why Aharon would be less authorized to do things than his sons were. Additionally,

when Moshe addressed the entire nation (9:6), he could have mentioned that these things had to be done by Aharon; why would he say it only to the Elders? The whole idea that it was so important for everyone to know that what was done on that day had to be done by Aharon (and not that they could have also been done by his sons, despite Aharon being praised for always lighting the Menorah even though any of his sons could have done it, see Ramban, Bamidbar 8:3), seems a bit peculiar.

Sifsay Chachamim suggests that the first time Moshe was making sure everyone knew that Aharon and his sons were chosen by G-d to be kohanim, and this time he was making sure they knew Aharon was chosen to be the Kohain Gadol. However, it was clear from the clothing Aharon was supposed to wear (as opposed to what his sons wore) that Aharon had been chosen to be the Kohain Gadol. Maharal says that even though it was clear that Aharon would be the Kohain Gadol, Moshe wanted to make sure everyone knew that Aharon didn't "jump the gun" and start to fulfill the role before G-d had told him to start (see also B'er Ba'sadeh). However, this being the first day of the Mishkan's operation, why would anyone think it was too early? When else should he start? Nachalas Yaakov is among the commentators that differentiates between the seven days of training (the seven days of "Milu'im") and the eighth day, with Moshe's earlier statement referring to Aharon (and his sons) being chosen to train for the role, and calling the Elders intended to inform them that this choice applied to the eighth day as well. We would still need to figure out why there should be a difference between the seven days and the eighth day, thus requiring Moshe to reiterate that Aharon was still chosen by G-d.

Maskil L'Dovid suggests that people might have otherwise thought that Moshe would be the Kohain Gadol, with Aharon being under him, and Aharon's sons under their father. However, it should have already been known that Moshe, whose sons were not kohanim, was not going to be the Kohain Gadol, especially since it was made abundantly clear that the priestly garments were for Aharon and his sons (not for Moshe). I'm also unsure why this would have to be told to the Elders right away, rather than waiting to tell the entire nation before the offerings were brought. [It should be noted that according to some (see Vayikra Rabbah 11:6), Moshe did serve as Kohain Gadol (albeit wearing the same garb Aharon's sons wore) for the 40 years in the desert (it would actually have to be 39). If so, we can understand why people might think that despite both Moshe and Aharon being able to bring the offerings on the Mishkan's first full day-and causing G-d presence to fill it-Aharon "pulled rank" on his younger brother and insisted he be the one to do it. Therefore, Moshe wanted to make it clear that Aharon took over because G-d wanted him to, not because Aharon insisted upon it. Nevertheless, most assume that after the seven days

of Milu'im, Aharon was the only Kohain Gadol, leaving us wondering why anyone would think Aharon wouldn't assume that role right away.]

At the burning bush, G-d spent seven days trying to convince Moshe to take the nation out of Egypt, and He wouldn't take "no" for an answer. Vayikra Rabbah (11:6) tells us that when the Mishkan was constructed, G-d paid Moshe back, as for the seven days of Milu'im Moshe was the Kohain Gadol, and he thought that this role would continue to be his on the eighth day as well, when the Divine Presence would descend. Finally, on the last of the seven days of Milu'im, G-d informed Moshe that for the eighth day Aharon would take over (see <http://RabbiDMK.posterous.com/Parashas-Shemini-5770>). (This could explain why there is no earlier commandment for the offerings of the eighth day even though there was one for the Milu'im; G-d didn't want to tip His hand by telling Moshe ahead of time what would happen on the eighth day.)

This Midrash also appears in Tanchuma (Sh'mini 3), followed by the explanation Rashi quotes as to why the Elders were also called when Moshe gave Aharon his instructions. If Moshe thought he was still going to be the Kohain Gadol on the eighth day, he couldn't have informed Aharon that he would take over. It's very likely that the 70 Elders were aware of what Moshe thought was going to happen, so they too would be surprised when it was Aharon who was the Kohain Gadol on the eighth day. In order that they wouldn't think, even for a short time, that Moshe was going to be the Kohain Gadol (that day) until Aharon insisted that he take over, Moshe called the Elders. This way, they knew Aharon didn't "enter on his own," but that this is what G-d had commanded. © 2011 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd when Moses heard [Aaron's argument] it found favor in his eyes" (Leviticus 10:19). Our biblical portion opens with the exalting and exultant ceremonies of the consecration of the desert sanctuary, closely followed by a description of the tragic death of Aaron's two eldest sons. These events lead to a fascinating halachic discussion between Moses and Aaron which has important ramifications for our religious attitudes today. The sin-offering of the New Moon was brought on the first day of Nisan, which was also the eighth day of the consecration, the banner day on which the sanctuary stood erect and completed. It was also the day of the tragic death of Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu. After seeing to the removal of their bodies, Moses immediately inquired after the meat of the New Moon offering. Hearing that it had been burned rather than consumed by Aaron and his two remaining children, he "became angry with Eleazar and Ithamar, the remaining sons of Aaron. Why did you not eat the

sin offering in the sacred area? After all, it is the holy of the holies, and it was given to you [to eat] so that you might bear the sin of the congregation, and bring them forgiveness before the Lord" (Lev. 10:16, 17). Aaron countered, "Behold this day they [Eleazer and Ithamar] have brought their sin offering and whole-burned offering before the Lord, and then such [tragic things] have befallen us; had I eaten the [New Moon] sin offering today, would it have been pleasing in the eyes of the Lord?" (ibid 19)

Moses and Aaron both understood that despite the great loss of his sons Nadab and Abihu, the High Priest and his remaining sons must continue to fulfill their priestly duties, especially during this period of consecration. Their mourning must go on in silence ("And Aaron was silent" 10:3) and their public functions must continue uninterrupted. Despite their personal sorrow, they are public servants whose service to the nation must continue unabated.

And so Moses commands them: "Do not dishevel [the hair on] your heads and do not tear your garments lest you die and anger strikes the entire community... You must not go outside the entrance to the Tent of Meeting lest you die, for the Lord's anointing oil is upon you" (Lev. 10:6, 7). They cannot ritually defile themselves by attending a funeral or a burial; they cannot express any outward signs of mourning. They must remain within the sanctuary, and see to the proper functioning of the ritual.

Moses understood that the divine law, which prohibited them from outward mourning and demanded that they continue to officiate in the sanctuary, included not only the requirement of bringing the sacrifices, but also their consumption. Hence, when Moses sees that although they offered the New Moon offering, they burned the meat instead of eating it, he becomes angry with them. He chides the remaining sons, so as not to embarrass his elder brother, but his displeasure is directed at all three. Aaron responds forthrightly and even a bit sharply (the verb *vayedaber* is used to refer to strong and even harsh speech), insisting that they brought all of the commanded sacrifices that day, thereby fulfilling all their obligations. However, he reminds his brother that their family was also struck by an unspeakable tragedy that day. Would G-d who took the two boys have approved of their father and brothers demonstrating all the requisite rejoicing engendered by eating a sacrifice from "the table of the most high," in the fellowship of the divine? Moses himself referred to the boys as "those near to G-d, through whom G-d is to be sanctified" (10:3).

Aaron contends that although in the face of tragedy, we must continue performing our official duties, we cannot be expected to celebrate with G-d as well. "And Moses heard, and [Aaron's words] were pleasing in his eyes." Rashi cites the midrash "Moses accepted Aaron's argument, and was not ashamed to say that indeed, he had not received a divine directive

compelling the mourning high priest to partake of the sacrificial meal" (Lev. 10:19, 20, Rashi ad loc). Aaron's argument that the law also takes into account human feelings and emotions is accepted. Perhaps it is on this basis that my revered teacher Rav Soloveitchik was wont to explain the halachot of an *onen* (one whose parent, sibling, child or spouse has died, during the period between death and burial). He suggested that such a person is forbidden to perform the commandments (pray, make blessings before eating, etc.); not only because "one who is occupied with a mitzva (in this case, burying the dead) is not obligated to perform another mitzva at the same time," but also because G-d gives the mourner an opportunity to be angry at Him. G-d removes from him the obligation to serve Him with the usual commandments when he has been struck by the death of a close and beloved relative in a world which is not yet redeemed. © 2011 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah displays Hashem's unbelievable compassion for the Jewish people. The prophet Yeshaya begins by characterizing the Jewish people as the nation created to sing the praises of Hashem. Yeshaya continues and says in the name of Hashem, (43:22) "And you didn't even include Me for you were too tired for My service." The Yalkut Shimoni (as loc) explains this passage to refer to our inappropriate attitude towards the service of Hashem.

Chazal (our Sages) say that one exerts enormous energies throughout the day in pursuit of self advancement and yet he is unwilling to exert even minimal energy for the sake of Hashem. One returns home after a long tiresome day of work and neglects attending davening with the "valid" excuse that he's too tired. Hashem says that I wasn't even included in your plans. Energies were available for everything besides My service, the purpose for which you were created.

The prophet continues to reprimand the Jewish people, and says, "You did not bring Me your sheep for burnt offerings and you didn't honor Me with your sacrifices. I didn't overwork you with a meal offering and didn't exhaust you with frankincense spice." Chazal (ibid) elaborated on this passage and explained that all Hashem ever demanded from the Jewish people on a daily basis was the Tamid sacrifice consisting of two sheep. In fact, even the easiest of all offerings, the meal offering was not an obligation but rather a special opportunity to serve Hashem if one so desired. And yet the Jewish people refused to participate in these services. The Radak (ad loc) notes that in the days of King Achaz there were altars in every corner of Yerushalayim for the purpose of idolatry. But the Bais Hamikdash doors were intentionally closed and Hashem was totally excluded from the Jewish services.

The Jews were just too tired to serve Hashem although energy was available for every other form of service.

The prophet suddenly shifts gears and begins to address the Jewish people with love and affection. He says, (42:1) "And listen now, My servant Yaakov whom I chose as Yisroel...for as I pour water on the thirsty and flowing waters on the dry land so will I pour My spirit on your children and My blessing on your offspring." Radak (ad loc) explains that the prophet is now speaking to the Jewish people in Babylonia. They had already suffered severe pains of exile and rejection by Hashem and had now reconsidered their previous ways. They thirsted to drink from the long lost waters of prophecy which had ended many years before. Hashem told them that they would once again merit the word of Hashem. Although they had turned their back to Hashem and totally rejected His service Hashem did not forsake His people. The Jewish people would always remain His chosen nation and Hashem would patiently await their return. Our eternal relationship with Hashem can never be severed or even affected and when the proper moment will arrive Hashem will reestablish direct contact with His beloved people. Even words of prophecy coming directly from Hashem will become a daily experience. Hashem's love for His people extends all bounds. Even after all we have done against Hashem He remains right there waiting for us.

Yeshaya concludes and says (44:22) "As the wind blows away the clouds so will I erase your rebellious acts and unintentional sins, return to me for I have redeemed you." The Malbim (ad loc) shares with us a beautiful insight and explains that as far as Hashem is concerned our redemption already happened. From His perspective everything has been set in motion; all that remains is for us to repent and return. May we merit in this month, the month of redemption, the fulfillment of these beautiful visions.

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YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA HARAV BARUCH GIGI SHLIT"A

Translated by Kaeren Fish

“You shall not come out of the entrance to the Tent of Meeting for seven days, until the days of your consecration are complete, for He shall consecrate you for seven days." (Vayikra 8:33)

Our parasha talks about the "days of consecration," following which the Mishkan is inaugurated. From here Chazal deduce that the Kohen Gadol, too, before Yom Kippur, requires a seven-day seclusion in his official chambers, and we also find a seven-day period in connection with the Red Heifer. What is the point of these seven days? Why the need for isolation, and why specifically for seven days?

The Meshekh Chokhma adds that during the preparation of the Red Heifer there was a biblical requirement to read "parashat Para"-the portion describing G-d's commandment in this regard. Likewise, on Yom Kippur, the relevant parasha was read, and in the same way, during the "days of consecration" the reading of the parasha was necessary. What is the need for all these readings?

What is common to all three cases is that they involve preparation for an important event: purification from the defilement of the dead, entrance into the Mikdash, and inaugurating the sacrificial service. Hence we may apply the lessons we learn here to other matters of importance in our lives.

Anything that is of critical importance must be preceded by thorough preparation, on two levels-as we find in all three cases described above.

First, there must be a "reading of the parasha." For instance, when Pesach approaches, we prepare ourselves by studying the laws so that we are ready: "We inquire and expound the laws of Pesach [from] thirty days prior to Pesach." Similarly, before a person marries, he or she must prepare by studying the laws relevant to this realm. Personal emotional preparation is not sufficient; one must study, for without the guidance of the Torah our private preparation will not suffice.

In Massekhet Yoma we find that towards the end of the Second Temple Period, there were kohanim-even Kohanim Gedolim-who were ignorant or illiterate. The beit din would therefore read the laws to them, since every momentous event requires appropriate study.

Second, we must prepare mentally and emotionally, like the week of isolation.

The idea behind this is that a week is an entire life unit. Along these lines, Ashkenazic brides and grooms do not see each other during the week prior to the wedding. And in the same way, the Kohen Gadol separates himself for a week prior to entering the Holy of Holies. It is through the merit of the Kohen Gadol that each individual among Israel achieves atonement and closeness to G-d; hence the importance of preparation on both levels: study and intense mental preparation.

CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Our parsha, which deals with a variety of sacrifices, devotes an extended section to the chatat, the sin offering, as brought by different individuals: first the High Priest (4:3-12), then the community as a whole (13-21), then a leader (22-26) and finally an ordinary individual (27-35).

The whole passage sounds strange to modern ears, not only because sacrifices have not been offered for almost two millennia since the destruction of the Second Temple, but also because it is hard for us to

understand the very concepts of sin and atonement as they are dealt with in the Torah.

The puzzle is that the sins for which an offering had to be brought were those committed inadvertently, be-shogeg. Either the sinner had forgotten the law, or some relevant fact. To give a contemporary example: suppose the phone rings on Shabbat and you answer it. You would only be liable for a sin offering if either you forgot the law that you may not answer a phone on Shabbat, or you forgot the fact that the day was Shabbat. For a moment you thought it was Friday or Sunday.

It's just this kind of act that we don't see as a sin at all. It was a mistake. You forgot. You did not mean to do anything wrong. And when you realise that inadvertently you have broken Shabbat, you are more likely to feel regret than remorse. You feel sorry but not guilty.

We think of a sin as something we did intentionally, yielding to temptation perhaps, or in a moment of rebellion. That is what Jewish law calls be-zadon in biblical Hebrew or be-mezid in rabbinic Hebrew. That is the kind of act we would have thought calls for a sin offering. But actually such an act cannot be atoned for by an offering at all. So how are we to make sense of the sin offering?

The answer is that there are three dimensions of wrongdoing between us and G-d.

The first is guilt and shame. When we sin deliberately and intentionally, we know inwardly that we have done wrong. Our conscience-the voice of G-d within the human heart-tells us that we have done wrong. That is what happened to Adam and Eve in the Garden after they had sinned. They felt shame.

They tried to hide. For that kind of deliberate, conscious, intentional sin, the only adequate moral response is teshuvah, repentance. This involves (a) remorse, charatah, (b) confession, vidui, and (c) kabbalat he-atid, a resolution never to commit the sin again. The result is selichah umechilah, G-d forgives us. A mere sacrifice is not enough.

However there is a second dimension. Regardless of guilt and responsibility, if we commit a sin we have objectively transgressed a boundary. The word chet means to miss the mark, to stray, to deviate from the proper path. We have committed an act that somehow disturbs the moral balance of the world. To take a secular example, imagine that your car has a faulty speedometer. You are caught driving at 50 miles per hour in a 30 mile an hour zone. You tell the policeman who stops you that you didn't know. Your speedometer was only showing 30 miles per hour. He may sympathise, but you have still broken the law, transgressed the limit, and you will still have to pay the penalty.

That is what a sin offering is. According to R. Shimshon Raphael Hirsch it is a penalty for carelessness. According to the Sefer Ha-Hinnukh it is

an educational and preventive measure. Deeds, in Judaism, are the way we train the mind. The fact that you have had to pay the price by bringing a sacrifice will make you take greater care in future.

R. Isaac Arama (Spain, 15th century) says that the difference between an intentional and an unintentional sin is that in the former case, both the body and the soul were at fault. In the case of an unintentional sin only the body was at fault, not the soul. Therefore a physical sacrifice helps since it was only the physical act of the body that was in the wrong. A physical sacrifice cannot atone for a deliberate sin, because it cannot rectify a wrong in the soul.

What the sacrifice achieves is kapparah, not forgiveness as such but a "covering over" or obliteration of the sin. Noah was told to "cover" (ve-chapharta) the surface of the ark with pitch (Gen. 6:14). The cover of the ark in the Tabernacle was called kaporet (Ex. 25:17). Once a sin has been symbolically covered over, it is forgiven, but as the Malbim points out, in such cases the verb for forgiveness, s-l-ch, is always in the passive (venislach: Lev. 4:20,26,31). The forgiveness is not direct, as it is in the case of repentance, but indirect, a consequence of the sacrifice.

The third dimension of sin is that it defiles. It leaves a stain on your character. Isaiah, in the presence of G-d, feels that he has "unclean lips" (Is. 6:5). King David says to G-d, "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (me-chatati tahareni, Ps. 51:4). About Yom Kippur the Torah says, "On that day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you [letaher etchem]. Then, before the Lord, you will be clean from all your sins" (Lev. 16:30).

Ramban says that this is the logic of the sin offering. All sins, even those committed inadvertently, "leave a stain on the soul and constitute a blemish on it, and the soul is only fit to meet its Maker when it has been cleansed from all sin" (Ramban to Lev. 4:2). The result of the sin offering is tehora, cleansing, purification.

So the sin offering is not about guilt but about other dimensions of transgression. It is one of the stranger features of Western civilization, due in part to Pauline Christianity, and partly to the influence of the philosopher Immanuel Kant, that we tend to think about morality and spirituality as matters almost exclusively to do with the mind and its motives. But our acts leave traces in the world. And even unintentional sins can leave us feeling defiled.

The law of the sin offering reminds us that we can do harm unintentionally, and this can have psychological consequences. The best way of putting things right is to make a sacrifice: to do something that costs us something.

In ancient times, that took the form of a sacrifice offered on the altar at the Temple. Nowadays the best way of doing so is to give money to charity (tzedakah) or perform an act of kindness to others

(chessed). The prophet said so long ago: "For I desire loving-kindness, not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6). Charity and kindness are our substitutes for sacrifice and, like the sin offering of old, they help mend what is broken in the world and in our soul. © 2011 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The Torah in this week's Parsha mandates that for animals to be kosher they must possess two characteristics-cloven hooves and chew the cud. (Leviticus 11:3) In contemporary times there is much ado about the impact of food on physical health. My doctors keep telling me for example, to keep the fat and cholesterol down. Is it possible that food could similarly impact on one's spiritual well-being? This in fact is the position of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in his explanation of kashrut (the dietary laws).

The characteristics of kosher animals point to their being more passive in nature. In Hirsch's words: "If we look at the signs for clean animals they appear plant-like. As they chew the cud, the food consumed passes through two stomachs, is driven up the gullet again and chewed for the second time. Thus, these animals spend a great deal of time in the absorption of food. The cloven hooves of the permitted animals also seem to have been created more for the mere purpose of standing than for being used as weapons or tools."

The same is true concerning fish. To be kosher, fish must have fins and scales. (Leviticus 11:9) Not coincidentally, fish that have these characteristics are by and large more peaceful in nature. The more aggressive fish fall into the category of the prohibited. Moreover, birds of prey are by and large enjoined. The rule holds fast. The more aggressive animals and fowl are prohibited. The more passive are permitted.

Of course, not everyone who consumes kosher food leads lives of inner peace. There are troubled people who eat kosher, just as there are fine people who do not eat kosher. Nonetheless, the ritual of kashrut may help us become more conscious of our responsibilities to live ethical lives.

The balance between outer action and inner feelings is especially discernible in the laws of forbidden and permitted animals. Note, that chewing the cud is an internal characteristic as it deals with the inner digestive system. In contrast, cloven hooves are an external characteristic. One merely has to look at an animal's foot to detect whether this criteria has been met. Perhaps, just perhaps this teaches that to be kosher one's behavior must not only be correct, but inwardly pure.

Whether these rationales are satisfactory or not, the prohibited foods teach us discipline. They remind us that in the end, G-d is the arbiter of right and wrong. Notwithstanding, the kashrut laws carry powerful

ethical lessons-lessons that can help ennoble and sanctify our lives. © 2011 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

The Gemara (Tractate) in Pesachim (3a) quotes: "A person should not speak in a negative way, as we see the Torah itself" went out of its way to speak nicely regarding the animals entering the Ark, describing the non-kosher animals as specifically that-non-kosher. It doesn't call them Tamei (Impure). The Torah "wastes" words in order to teach us the importance of speaking nicely. From this week's Parsha, Shemini, we have a problem with this Gemara. The Torah continually refers to non-kosher animals as Tamei (11:4 and others)! What happened to speaking nicely?

R' Mordechai Kamenetzky answers that the difference is that the story of the Ark is a narrative, which is when people should be careful to tell it over in a nice way, refraining from Lashon Hara (slander) or negativity of any sort. In our Parsha, however, the Torah describes the nitty-gritty laws of what one may eat. In our case, it's important to give a resounding "TAMEI!" when discussing these matters, as the consequences are much graver. It should be the same when dealing with children and others around us who may not know better. We speak softly in order to get them to understand history, reasons and customs of Judaism. However, as the metaphor of food may hint at, if they are in imminent danger of internalizing negative influences, it's time to fearlessly admonish them! When dealing with clear right and wrong, the Torah tells us that sometimes it's necessary to boldly speak where no one has spoken before! © 2011 Rabbi S. Ressler and LeLamed, Inc.

