

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

### Shabbat Shalom

**“F**or seven days leaven may not be found in your homes, for anyone who eats even a mixture of food with the slightest amount of hametz, his soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel" (Ex. 12:19)

Every festival requires preparation but no holiday is approached with the kind of frenzied, frenetic cleaning which marks the approach of Pessah. Indeed, the usual greeting among observant Jews before Purim is "Have a joyous Purim" (Purim sameah), whereas before Passover it is "Have a kosher Pessah," (Hag kasher vesameah).

An astute rabbi once commented that it should be the opposite: on Purim we should wish each other a "kosher" Purim, since we are commanded to drink on Purim, and under the influence of inebriating beverages, there is no limit to the unkosher words a person might express or unkosher deeds they might commit. On Pessah, however, we need to remind each other to be joyous, because the cleaning to rid our homes of hametz (leavened products) can sap the strength of even the most energetic.

There are three biblical verses which command us to remove every trace of hametz before the festival: "...before the first day [of Pessah] you must destroy [or nullify] the leaven from your homes" (Exodus 12:15); "For seven days leaven may not be found in your homes, for anyone who eats even a mixture of food with the slightest amount of hametz, his soul shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel" (Ex. 12:19); "Since matzot must be eaten for these seven days, no leaven may be seen in your possession; no leaven may be seen in your boundaries" (Ex. 13:7). No wonder Jews become obsessive in preparation for Pessah!

What lies behind this emphasis on eliminating hametz? Interestingly enough, both the rationalists and the mystics, the mitnagdim as well as the hassidim, agree that hametz symbolizes the evil instinct, the spirit

of Satan which all too often invades the inner domain of even the best of us.

How so? From a religio-legal (halachic) perspective, hametz is any one of the five grains - wheat, barley, rye, oats or spelt - mixed with water for more than 18 minutes, which then rises or ferments. Conversely, matza is any one of those same grains mixed with water for less than 18 minutes, so that the dough will not rise. These grains are known as the staff of life for every human being. Hametz is puffed-up matza, whereas matza is simple hametz.

The inflated nature of hametz symbolizes crass materialism, the kind of self-importance which leaves no room for others, and certainly no room for G-d. It also symbolizes the swelling connected with the stimulation of the libido outside the context of love and marriage.

Since the dough must be constantly kneaded with one's hands to prevent fermentation, whereas a mere lack of conscious effort will allow dough to rise automatically, hametz also suggests sloth and bored passivity. Matza, from this perspective, suggests active intervention.

Just as the same grains can produce either hametz or matza, the very etymology of the words is almost identical: hmtz and mtzh - the only difference is the soft or hard "h." Moreover, matzot and mitzvot (divine commands) are spelled exactly the same way in Hebrew.

This moralistic exposition emanates from our Talmudic texts. The first mishna in tractate Pessahim opens: "On the evening of the 14th day [of Nisan [this year, Sunday night March 17], we must search for [and eliminate] hametz by the light of a candle."

The Talmudic sages compare this to G-d's ferreting out of evil in Jerusalem by the light of a candle before the coming of the Messiah (Zephaniah 1:12), and cite as the proof-text: "The candle of the Lord is the soul of the human being; He searches the innermost recesses" (Proverbs 20:27). Hence our search for hametz is much more than "spring housecleaning"; it is, rather, a cleansing of our inner selves, of our souls.

And how appropriate that this is the way we prepare for Pessah, the festival of our birth as a nation! Tradition has it that Elijah will prepare the world for Redemption before the Passover of universal freedom, and will do so by "turning the hearts of the parents to the children and the hearts of the children to the parents," through teshuva - repentance (Malachi 3:23-24).

This issue of Toras Aish is dedicated by  
Ayala & Mayer Grosser  
in memory of  
Samuel Grosser  
יהושע מנחם בן מאיר ז"ל  
on his yarzeit. May his neshama have an aliya!

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Our mission as a nation is to bring the world to compassionate righteousness and moral justice - tzedaka and mishpat (Genesis 18:19), the virtues for which G-d chose Abraham and charged him with bringing the blessing of redemption to all the nations (Gen. 12: 3). We cannot begin to fulfill our mission unless we first extirpate the hametz from our souls!  
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**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd G-d said to Moshe, 'speak to Aharon your brother, and he shall not come at all times to the holy, inside the curtain, in front of the Kapores which is on the Aron, and he shall not die, for in a cloud I will appear upon the Kapores'" (Vayikra 16:2). Entering the "holy of holies," the inner sanctum of the Mishkan and Temple, was a dangerous proposition, one that resulted in death if not done at the right time (on Yom Kippur, see Rashi), while following the proper procedure. This procedure is described in the verses that follow, beginning with the words "with this Aharon shall come to the holy" (16:3). Rashi tells us that the word "and this" ("b'zos" has the numerical value (gematria) of 410, hinting to the [years of the] first Temple, which stood for 410 years. Although Rashi employs gematria elsewhere, how they help us understand the text is more readily apparent. For example, in Beraishis (14:14), Rashi tells us that the "318 men" who fought with Avraham was really just Eliezer, his servant, whose name has the numerical value of 318. In Bamidbar (15:39), telling us that the numerical value of "tzitzis" is 608, which added to the five knots (on each of the four tzitzis) adds up to 613, explains how wearing tzitzis can remind us to keep the 613 mitzvos. How does the gematria of "b'zos" being the number of years of the first Temple help us understand our verse?

The most common question asked on (every) Rashi is "what's bothering Rashi" What was out of place, or what information was missing, that necessitated Rashi to make this comment, and how does he address that issue? These questions apply here as well. Additionally, the procedure described (for Yom Kippur) is not limited to the first Temple; it was necessary in the Mishkan (including the hundreds of

years the Mishkan was in Shiloh) and in the second Temple. Why would the Torah hint only to the years of the first Temple, if the context applied equally to the second Temple and to the Mishkan? Most puzzling (to me, at least) is that there are several other suggestions made by Chazal (our sages, of blessed memory) as to what the word "b'zos" teaches us, suggestions that seem much closer to a straightforward understanding of the verse than using its gematria. For example, Shemos Rabbah (38:8) says that Aharon was able to enter the inner sanctum in the merit of the mitzvah of circumcision, where the word "zos" is also used (Beraishis 17:10 and elsewhere). "With" the merit of "zos" ("b'zos" Aharon was able to enter the holy. Vayikra Rabbah (21:6) adds additional merits where the word "zos" is used (e.g. Torah, Shabbos, Terumah and Ma'aser), whereby these merits allowed the Kohain Gadol to "enter the holy." (There are other Talmudic-era explanations for the word "b'zos" as well.) Why would Rashi ignore the more "mainstream" approaches to what "b'zos" signifies, quoting the Chazal (Vayikra Rabbah 21:9) regarding its gematria instead?

Many commentators on Rashi suggest that the word "b'zos," being singular feminine, is out of place. If it was referring to all of the offerings, it should be plural ("b'eilu" and if it only refers to one of them, it should be masculine ("b'zeh" since a male animal was offered. This is how the Talmud (Yoma 4a) understands the Beraisa that uses the word "b'zos" as a source for secluding the Kohain Gadol for seven days before Yom Kippur (comparing it to the seven days of "milu'im," where the kohanim were secluded for seven days before doing the service in the newly built/sanctified Mishkan). However, Rashi does not give the same answer the Talmud does. Besides, there are numerous other reasons suggested as to why the singular feminine "this" is used here. Rabbeinu Bachye is among the commentators who read the verse as "this procedure is the one to be followed before entering the holy," with the word "this" referring to the procedure, not the offerings. Toras Kohanim understands the singular "this" to be excluding any other offerings from allowing the Kohain Gadol to enter the Temple's inner sanctum (even though there may be reason to think otherwise). In short, if this was really what was bothering Rashi, there seem to be more straightforward ways to explain the word "b'zos" than a gematria about how long the first Temple stood. And we would still need to explain why this information is being hinted to here.

Maharai suggests that the "holy" that was entered (16:3) refers to the inner sanctum when it was at its holiest, i.e. when the Ark was there. Since the Ark wasn't there for the second Temple, the Torah is hinting that this only applied during the first Temple, not the second. This approach has many, many problems (some of which are asked by the commentators, e.g. Mizrahi). First of all, the "hint" is inaccurate, as the Ark wasn't there for all 410 years of the first Temple either.

Secondly, it was there for most of the hundreds of years of the Mishkan; why were those years ignored? Thirdly, why is there no hint regarding the 57 years the Mishkan was in Nov and in Givon, when there was no Ark in the Mishkan? Why differentiate between the Temple and the Mishkan, hinting about the years in the Temple when there was an Ark in order to exclude when there wasn't, but not for the Mishkan? Additionally, Toras Kohanim says that the repetition of "to the holy" in 16:3 teaches us that this procedure applies even when there is no Ark (as the inner sanctum is still "holy"); how can Maharai say the word "holy" in 16:3 refers specifically to when the Ark was there? Finally, since this procedure needed to be followed in the second Temple too (or the Kohain Gadol couldn't enter the inner sanctum), why would the Torah imply that this requirement did not apply when there was no Ark?

The most common approach to explain Rashi (see Mizrahi) is that a Kohain Gadol couldn't be compared to Aharon if the same ceremony wasn't done when he became Kohain Gadol as when Aharon did, namely being anointed with the special anointing oil Moshe mixed together when the Mishkan was first built. Since this oil was hidden (with the Ark) towards the end of the first Temple era, none of the Kohanim in the second Temple were anointed with it, and couldn't be called "Aharon." Therefore, when the Torah says that "this is how Aharon should come to the holy," a modifier had to be employed to indicate that only the Kohanim Gedolim of the first Temple could be compared to Aharon, but not those of the second Temple. Although some of the questions on Maharai's approach won't apply to this approach, others still would. It is still awkward that the second Temple is excluded by hinting to the first Temple, when there is no difference (as far as the anointing oil) between the Kohanim Gedolim that served in the Mishkan and those that served in the first Temple. Additionally, anyone who became Kohain Gadol after the anointing oil was hidden would have the same deficiency even if they served in the first Temple (see B'er Ba'sadeh), so it wasn't for the full 410 years that the Kohanim Gedolim could be called "Aharon." The procedure (on Yom Kippur) was the same for all Kohanim Gedolim, so there seems to be no reason to point out here (certainly not more than any other place that Aharon's name is mentioned) that not all Kohanim Gedolim could be put in the same category as Aharon. And, most importantly for our discussion, it seems odd that this is the lesson Rashi would choose to teach us regarding the word "b'zos."

Others present a slight variation to this approach (see Maskil L'Dovid and Tzaidah La'derech), suggesting that since many of the Kohanim Gedolim in the second Temple were wicked, the Torah didn't want to associate Aharon with them, and wouldn't call them "Aharon" since they could not be considered his students. This avoids the issue of not having any anointing oil for the final decades of the first Temple,

and has the advantage of fitting better with Rashi's source (which contrasts the righteousness of the Kohanim Gedolim of the first Temple with the wickedness of many Kohanim Gedolim in the second Temple). Nevertheless, enough of the issues raised above still apply to prevent it from satisfactorily explaining why Rashi chose this Chazal over any of the others.

The gematria Rashi quotes is part of a contrast between the Kohanim Gedolim of the first Temple, who were righteous, and the Kohanim Gedolim of the second Temple, most of whom were not. This difference is evidenced by comparing how few Kohanim Gedolim there were in the first Temple to how many there were in the second Temple; the Kohanim Gedolim during the first Temple lived longer, while most of the Kohanim Gedolim of the second Temple didn't make it through the year (see Yoma 9a).

During the "Avodah" part of our Yom Kippur service, when we describe what was done in the Temple, we mention that the Kohain Gadol made a party if he survived going into the inner sanctum. It would be fair to assume that most, if not all, of the Kohanim Gedolim who didn't make it through the year died on Yom Kippur, as those who were unworthy couldn't handle the extreme holiness of the inner sanctum. (In school we were taught that ropes were attached to the Kohain Gadol so that he could be pulled out if he didn't make it.) It wasn't just the High Priests who were Sadducees-and didn't perform the service the way they were supposed to-that died; if it were, there would be no reason for a non-Sadducee to make a party if he survived, and no one could doubt that the Pharisees were right (as anyone who followed their instructions survived).

The notion that any Kohain Gadol who followed the procedure described in our Parasha could die during the service is problematic. The Torah tells us that entering the inner sanctum without following this procedure will bring death (16:2), implying that if it is followed this won't happen. The Torah repeats this at the end of the description of the procedure (16:13), telling us that if the procedure is followed the Kohain Gadol won't die.

Yet, apparently they sometimes did.

How could any Kohanim Gedolim have died on Yom Kippur when they entered the inner sanctum if they followed the procedure they were supposed to? Well, they died because they weren't really worthy of being Kohanim Gedolim; they often bought the position from the king/governor, and weren't appointed based on their spiritual level. Nevertheless, the Torah's assurance that if the Kohain Gadol followed the proper procedure he wouldn't die should have prevented their death (and may be why the next Kohain Gadol thought he could survive, attributing the death of the previous Kohain Gadol to his not having followed the procedure, perhaps suspecting him of being a closet Sadducee). If this is

what was bothering Rashi, we can easily understand why he chose the Chazal that differentiates between the Kohanim Gedolim of the first and second Temples to explain our verse.

As Toras Kohanim explained, repeating "to the holy" (16:3) teaches us that this procedure must be followed even when there is no Ark. However, even though the Kohain Gadol is still obligated to do the same service as when there was an Ark, since the position became a political one, not (just) a religious one, the assurance that the Kohain Gadol would live (if he followed the procedure) did not apply to the second Temple. How do we know this? Because the Torah says "b'zos;" only the first Temple had this guarantee, not the second one. The Mishkan wasn't referenced because the assurance was valid throughout all the years of the Mishkan; it was only when the Temple was in operation that it didn't always apply. Using the word "b'zos" tells us that it only applied during the first Temple; Kohanim Gedolim could die during the second even if they followed the proper procedure. And if Kohanim Gedolim dying during the second Temple despite having followed the procedure is the issue that bothered Rashi, only this Chazal addressed it. © 2011 Rabbi D. Kramer

#### **CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

## **Covenant & Conversation**

I had been engaged in dialogue for two years with an imam from the Middle East, a gentle and seemingly moderate man. One day, in the middle of our conversation, he turned to me and asked, "Why do you Jews need a land? After all, Judaism is a religion, not a country or a nation."

I decided at that point to discontinue the dialogue. There are 56 Islamic states and more than 100 nations in which Christians form the majority of the population. There is only one Jewish state, 1/25th the size of France, roughly the same size as the Kruger National Park in South Africa. With those who believe that Jews, alone among the nations of the world, are not entitled to their own land, it is hard to hold a conversation.

Yet the question is worth exploring. There is no doubt, as D.J. Clines explains in his book, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, that the central narrative of the Torah is the promise of and journey to the land of Israel. Yet why is this so? Why did the people of the covenant need their own land? Why was Judaism not, on the one hand, a religion that can be practised by individuals wherever they happen to be, or on the other, a religion like Christianity or Islam whose ultimate purpose is to convert the world so that everyone can practice the one true faith?

The best way of approaching an answer is through an important comment of the Ramban (Rabbi Moses ben Nachman Girondi, born Gerona, 1194, died

in Israel, 1270) on this week's parsha. Chapter 18 contains a list of forbidden sexual practices. It ends with this solemn warning:

"Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. The land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you must keep my decrees and my laws... If you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you." (18:24-28)

Nahmanides asks the obvious question. Reward and punishment in the Torah are based on the principle of *midah keneged midah*, measure for measure. The punishment must fit the sin or crime. It makes sense to say that if the Israelites neglected or broke *mitzvot hateluyot ba'arets*, the commands relating to the land of Israel, the punishment would be exile from the land of Israel. So the Torah says in the curses in *Bechukotai*: "All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it" (Lev. 26:35), meaning: this will be the punishment for not observing the laws of *shemittah*, the sabbatical year. *Shemittah* is a command relating to the land. Therefore the punishment for its non-observance is exile from the land.

But sexual offences have nothing to do with the land. They are *mitzvot hateluyot baguf*, commands relating to person, not place. Ramban answers by stating that all the commands are intrinsically related to the land of Israel. It is simply not the same to put on *tefillin* or keep *kashrut* or observe *Shabbat* in the Diaspora as in Israel. In support of his position he quotes the Talmud (*Ketubot 110b*) which says, "Whoever lives outside the land is as if he had no G-d" and the *Sifre* that states, "Living in the land of Israel is of equal importance to all the commandments of the Torah." The Torah is the constitution of a holy people in the holy land.

Ramban explains this mystically but we can understand it non-mystically by reflecting on the opening chapters of the Torah and the story they tell about the human condition and about G-d's disappointment with the only species- us-He created in His image. G-d sought a humanity that would freely choose to do the will of its Creator. Humanity chose otherwise. Adam and Eve sinned.

Cain murdered his brother Abel. Within a short time "the earth was filled with violence" and G-d "regretted that he had made human beings on earth." He brought a flood and began again, this time with the righteous Noah, but again humans disappointed by building a city with a tower on which they sought to reach heaven, and G-d chose another way of bringing humanity to recognise him-this time not by universal rules (though these remained, namely the covenant with all humanity through Noah), but by a living example: Abraham, Sarah and their children.

In Genesis 18 the Torah makes clear what G-d sought from Abraham: that he would teach his children and his household after him "to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just." Homo sapiens is, as both Aristotle and Maimonides said, a social animal, and righteousness and justice are features of a good society. We know from the story of Noah and the ark that a righteous individual can save themselves but not the society in which they live, unless they transform the society in which they live.

Taken collectively, the commands of the Torah are a prescription for the construction of a society with the consciousness of G-d at its centre. G-d asks the Jewish people to become a role model for humanity by the shape and texture of the society they build, a society characterised by justice and the rule of law, welfare and concern for the poor, the marginal, the vulnerable and the weak, a society in which all would have equal dignity under the sovereignty of G-d. Such a society would win the admiration, and eventually the emulation, of others:

"See, I have taught you decrees and laws... so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will be your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people'... What other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?" (Deut. 4:5-8)

A society needs a land, a home, a location in space, where a nation can shape its own destiny in accord with its deepest aspirations and ideals. Jews have been around for a long time, almost four thousand years since Abraham began his journey. During that period they have lived in every country on the face of the earth, under good conditions and bad, freedom and persecution. Yet in all that time there was only one place where they formed a majority and exercised sovereignty, the land of Israel, a tiny country of difficult terrain and all too little rainfall, surrounded by enemies and empires. Only in Israel is the fulfilment of the commands a society-building exercise, shaping the contours of a culture as a whole. Only in Israel can we fulfil the commands in a land, a landscape and a language saturated with Jewish memories and hopes. Only in Israel does the calendar track the rhythms of the Jewish year. In Israel Judaism is part of the public square, not just the private, sequestered space of synagogue, school and home.

Jews need a land because they are a nation charged with bringing the Divine presence down to earth in the shared spaces of our collective life, not least- as the last chapter of Acharei Mot makes clear- by the way we conduct our most intimate relationships, a society in which marriage is sacrosanct and sexual fidelity the norm.

That contains a message for Jews, Christians and Muslims alike. To Christians and Muslims it says: if

you believe in the G-d of Abraham, grant that the children of Abraham have a right to the land that the G-d in whom you believe promised them, and to which He promised that after exile they would return.

To Jews it says: that very right comes hand-in-hand with a duty to live individually and collectively by the standards of justice and compassion, fidelity and generosity, love of neighbour and of stranger, that alone constitute our mission and destiny: a holy people in the holy land. © 2011 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**W**hy were Nadav and Avihu, two of Ahron's (Aaron) sons killed? The Torah states their death came when they brought an eish zarah, a foreign fire into the Temple. (Leviticus 10:1) But what was the nature of this fire?

Some maintain that because the prohibition against drinking is found in the sentences that Follow their death, (Leviticus 10:9) the fire alludes to the possibility that Ahron's sons served in the sanctuary while intoxicated. This may be the reason for the punishment of death.

Others insist that the fire relates to their being "hot" in deciding halakhic matters themselves without consulting Moshe (Moses). Note that the preceding sentences (Leviticus 9:23) stresses the leadership role of Moshe and Ahron.

I am convinced that when many answers are offered, it indicates that none are truly compelling. It can be suggested that we cannot comprehend the reason why Nadav and Avihu's actions were deserving of death. Only G-d can grasp the unfathomable, we cannot.

This may explain why the Torah tells us at the beginning of this week's portion, that the Lord spoke to Moshe immediately after the death of Ahron's two sons. (Leviticus 16:1) The lesson: despite the suffering of sufferings, the horror of an untimely ghastly death, dialogue continues. G-d tells Moshe to speak to Ahron and Ahron does G-d's will. In fact this may be the central point of the Nadav - Avihu story. Although not understanding why his son died, Ahron and the priesthood continue on in a relationship to G-d.

Not coincidentally, soon after the first sentence of our portion, Ahron the high priest is commanded to select two identical goats and, by lots, designate one as an offering to G-d and the other to be pushed over the cliff for Azazel. (Leviticus 16:6-11) It is extraordinary that although these goats are identical in every way, they experience different fates. This to teach Ahron and all of us that sometimes life takes tragic twists and turns that are inexplicable.

When confronted with such inexplicable suffering we ought all remember the words of Esther Wachsman, mother of Nachshon (the young Israeli

soldier murdered by Arab terrorists a number of years ago). She said, "When tragedy befalls us we should not ask 'why?' but rather, 'what shall we do now?'" It is our choice whether to approach our tragedy by only crying 'woe is me' or whether to allow it to elevate us, giving our lives new meaning and direction and bringing us closer to G-d."

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik makes this very point when distinguishing between "fate" and "destiny." Fate casts each of us into a dimension of life we cannot control. Destiny, on the other hand, "is an active existence in which humanity confronts the environment into which she or he was cast...Humanity's mission in this world is to turn fate into destiny, an existence that is passive and influenced to an existence that is active and influential."

A lesson to think about especially these days when Israel is under attack. Like Nadav and Avihu, no one can explain why it's happening. But like Ahron and the priesthood, against all odds, Am Yisrael will continue to connect with G-d and, in the end, prevail.

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#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

In this week's parsha the Torah teaches us that there are two living beings that carry the sins of Israel upon them on Yom Kippur - and through them comes expiation and forgiveness of sin to all of Israel. The first is the High Priest of Israel who is charged with the fulfillment of the ritual service in the Temple and the other is the scapegoat that will be thrust off of the cliff of Azazel carrying with it the sins of Israel.

Much has been written about these two creatures and their roles in the exalted Yom Kippur service. I think that one of the insights that may be gleaned from these differing forms of the ritual of achieving forgiveness for our sins lies in the stark contrast between the creatures.

Though they are both instrumental in fulfilling this role of mediating between G-d and us, the contrast between the High Priest of Israel and a goat is striking. One is the holiest and most exalted of humans, clad in white and devoted solely to purity and the other is a goat that was apparently chosen at random through a "lottery" to be the sacrificial animal, which possesses no human intelligence and spirit. What are we to make of this disparity of mediators between man and G-d?

Perhaps we can understand the role of the High Priest in this spiritual drama but the role of the goat is certainly shrouded in mystery and wonder for us. The entire matter certainly demands thought, analysis and explanation

My insight is that the High Priest brings forgiveness to Israel through living - through a life of holiness and public service. The High Priest blesses the people and he is aware that he bears the responsibility for their behavior and is charged with being the proper role model for his fellow priests and for all of Israel generally.

It is not an easy task to live a holy life of spiritual example and leadership. We often think that sanctification of G-d's name is a task that is beyond our meager talents and abilities. That is not true. The true sanctification of G-d's name, the true struggle for holiness and forgiveness is accomplished in our daily living. It is accomplished in our relationship and treatment of others and in our constant struggle for personal self improvement.

The other method of bringing forgiveness, dying for a cause - is that of thrusting the goat off of the cliff of Azazel. Even though martyrdom has been an unfortunate staple of Jewish existence over the ages, it is certainly not the preferable method of sanctification of G-d's name. And as the Holocaust abundantly proved it is not necessarily a voluntary, thought out, determined personal choice.

Like the goat of Azazel, it is often a dumb and involuntary choice, a random choice. And even though it also brings absolution for one's and others' sins, it is not the true fulfillment of the human part of seeking forgiveness. Apparently the scapegoat in terms of practicality is part of our lives as Jews but we should all at least attempt to emulate the High Priest © 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](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)*

#### **RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY**

### **The Whole Truth**

One of the key elements in relating the story of the Exile and Exodus from Egypt is the concept of *maschil b'gnus um'sayaim b'shvach*. We begin with our shame, the low point and end with our praise, the high point.

Indeed, from two angles we accomplish this. We discuss the fact that, "At first our forefathers worshiped idols, but then the Omnipresent brought us near to divine service, as it is written: 'Joshua said to all the people: so says the Lord G-d of Israel-your fathers have always lived beyond the Euphrates River, Terach the father of Abraham and Nahor; they worshipped other gods.'" We end with the fact that Hashem has

drawn us near to him, and promised us the Land of Israel.

According to others, the complete story begins with the origins of slavery, beginning with Yaakov's sojourn to Egypt until the redemption.

It seems that it is incumbent upon us in telling the story of the Seder night to relate the whole story-not just a high point, or even some trials and tribulations. We have to go back to the roots in relating the story of Yetzias Mitzrayim. Why?

The Chofetz Chaim enjoyed retelling a story of two men who were discussing a posuk in Tehillim, a verse we say each day in the prayer, Ashrei:

"Hashem preserves all who that love Him; and all the wicked will He destroy" (Psalms 145:20).

Unfortunately, each of the two men severed the verse, and then punctuated it according to his own unique way, and thus found it very strange. One turned to his friend and said, "Can you imagine that Tehillim says:

'Hashem preserves all who that love Him; and all the wicked!' Why would he preserve both those who love him and the wicked?"

The other man, who left out the first part of the verse, also was disturbed, saying, That is so strange. "I read a posuk that says, 'All who that love Him; and all the wicked will He destroy.' Why would he destroy both those who love him and the wicked! Is that fair?"

They were both talking about the aforementioned verse. One left out the beginning, the other the end. And to both it was at best meaningless, but at worst it was perverse.

The Alter of Kelm explains that the basis of the foundation of Jewish outlook is derived from the story of the Egyptian exile. It is a long story, it begins with a Yosef and his descending to Egypt, and it involved 210 years of living in Egypt of which 86 entailed forced labor.

It did not begin with the plagues, nor did it begin with the miracles of the Reed Sea. There is a long history and calculation behind everything.

In life, one can't read half a story. The Chofetz Chaim explains the verse in Tehillim, "The judgments of Hashem are truthful, when they are judged in whole-together" (Psalms 19:10). Only when one knows the entire story can he understand the rest of the story.

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**RABBI YAKOV HABER**

## TorahWeb

**T**he Haggada begins with the words: "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and G-d took us out from there. If the Holy One Blessed Be He had not taken out our ancestors from Egypt, we, our children, and our children's children would [still be] enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt." A famous question is raised by many of the commentaries in slightly different ways. Would

not the vicissitudes of history, the rise and fall of nations, and the change of rulers and government models have eventually led to the freedom of the Jewish people much as these led to the freedom of other enslaved peoples? How can we say that the Jews would still be slaves in Egypt? Why was it crucial that Hashem directly take us out, as stressed by this paragraph; would not Pharaoh's releasing us through his own free will, not forced by the makkos, lead to the same result? Here, we present and answer by one of the classic commentaries with some elaboration.

Rav Yaakov Loberbaum of Lisa, famous for his Nesivos HaMishpat, in his commentary Ma'aseh Nissim to the Haggada on this opening paragraph, develops a major theme permeating the entire Haggada. When Hashem took us out of Egypt with great miracles transcending of all of the known rules of nature, he "threw His lot in," so to speak, with the Jewish people. He linked "His image" in the world to the fate of His beloved nation. If the Jews subsequently would be threatened, due to their sins, with severe punishment, or G-d forbid, elimination, Hashem automatically would consider the fact that the downtrodden state or worse, chas v'shalom, of His nation would be interpreted as a lack of Divine power to save His nation. This of course was the basis of Moshe's powerful prayers which saved the Jewish people from destruction after the disastrous sin of the Golden Calf and, later, the Sin of the Spies.

We continue to utilize this theme of prayer throughout the centuries by reciting in Shemone Esrei, Hallel, and Selichos and many other places: " 'asei l'ma'anacha, 'im lo l'ma'aneinu!"-"Act for Your sake, if not for ours!" This theme also serves as the means for the ultimate redemption of the Jewish people as stated by Yechezkel (36:22-23): "Say to the Children of Israel, 'So says Hashem Elokim : not for your sake do I act, O House of Israel, but for [the sake of] My holy name which you desecrated among the nations to which you came. And I shall sanctify My great Name which is desecrated among the nations which you desecrated among them, and the nations will know that I am G-d, the word of Hashem Elokim, when I am sanctified through you before their eyes.'" Even if the merits of the Jewish people are insufficient, G-d will redeem them in order to avoid further desecration of His name.

At first glance, this is a result of G-d having redeemed us from Egypt. In other words, since He chose to form a nation to carry His word to the world, G-d chooses to save us at subsequent points in history in order to uphold this mission. However, explains the Nesivos, G-d could have redeemed us in another way. He could have orchestrated the redemption about in a much more natural way, similar to the Purim salvation, so that his "reputation" would not be at stake since the nations of the world would not necessarily attribute the redemption to G-d's actions. He precisely chose a direct, openly miraculous redemption. Even Pharaoh's consent, under the duress of the plagues, was

rescinded when he and his armies chased after the Jews. Only another miraculous, Divine intervention led to the utter destruction of the Egyptian forces and the deliverance, once again, of the Jewish people. He chose to redeem us precisely in this way so that His image in the world should be linked to ours.

This act of Divine love which assured eternal Jewish survival is one of many themes motivating us to truly feel gratitude toward the One Who created us twice, first as a people and then as members of the Jewish nation (see B'raishis 1:27 and Yeshaya 43:21). Gratitude and recognition of the multi-faceted acts of Divine kindness are major themes of the night of the Seder. As pointed out by the Nesivos, knowledge of the eternal ramifications of the Exodus further motivates us to investigate and analyze how every detail concerning this event was not just for our immediate benefit but for our eternal advantage. The Nesivos calls this: "the absolute greatest of kindnesses with none greater!"

May we merit to absorb all of the deep, eternal messages of the first Exodus and see the fulfillment of the promise of the prophets, "As when you went out of Egypt, I shall perform miracles for you" (Micha 7:15) in the final redemption. © 2011 Rabbi Y. Haber & The TorahWeb Foundation

#### SHLOMO KATZ

## Hama'ayan

*Sponsored by Mr. Moshe Cohen on the yahrzeit of his father R' Chaim ben R' Zvi hakohen A"H*

R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (1784-1869: rabbi of Brody, Galicia) offers an explanation for the fact that today is called "Shabbat Ha'gadol" / "The Great Shabbat." He writes: It is impossible for a ba'al teshuvah to greet the Shechinah unless he has first experienced Shabbat. This is learned from the midrash which states that the reason a brit milah takes place on the eighth day of a boy's life is so that he can first live through a Shabbat. This teaches that experiencing a Shabbat is a catalyst for achieving greatness.

Why then is the Shabbat before Yom Kippur called "Shabbat Teshuvah" while the Shabbat before Pesach is called "Shabbat Ha'gadol"? R' Kluger explains:

Pesach, like the High Holidays, is a time to sanctify and purify oneself. However, while the High Holidays is a time of teshuvah / repentance for past misdeeds, Pesach is a time to be forward-looking, focusing on the sanctity, purity and greatness that one can achieve. Hence, we call this Shabbat, which is a prelude to greatness, "Shabbat Ha'gadol." (Kohelet Yaakov: Shabbat Ha'gadol, drush 1)

The Tikkunei Zohar (Tikkun 21, p. 51a) teaches: "On the night of the fourteenth [of Nissan], we search for chametz by the light of a candle. This light of a candle refers to Torah and mitzvot, as it is written

(Mishlei 6:23), 'For a mitzvah is a candle, and Torah is a light.' The candle is in the heart; the light in the eyes. This is the light of a candle."

R' Avraham Abusch Zehnwirth shlita (Yerushalayim) explains: The Tikkunei Zohar is teaching that just as one must search for chametz in his home and destroy it, so one must search for his yetzer hara and subdue it. This can be accomplished only by studying Torah, which is called "light," and performing mitzvot, which are called "candles." (In comparison to Torah study, which gives off strong "light" like a raging fire, a mitzvah that is performed gives off a relatively weaker "light," like a candle.)

What is the meaning of: "The candle is in the heart; the light in the eyes"? R' Zehnwirth explains: Performing mitzvot awakens one's love of G-d, while Torah study awakens one's fear or awe of G-d. [One who has fear/awe of Hashem does not let his eyes wander toward sinful desires.] Together, the traits of love and fear/awe of Hashem can defeat the yetzer hara. (Shulchan Aruch Ha'Zohar im Peirush Even Yekarah, siman 431)

"Mah nishtanah ha'laila ha'zeh mikol ha'lailot?"

This familiar phrase is commonly understood to mean: "Why (or 'in what way') is this night different from all other nights?" R' Yechiel Michel Epstein z"l (rabbi of Novardok, Russia; died 1907) suggests a different interpretation. He writes:

The expression "Mah nishtanah" is similar to Tehilim (72:6): "Mah gadlu ma'asecha Hashem" / "How great are Your deeds, Hashem!" and to Bemidbar (24:5): "Mah tovu" / "How good are your tents, Yisrael!" These are not questions, but rather exclamations of wonder and awe. "How different and special is this night compared to all other nights!"

In response to the questions of Mah Nishtanah, we say, "Avadim ha'yinu..." / "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt." R' Epstein writes that this answer must be recited with joy and excitement. [Not, "Alas! We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt." Rather, "Hurray! We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt."] Why? Because it was our slavery in Egypt that prepared us to become, and remain, subjugated to Hashem. (Aruch Hashulchan: Orach Chaim 473:21-22)

