

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

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Covenant & Conversation

Judaism is less a philosophical system than a field of tensions -- between universalism and particularism, for example, or exile and redemption, priests and prophets, cyclical and linear time and so on. Rarely is this more in evidence than in the conflicting statements within Judaism about sacrifices, and nowhere more sharply than in the juxtaposition between the sedra of Tzav, which contains a series of commands about sacrifice, and the passage from the book of Jeremiah that is usually (not this year) its haftorah: "When I brought your forefathers out of Egypt and spoke to them, I did not give them commands about burnt offerings and sacrifices, but I gave them this command: 'Obey me, and I will be your G-d and you will be My people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you.'" (Jer. 7:22-23)

Commentators have been puzzled by the glaring contradiction between these words and the obvious fact that G-d did command the Israelites about sacrifices after bringing them out of Egypt. Several solutions have been offered. According to Maimonides, the sacrifices were a means, not an end, to the service of G-d. Radak argues that sacrifices were not the first of G-d's commands after the exodus; instead, civil laws were. Abarbanel goes so far as to say that initially G-d had not intended to give the Israelites a code of sacrifice, and did so only after the sin of the Golden Calf. The sacrifices were an antidote to the Israelites' tendency to rebel against G-d.

The simplest explanation is to note that the Hebrew word *lo* does not invariably mean "not"; sometimes it means "not only" or "not just". According to this, Jeremiah is not saying that G-d did not command sacrifices. He did, but they were not the sole or even most important element of the religious life. The common denominator of the prophetic critique of sacrifices is not opposition to them as such, but rather an insistence that acts directed to G-d must never dull our sense of duty to mankind. Micah gave this idea one of its most famous expressions: "With what shall I come before the Lord / And bow down before the exalted G-d?... / Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, / With ten thousand rivers of oil?... / He has shown you, O man, what is good. / What does the Lord

require of you? / To act justly and to love mercy, / And to walk humbly with your G-d." (Micah 6:6-8)

Yet the question remains. 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 G-d 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*.

Albo's theory took as its starting point, not sacrifices but two other intriguing questions. The first: Why, after the flood, did G-d 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 G-d, 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). G-d'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 G-d?

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 G-d 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 G-d (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 G-d, namely my brother Abel. Cain killed Abel not out of envy or animosity but as a human sacrifice.

That is why G-d 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, G-d

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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 G-d's creation but also G-d'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 G-d 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 G-d, has G-d 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. G-d 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 G-d, has G-d made man"). It is not that G-d 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 G-d never chooses to change human nature, see Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed, Book III, ch. 32). 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 Ren 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." (*Violence and the Sacred*, 8).

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." (*Ibid.*, 15)

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 G-d'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 need 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." (The Warrior's Honour, 188-190)

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) © 2013 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Behold, I send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. And he [Elijah] will turn [back to G-d] the hearts of the parents through their children and the hearts of the children through their parents." (Malachi 3:23-24)

The Shabbat before Passover is called Shabbat Hagadol (the Great Sabbath), a phrase deriving from the last verse of the prophetic portion read on that day which declares that G-d will send Elijah the Prophet on the "great day" of the Lord right before the coming of the redemption.

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

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

The usual explanation for this is that vegetation emerges in the springtime; Passover is biblically called the Spring Festival, and so we dip a vegetable in salt water, reminiscent of spring renewal emerging from the tears of Egyptian enslavement. Rabbi Shlomo Kluger, in his late 19th-century Haggada, suggests another interpretation. The Hebrew word "karpas" appears in the opening verses of the Book of Esther, in the description of the "hangings" that were found in the

gardens of King Ahasuerus's palace, where the great feast for all his kingdom was hosted; karpas white cotton joined with turquoise wool. Rashi connects the term "karpas" in the sense of material with the ketonet passim, the striped tunic that Jacob gave to his beloved son, Joseph.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

One of the main focuses of the Pesach Seder is the transmission of our traditions to the next generation. As such, one of the prominent parts of the Haggada (i.e. the actual words we read) is the question and answer section featuring the four sons. They are usually described as the wise son, the wicked son, the simpleton and the son not yet able to even ask about what he sees around him at the Seder.

In comparing these sons, the Haggada quotes four places in the Torah that refer to the father giving the traditions over to his son, and assigns each to a particular son. Three are questions asked by the son, along with the answer to be given to that son, while the fourth is just an "answer," indicating that this son did not ask on his own. One would expect the answer the Haggada provides each son to correspond to the answer the Torah gives to the question assigned to that particular son. However, this is not the case.

The "Chacham," or wise son, asks, "What are these testimonies, statutes and laws that Hashem, our G-d, has commanded you?" (D'varim 6:20) The Torah then provides a lengthy answer (6:21-25), none of which is part of our response to this son, or any of the other sons. The first verse of the response (6:21) is similar to our first words when we respond to the four questions ("we were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt, and G-d took us out"), but it is not exactly the same, and it is said before we even mention the four sons. The only (other) verse from this response mentioned anywhere in the Haggada (6:23) isn't said until long after we have finished discussing the four sons (before the first part of Hallel, when we mention that each and every generation must consider it as if they themselves came out of Egypt). Additionally, this question is presented as if it is being asked about the Seder when it is really about keeping the Torah in general, not specifically the laws of Pesach.

The "Rasha," or wicked son, asks, "What is this service to you?" (Sh'mos 12:26) While this was asked regarding the Passover offering, it was not referring to

anything we do at the Seder itself, but about setting aside the animal to be brought as the offering, which is done a few days before the Seder. Yet, the Haggada presents this question as if it being asked about the Seder, and answers by telling the Rasha that he wouldn't have been redeemed. The words used in the Haggada are not from the Torah's response to this question, but to the question asked by one of the other sons (see below). The response to this question is pretty straightforward (12:27), without any hint of putting down the one who asks it for the way it was asked.

The "Tam," or simple son, asks, "What's this?" (Sh'mos 13:14). The Haggada gives the same answer the Torah does, except that the Torah's answer is 36 words, and we only say the first seven. However, this can be explained by the context, as the question in the Torah is not about the Seder, but about giving the firstborn animal to G-d (or redeeming a firstborn son), which the additional words refer to directly. Nonetheless, once again the Haggada is presenting a question that was not about the Seder as if it was. To complicate matters even further, when the "four sons" are described in the Yerushalmi (P'sachim 10:4), the answer given to the Tam is not the one the Torah gave, but what the Haggada gives to the Chacham! In the Yerushalmi, the Chacham is given the answer the Haggada gives to the Tam. How can the answer appropriate for the Chacham being given to the Tam (and vice versa)?

The "Aino Yodaya Lishol," or son unable to ask, is based on the Torah telling us to teach our son without quoting any question being asked (Sh'mos 13:8). The "answer" in the Haggada is the same as in the Torah, although the Torah (13:6-7) refers to eating Matzah for seven days and not anything leavened, not the Seder itself. Additionally, this is the same verse used to answer the Rasha, yet there is no indication that this son did anything to warrant being put down -- nor does the Haggada indicate that it is meant as a put down. If no put down is inherent in the verse, why is it used as such for the Rasha? If there is, why is it (also) used for the Aino Yodaya Lishol? And why is the same verse used for two sons?

Finally, the Haggada, in relaying the questions of the sons, asks what each "says." In the Torah, only the Rasha "says" his question (indicating that it is not a question, but a statement as to why he doesn't involve himself in performing the Mitzvah). The Chacham and the Tam ask their question, as would be expected. Why does the Haggada refer to these questions as having been "said" rather than asked? How can the Haggada answer the same questions differently than the Torah does?

The four types of sons referred to in the Torah (and by extension, in the Haggada) are not just different stages of development. We wouldn't consider the Chacham and Rasha to be different because of their ages, but because of the choices they've made.

Similarly, the Tam shouldn't be looked at as being younger, or having spent less time learning Torah, than the Chacham; they just have different approaches towards their spiritual growth. The Torah refers to Yaakov as an "Ish Tam" (B'raishis 25:27), and we wouldn't think of him as anything but righteous. The Chacham might favor "d'rasha" while the Tam might prefer a simpler, more straightforward approach, but both are righteous and completely committed to performing the Mitzvos. We can look at the Rasha and the Aino Yodaya Lishol (AYL) in a similar way. Both don't want to follow the Torah, but the Rasha challenges anyone who does, while the AYL just doesn't get involved. It's not that he doesn't know how to ask, but that he doesn't know that he should be asking. He won't argue with those who keep the Torah, avoiding confrontation; any conversation on the topic must be initiated by the other party. Ben Ish Chai (Otzros Chayim) compares the Chacham to Yitzchak, the Rasha to Eisav, the Tam to Yaakov and the AYL to Yishmael. Malbim also says that Chacham and Tam refer to two kinds of righteousness, while Rasha and AYL represent two kinds of wickedness. These four types of personalities manifest themselves throughout the year, not just at the Seder. The Haggada prefaces the discussion of the four sons by blessing G-d for giving the Torah to all of Israel, no matter which personality type they are, and for preparing us to deal with each of them.

At every step of the way, the Rasha will challenge the Mitzvah being taught to him. The Torah uses, as an example, preparing for the Passover offering, but the question would be asked the rest of the year as well. And we are supposed to give a full and direct answer, as the Torah describes in its answer to the Rasha. The Chacham will inquire about the details of every Mitzvah and the rationale behind them, and the Torah tells us to fully explain it to him. The Tam is also given a full explanation for the Mitzvah he is asking about, despite the brevity of his question. The AYL, who doesn't ask any questions, is told about the Mitzvah. However, whereas the conversation(s) with the other sons take place all year long, the Torah specifies that when the father is instigating the conversation, it is by the Seder, "on that day" (13:8), when we can point to something tangible during our explanation.

After the Haggada tells us about the Biblical requirement to talk about the Exodus at the Seder, it informs us that this requirement includes teaching it to all of our children, no matter what their personality type is, as the Torah alludes to four distinct type of sons. Not that the Torah refers to these types specifically regarding the Seder, but that the Torah discusses these four types regarding the manner in which, all year long, they ask (or don't ask) their questions. The Haggada is not saying "this is what each son says," but that "this is what the Torah says when referring to each type." This is why the Haggada doesn't say it is what the Chacham

or Tam "asks;" telling us only what the Torah "says" about each type.

The Chacham is told all the laws of Passover, up to and including the prohibition against eating anything after eating the Passover offering (represented by our "afikoman"). It is precisely because the Chacham's question is not limited to the Seder that the Haggada says "we must detail all the laws of Passover;" if the question was specifically about the Seder, these words would be superfluous. The Tam, who is also righteous, is taught all the laws of Passover as well; he is virtually interchangeable with the Chacham, as evidenced by the Yerushalmi. The Haggada quotes the part of the Torah's response to the Tam's question that is applicable to the Seder, and we add more specifics about the Seder just as the Torah answers more specifically about the firstborn (which was the topic under discussion there).

The Rasha, despite his antagonistic question, is given a full explanation all year. At the Seder, though, when the story of the Exodus is retold, we make sure that he understands that not every member of the Children of Israel left Egypt, and he would not have been redeemed. Although the verse quoted in the Haggada is from the conversation with the AYL, since both are wicked, it applies to the Rasha as well, and is used for both. Nevertheless, since the AYL is not as hostile as the Rasha, we don't put him down explicitly.

This can also explain another issue, one that is discussed by many commentators; why anyone would think that the obligation to tell our children about the Exodus begins on Rosh Chodesh (Nisan) if the Exodus itself didn't happen until the fifteenth. Even though conversations with the other three sons occur throughout the year (when they ask questions about other aspects of Torah observance), and preparation for and fulfillment of Passover obligations (such as learning its laws and designating an animal for the Passover offering) are well underway ("in this month," see Sh'mos 13:5), so the other sons have likely already started asking their questions, the obligation to start a conversation with the AYL does not begin on Rosh Chodesh. Rather, "and you shall tell your son," i.e. the AYL, "on that day" (13:8). On which day? When you can say "because of this" and can point to the Matzah and Maror on your Seder Table. © 2013 Rabbi D. Kramer

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Our parsha informs us that the priests' first task of the day was to remove the ashes from the offering sacrificed the previous day. (Leviticus 6:3) Is there any significance to this being the priests' first order of business with which to start the day?

Samson Raphael Hirsch suggests that this mandate serves as a constant reminder that service of the new day is connected to the service of the previous

day. After all, it was the ashes from the remains of yesterday's sacrifice that had to be removed. In one word: even as we move forward in time and deal with new situations and conditions it is crucial to remember that all that is being done is anchored in a past steeped with religious significance and commitment.

Another theme comes to mind. Just as a small portion of every food grown in Israel must be given to the priest (terumah), so is the priest responsible to remove the last remains of the sacrificial service (terumat ha-deshen). Thus, the entire eating and sacrificial experience is sanctified through a beginning or ending ritual. Terumah elevates the food as we give its first portion to the priest; terumat ha-deshen elevates the sacrifice as the kohen maintains contact even with the remains of the sacrificial parts. Not coincidentally, the portion given to the priest and the ashes removed by the priest are given similar names-terumah and terumat ha-deshen-as the word terumah comes from the word ruam, to lift.

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

A story reflects this point. A few years ago a husband and wife appeared before Rabbi Gifter, Rosh Yeshiva of Tels, asking him to rule on a family dispute. The husband, a member of Rabbi Gifter's kollel (an all day Torah learning program) felt that as one who studied Torah it was beneath his dignity to take out the garbage. His wife felt otherwise. Rabbi Gifter concluded that while the husband should in fact help his wife he had not religio-legal obligation to remove the refuse.

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

And that may be the deepest message of terumat ha-deshen. © 2013 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 DAVID LEVIN

Drasha

Parashat Tzav contains the final instructions for the different kinds of korbanos, sacrifices, that were to be part of the responsibilities of the Kohanim. Included in this parasha were also the instructions to Moshe for the korbanos that were to be brought for the Milu'im, the inauguration of the Kohanim into their service of Hashem. The Torah discusses the placing of

the blood from the sacrifice onto the Kohanim on different parts of the Kohanim's bodies. In the end we have the last sacrifice that was brought by Moshe before he turned over that responsibility to his brother Aharon and his children. This is the first of Moshe's daily tasks that he now passed on to someone else. It is worthwhile for us to examine another similar incident, the final task of turning over the leadership of the people to Yehoshua.

As we recall, Moshe was reluctant to take on the leadership of B'nei Yisrael and speak before Par'oh. He questioned Hashem many times in the beginning of Sh'mos, knowing that the task of speaking to Par'oh would only highlight his speech impediment. He did not feel that anyone would listen to him, neither the B'nei Yisrael nor Par'oh. He was not unwilling to fulfill the command of Hashem, but he was concerned that he would not be successful. In the end he did take the leadership of the people and continued to lead them for forty years. When it was time to pass on that leadership to Yehoshua, we find that Moshe was reluctant to give up that responsibility, even at Hashem's wishes.

The medrash tells us of an interesting event near the end of Moshe's life. Moshe came before Hashem to plead with Him for the right to enter the Land of Israel. Moshe had been disqualified from this right when he did not glorify Hashem's name when he struck the rock instead of speaking to it. It is not clear exactly what was Moshe's sin to Hashem (see Rashi, ibn Ezra, and the Ramban). Moshe was punished by not being permitted to enter the Land of Israel. In Parashat V'Eschanan (Devorim 3:25) we find that Moshe pleaded with Hashem to change this decree, but with no success. The medrash gives us a more detailed description of what took place.

Moshe approached Hashem with a long list of reasons to change the decree and with each answer Hashem countered his argument. Finally Hashem said to Moshe, "and did I punish you for killing the Egyptian?" Hashem was referring to the Egyptian taskmaster who had been beating the Jewish slave. Moshe had been forced to flee from before Par'oh in fear for his life. When Moshe heard this question from Hashem he remained silent. Yet another medrash tells us what took place just before.

Hashem commanded Moshe to turn over the responsibility of leadership to Yehoshua who was to lead the Jews into the Land of Israel. Hashem told Moshe that he was to die outside of the land and that only Yehoshua would lead the people. Moshe tried to reason with Hashem saying that he could step down from leadership and simply accompany Yehoshua and the B'nei Yisrael into the land. Hashem then called Yehoshua into the Tent of Meeting and excluded Moshe. When Yehoshua exited the tent, Moshe ran to him to find out what Hashem said. Yehoshua answered, "and did I ask you each time you exited?"

Moshe understood then that he could not be in the background as Yehoshua led the people.

Moshe was greatly saddened by this conclusion of his days. As difficult as it was to lead the Jews through the desert, it was more difficult to give up that leadership. This reluctance was not due to Moshe's love of leadership. There are many people who do not like to give up power. But this was not Moshe's problem. Moshe relished his close relationship with Hashem. Moshe also was distraught because he would not get to complete the task of leading the Jews from Mitzrayim into Eretz Yisrael. This final task would fall into the hands of Yehoshua.

We see here that Moshe greatly valued the special bond that he had with Hashem. Giving up any part of that bond was difficult for him. Yet we see in this week's parasha that Moshe does not seem to be upset or troubled when giving away the priestly responsibilities to Aharon and the Kohanim. Is Moshe not bothered by losing his spiritual bond with Hashem? What exactly is Moshe losing?

Up until the sacrifices of the Milu'im, Moshe had control of the Priesthood and the Kingship. Aharon was always to become the Kohen Gadol, but until which time he was anointed and sanctified, the sacrifices were brought by Moshe. Moshe therefore had two bonds with Hashem, one as the Spiritual leader of the people and the other as their King. The King at that time was the halachic teacher of the people. At this time Moshe would have to relinquish the Spiritual leadership to Aharon. Yet there appears to be no indication that Moshe was reluctant to do this.

But is that accurate? There is a small hint to Moshe's reluctance to diminish his closeness to Hashem in the trop or the note used to sing the Torah reading. The trop that is used here at the slaughtering of the last of the sacrifices is a shalsheles, a zigzag line that occurs only four times in the Torah. Each time that this note is used we find that the person involved is faced with a difficult decision which is positively resolved in the end. Here we see the same thing occurring with Moshe. He too is faced with a difficult decision that he resolves in a positive way. He gives up the Priesthood aspect of his responsibilities and allows them to pass to his brother Aharon.

But there is one other aspect about the shalsheles. This note is always followed in the Torah by a p'sik, a line that separates this word from the next. When this note is vocalized it creates a small stop between the previous word and the next. In its relationship with the shalsheles, then, it indicates that the making of this decision ends the person's previous life and expectations and begins for him a new life. This is certainly true here for Moshe who will no longer serve Hashem in this capacity. Since Moshe is facing the same diminishing of his relationship with Hashem that we see in Devorim, where are the midrashim that

indicate this? And why is this conflict only hinted at by the trop?

For an answer we must go back to Moshe's original encounter with Hashem. We saw that Moshe was concerned about speaking to Par'oh because of his speech impediment. Hashem told him that he would have Aharon speak for him before Par'oh. Moshe was concerned that Aharon would feel slighted that his younger brother would be the leader, yet Hashem told him that Aharon was happily coming to greet him. Moshe understood that his brother was happy for him in his special role with Hashem. Now when Aharon would also rise to lead the people, Moshe felt this same brotherly love towards him. He was more than willing to share his special relationship with Hashem if he could share it with his brother.

It is always difficult to step down from a leadership position when there is so much more to do. But there is never a time when all the jobs are completed. Our responsibility is not to complete every task but to lay the foundation for others to build on. May we never lose sight of our task and may we assist the next generation by our example to further the task in our service of Hashem. © 2013 Rabbi D. Levin

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Shades of White

“Moshe took them from their palms and offered them on the altar in addition to the olah. They are inaugural offerings, as a pleasing fragrance, a fire-offering to Hashem.”

Rashi: "Moshe served all seven days of the Mishkan's inauguration in white vestments."

Maharal: "Rav Eliyahu Mizrahi ponders Rashi's timing in telling us about Moshe's role. This is not the first verse that puts Moshe at the center of the avodah during the inaugural week. [See above, lines 15-16] Why did Rashi wait till this point to tell us that Moshe performed as a kohein during this period? We might also puzzle over Rashi's description of Moshe's wardrobe. Rashi is committed to addressing issues of basic pshat. Why did he feel it was necessary to throw in the detail about Moshe wearing white garments?"

Although earlier pesukim described Moshe's role in the early stages of the days of miluim, his performance does not support the conclusion that he served as a kohein. Having been instructed by Hashem, Moshe was the only person who fully understood the details of the avodah. Of necessity, he had to demonstrate to Aharon and his sons how to perform various parts of it. We could think that Moshe served not so much as a kohein, but as a master teacher substituting for a kohein at a time that no one else was available.

This theory falls apart when we arrive at our pasuk. In commenting on a similar avodah, Rashi, (Vayikra 7:30) citing gemara Menachos, tells us that

three different kohanim orchestrate the tasks between slaughter and placing of the meat on the altar. Although a single kohein could conceivably do all of them himself, the King is honored through the service of a greater number of attendants. Why, then, during the miluim week, did Moshe perform all the tasks alone? Even as a temporary instructor, he could have guided another two kohanim to work alongside him. Our pasuk points, therefore, to a different role for Moshe. He was not a stop-gap instructor, demonstrating technique to a class of eager new kohanim. We can only conclude that during this week, Moshe was by design the only one qualified to do the avodah. That made him not a teacher, but a kohein -- a kohein designated as the sole officiant in this avodah.

But what kind of kohein would that make him? Kohanim can usually be differentiated from each other by their vestments. Ordinary kohanim wore white garments. The kohein gadol wore an additional four that are called golden, because they contained some gold components. On Yom Kippur, some of the avodos called for the kohein gadol to wear only white garments, one of which was different than those of the ordinary kohein. Rashi's interest in what Moshe wore was not incidental. He was trying to more accurately define the nature of Moshe's kehunah during the inaugural week.

Rashi opts for white begadim, similar to those of the kohein gadol on Yom Kippur, pointing to his lofty stature on the one day that he is allowed to enter the Kodosh Kodashim. Now, we know that the ordinary kohein also wore white begadim. How can white begadim serve both the special (the kohein gadol) and the ordinary (the common kohein)?

Context determines how the same object can symbolize different things. Watching multiple kohanim perform the daily avodah, we would be struck by the uniformity of their dress. The plain white garments pointed to the commonality, the shared sameness of what they were all doing. In general, elements that are common to a system are more basic; the avodah-in-white of the everyday kohein shows the basic importance of their tasks to our national purpose.

The white of the kohein gadol's garments on Yom Kippur makes a different statement. It underscores his specialness, not his sameness. This is conveyed only in conjunction with the laws that governed those Yom Kippur garments. They were indeed special. No other kohein could use them, not even another kohein gadol on a future Yom Kippur. In fact, the kohein gadol himself could not use last year's set on a future Yom Kippur! The begadim spoke of his unique role, standing before Hashem as their representative at that moment.

Moshe's begadim testified to his having attained the level of a pure, unadulterated, unencumbered intellectual force. His sechel had become purified enough to be able to receive sechel and chochmah directly from Hashem. The gemara (Taanis 11b) teaches that Moshe's cloak had no hem.

This means that it lacked anything curved, crooked, doubled over. Moshe's sechel was straight, pure, simple. Similarly, it was white because to the eye, white has no admixture of any hue or tint. Again, the symbol is simplicity -- in this case appropriate to Moshe's unique accomplishment as a sechel pashut. His garments therefore pointed to how he was different than others (similar to their purpose for the kohein gadol), not to how similar he was (like the vestments of the ordinary kohein).

We could add another element that seems to be different, but really amounts to the same thought. A hem is the finishing touch on a garment. Moshe's lacked a hem, just as he lacked the finishing touch of a human being. We are differentiated from the animals in our capacity for complex speech. The gift of speech is the final stamp upon the human form that makes its recipient truly human.

The gemara (Nidah 30b) tells us that a person studies all of Torah in utero. When he is ready to emerge from the womb, an angel strikes him on the mouth, and he forgets what he learned. Why the mouth? Why does he need to be struck?

Chazal call applying the final touches to a utensil makeh bepatish, or smoothing out the last imperfections with the blow of a hammer. The angel does the same to the emerging fetus. The final blow, the finishing touch that fashions him into a full human being, is the power of speech. It is a wonderful gift, but it also points to human limitation. Speech is a window to the intellect. It projects inner thoughts to the external world. It transforms pure intellect into something physical. This is perfectly consistent with the role of a human being on his journey through the world, a physical body containing a spiritual sole.

Moshe, as we know, was deficient in his speaking ability. This seeming imperfection, we realize in hindsight, was really a sign of his specialness. His inner spirit, his intellect, was not limited by and mired in the physical. He functioned as a sechel hapashut.

His garment lacked the finishing touch of the hem, just as he lacked the ordinary finishing touch of ordinary human speech. In his case, this displayed his lofty specialness. (Based on Gur Aryeh, Vayikra 8:28 and 7:4; Gevuros Hashem chap. 28) © 2013 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein and torah.org

