

Overview of Sefer VaYikra

At the end of Vayikra, in Parshas Bechulosai, a covenant is made with the Jewish people over Brachos and Kelalos. There is a case to say that not just the Brachos and Kelalos, but the whole of VaYikra reflects the establishment of this covenant. Sefer Bereishis is the book of creation – the roots of the nation, ending with the Avos. Sefer Shemos is the book of the birth of the nation. Vayikra is the consolidation of that birth into an ongoing covenant, by completing and affirming the Sinai experience¹. Finally, in our Parsha, the Torah makes explicit what has been the theme throughout – a Bris, with its blessings and curses. This is why, when Shmittah is given in this book², it is stressed that it was given at Har Sinai, and why this is followed by our Parsha, where the Bris is made explicit³.

VaYikra talks primarily about Korbanos, although there is a large section about purity and impurity, in particular the *metzora*. It also makes sense that the Yom Kippur Avoda is in this sefer, for this took place in the Beis Hamikdash and involved several korbanos. Yet there are many other Mitzvos here – all those dealing with sexual immorality; interpersonal Mitzvos such as loving and rebuking your neighbor, not hating nor taking revenge; so too Shemittah and Yovel and Kiddush and Chillul HaSh-m all appear in Sefer VaYikra. The place of all of these in this Sefer is not clear.

The Ramban⁴ states that, now that the Mishkan is built, **ספר ויקרא** gives us the means to keep it (and later the Beis HaMikdash) and prevent it from being destroyed⁵. Should we mess up, we are able to gain atonement through the Korbanos⁶. But you don't have to sin to bring a Korban. A korban served as a vehicle for the most righteous to connect to the highest levels of G-d's unity possible⁷. This is why the Maharal says that Sefer Vayikra is the idea of וְהִנּוּרָא, of our awe and deepest appreciation through bringing back to Him the best of what we have, and thereby

¹ ממעמקים, ריש במדבר: ספר בראשית נקרא בפי הרמב"ן (בהקדמתו לספר שמות), ספר היצירה, ובו כלולים סיפורי האבות – השרשים שמהם התפתחה האומה הישראלית, ספר שמות מתאר את תהליך יציאת מצרים שתוכו – התהוות האומה הישראלית, שלב המקביל לשלב לידת העובר. עוד כלול בספר שמות, מעמד קבלת התורה – שלב הגדול של האומה הישראלית. ספר ויקרא משלים את הצוויים שצטוו בהר סיני ובו מבואר ענין ברית סיני – בחינת ברית נישואין. וגו'.

² ממעמקים, שם: בהארות: דבר זה מתבטא במיוחד בסיום ספר ויקרא ששם מובא הציווי על השמיטה שנאמרה בה

³ ממעמקים, שם: מצטט לרמב"ן, ויקרא כה א

⁴ הקדמתו לספר ויקרא

⁵ כפי כאשר יה ספר אחד בענין הגלות והגאולה ממנו, והשלימו בענין אהל מועד וכבוד ד' אשר מלא את המשכן, צוהו בקרבנות ושמירת המשכו שיהיה הקרבנות כפרה להן ולא יגרמו העוונות לסלוק השכינה

⁶ רמב"ן, הקדמה לספר ויקרא

⁷ רבינו בחיי, דברים א': ואחריו ספר ויקרא שהוא ספור הקרבנות, וידוע שעיקר היחוד הם הקרבנות שהם קירוב הכתות זה בזה עד הסבה הראשונה יתעלה, כי הצדיק על ידי הקרבן מיחד לאותו המחשך יתעלה.

realizing at a much deeper level that G-d is the creator and sustainer of all, and that ultimately there is nothing besides Him⁸.

Shmittah and Yovel really teach the same lesson – the land is G-d's, all people, including slaves belong only to G-d.

In this context, the laws between man and his fellow-man, have to be understood in a new light. We do not love our fellow man because we connect directly to him as another human being. Rather, since we are both connected to G-d, I can recognize that he, like me, has a core of holiness. Both of us ultimately derive from the same source. Seen in this light, my neighbor is really not as separate a human being as it first seems. The source of my relating to my fellowman is holiness, not universal brotherhood. I cannot verbally abuse or embarrass this G-d-like being. I must judge his financial disputes. And I must certainly not take financial advantage of him. The laws of love and rebuke, etc. belong squarely in the middle of the lessons of the Korban.

And so, Sefer VaYikra teaches us that the purpose of all of the Torah, both the laws between man and G-d as well as the laws between man and man, is holiness. Two levels of holiness can be discerned in this book.

Level one holiness is purity (טהרה), or the kedusha of prishus, of separating ourselves from that which will make us impure and knowing how to get on track when we mess up. These are laws of metzora, of zav, zivah, yoledes and nidah⁹ as well as all of the laws of forbidden foods and sexual relations. Level two is the level of positive Kedusha. After the Torah has talked about all of these things (up to and including Parshas Acharei Mos), the Torah then declares קְדוּשִׁים תְּהִיוּ – be holy. This is a transitional Mitzvah between the two levels of holiness. Rashi learns that *Kedoshim Teheyu* is essentially negative: separate yourself from the forbidden sexual relationships and other things. The Ramban already extends this to the area of Reshus – to be holy (by not over-indulging) even in the things permitted to us. Reishis Chochma¹⁰ talks of yet a higher level – positive Kedusha – the holiness born of doing holy acts.

In the parsha thereafter, the Torah gives us the Mitzvah of קִידּוּשׁ ד', a mitzvah that covers and informs all other mitzvot and certainly a continuation of the positive Kedusha idea.

In fact, all of Sefer VaYikra is permeated with this kind of holiness. Take the Korbanos. By showing that the best of what he has really belongs to HaSh-m, the person would thereby be educating himself that he has to serve HaSh-m with all that he has¹¹. All he has means a lot more than just his possessions. The very possibility of atoning (through a Korban) for one's sin, shows that a person's inner essence remains pure, and it was only some happenstance superficial outburst which led to his

⁸ מהר"ל, שם: והספר השלישי נגד הנורא שהוא יתברך אחד בעולמו לכך ממנו היראה כי הוא אחד ומי מוחה בידו אשר הוא עושה והכל אפס זולתו, ולפיכך מקריבין אליו הקרבנות שהוא הוראה שהוא יתברך אחד כמו שהתבאר, וזהו ספר ויקרא.

⁹ ולכן נמצאים בספר הזה וכתב הרמב"ן שהן חייבים כולם בקרבן ולכן נמצים בספר ויקרא

¹⁰ שער הקדושה פ"א

¹¹ אבל החינוך צה כתב טעם אחר: כי מזה השורש צונו הקל להקריב לעולם מהדברים שלב ב"א חומד מהם כמו הבשר והיין והפת כדי שיתעורר הלב יותר עם העסק בהן. ולעני חייב להביא ממעט קמחו אשר עיניו ולבו עליו כל היום.

sin¹². And so, the Korban comes to reconnect a person with all of his potential and direct every facet of his being towards serving His maker.

Hence a Korban was much more than just restoring purity, a withdrawal from evil. It was, rather, an active engagement of G-d's world¹³ by seeing that there was another whole world, that of the human being.

Hence ויקרא begins with just this word – ויקרא - and G-d lovingly¹⁴ called to Moshe as He once had done, “משה, משה”¹⁵ – Moshe, you who I am calling now, you are really the deeper Moshe – with all of your potential¹⁶.

Sefer VaYikra ends with blessings, curses and a general insight in to the purpose of the world. The book is indeed, a whole world by itself.

¹² מהר"ל, גבורות השם, פ"ח: והחטא שמקבלים אין זה רק מקרה, ודבר שהוא רק מקרה בלבד אשפר הסתלקות. ולפיכך אין ראוי להעביר ישראל בשביל החטא, כיון שבעצם הם טהורים ואין החטא שלהם בעצם.

¹³ בשעורי דעת ח"ב, קרנות: שם מביא את המסילת ישרים שמבדיל בין טהור וקדוש: והנה האיש המתקדש בקדושת בוראו אפילו מעשיו הגשמיים חוזרים להיות עניני קדושה ממש. וסימנך אכילת קדשים שהיא עצמה מצות עשה ואמרו ז"ל: כהנים אוכלים ובעלים מתכפרים, ותראה עתה ההפרש שבין הטהור לקדוש, הטהור מעשיו החמריים אינם לו אלא הכרחיים, והוא עצמו אינו מכתכוון בהם אלא על צד ההכרח, ונמצא ענין יוצאים מסוג הרע שבחומרות ונשאים טהורים. ... והנה האיש כזה הוא עצמו נחשב כמשכן וכו' כמקדש וכמזבח וכמקדש ז"ל: ויעל מאליו אלו'קים. האבות הן הן המרכבה וכן אמרו: הצדיקים הן המרכבה. כי השכינה שורה עליהם כמו שהיתה שורה עליהם במקדש ומעתה המאכל שהם אוכלים הוא כקרבן העולה על האישים ... והוא הענין שאמרו עליהם ז"ל: כל המביא דורון לתלמידו יחכם כאלו הקריב בכורים. וכן אמרו: ימלא גרונו של תלמידו יחכים יין במקום נסכים. וגו'

¹⁴ רש"י, א א: קדמה קריאה – לשון חבה

¹⁵ גור אריה, א א: פירוש מה שקראו, ולא דבר עמו פתאום, היינו דלכל הדברות היתה קריאה קודם שדבר עמו, והיה קורא לו, "משה משה" (שמות ג ד) ודיבר עמו

¹⁶ שפת אמת (שמיני, תרמ"ז): קריאה הוא דבקות בשורש, כמו שכתוב ויקרא אל משה, לשון חיבה. וכן בכל מעשה בראשית, כמש"כ ויקרא וכו', לאור יום וכו', היינו דבקות כל דבר בשורשו. ובענין זה קרא האשם שמות וכו'

ממעמקים (עמ' 15): משה, משה – קריאה של חיבה המורה על התאחדות האדם עם שורשו ומהותו. וכאמור בכח אותה קריאה לעורר את האני של כל אדם מהשינה העמוקה ביותר - אשר זהו תכנו העמוק של ענין הקרבנות

ויקרא

Korbanos

Korbanos occupy a very central place in Judaism and will have an elevated place even in the Messianic era. Even the Kabbalists cannot fully comprehend their profundity. Yet, had the Torah not legislated such a thing, we would never have imagined that the idea of slaughter, with its blood and staining, would bring us closer to G-d. For this reason, the Torah uses only the holiest Name of G-d, the Shem HaSh-m, in reference to the *Korbanos*, that we shouldn't think that this really relates to some idolatrous practice.

Korbanos are no concession to our primitive instincts. Many laws make it clear that the whole focus of the *Korbanos* was the very opposite of cruelty and violence. Clearly, HaSh-m, who lacks for nothing, does not need our *Korbanos*. So the starting point of understanding *Korbanos* is to realize that they are for our benefit, a chance for us to connect to him.

The *Beis HaMikdash* was an awesome structure. As one approached the *Beis HaMikdash*, one saw Leviim and Cohanim all over, guarding it, and one was struck by the sheer majesty of the building. For the average Jew, this sight came at the end of extensive preparations. He had to identify his *korban*, guard it carefully, take care of his affairs and walk for days and maybe weeks to Jerusalem. There he would live off his maser sheni, and join hundreds of thousands of other Jews in going up to the *Beis HaMikdash*. He was now ready to connect to G-d at a much deeper level than he had achieved until then.

The opportunity to connect applied to everyone. Every Jew participated in its building. This shows that the Neshama of each Jew belongs to the bigger whole of the macro-Neshama of Klal Yisroel. Even non-Jews were invited to bring *Korbanos* to the *Beis Hamikdash*. Hence, the idea of the *Korbanos* was to show that everyone counts, that everyone has a right to connect to spirituality.

How did this connection take place?

אדם כי יקרִיב מִכֶּם – it is from within you that should be brought near. The *Korbanos* were full of moral and spiritual lessons of how to build our character and lead our lives. The prophets repeatedly made it clear that bringing *Korbanos* without integrating the messages that they conveyed was not pleasing to G-d. Today, when we can no longer bring *Korbanos*, we say the Shmoneh Esreh instead. Just like we make requests in the Shmoneh Esreh asking G-d to fulfill our spiritual lack, so too we would make such requests at the time of bringing the Korban. Shlamim for example, were brought to correct deficiencies in our trait of Chesed, while נולות related more to our Bein Adam LeMakom deficiencies.

When someone brought a קרבן, he would do so from the best of his possessions. By showing that the best of what he has really belongs to HaSh-m, the person would thereby be educating himself that he has to serve HaSh-m with all that he has. He would be showing that he recognizes that everything connects ultimately back to HaSh-m, that at a deeper level, there is no reality besides HaSh-m. This was much more than the level of Tahara, of withdrawal from all evil. It was, rather, an active engagement of G-d's world. Once a person had re-dedicated all of himself to G-d, he was able to focus on that part of his potential which was lacking. Hence, the word Korban, say the Meforshim, comes from the word הִתְקַרְבֹּת, to bring you and your possessions closer to HaSh-m, to reconnect everything to its source.

You see that blood on the altar, that ought to be my blood, my very life on that altar. But G-d demands that I serve Him with my life, not with my death and so I bring Him a קרבן instead. The arm of that animal, that really should be my arm - indeed I hereby dedicate my arm to serving only G-d. The heart, the legs, the body - all call on my body parts to be that daily קרבן in my work, my family life, my joys and sorrows.

The suppression of sensuality symbolized by the burning of kidneys and liver, of selfishness by the offering up of the heart of the animal. The blood, the source of the life force of the animal, can never become subservient to and subsumed by man. It is this higher part of the animal, its נפש בהמית, which gives the animal its higher value, and which is, in fact, so spiritually potent that it can actually atone for the spiritual negativity of man himself.

So here is some understanding. Yet, the Kuzari warns us that intellectual reasoning alone will never give us the full picture of closeness to G-d which the *Korbanos* The *Korbanos* are G-d's Will - and doing His Will gives us an element of spirituality which intellect alone could never anticipate. Do and you will see.

But even the Ramban only seems to relate to the Korban of a sinner, rather than all Korbanos. According to the Ramban, the limbs of the Korban come to replace ones own limbs, because really one should give one's life to G-d in lieu of the sin that was committed. But surely the logic of the Ramban would apply to other situations as well. The idea of the Korban is to show that G-d is the source of all reality, that nothing exists beyond His Will.

Humans have self-consciousness, we know where our bodies end, and from there outwards the world beyond ourselves begins. In fact, it is the a sign of serious mental illness if we do not have the boundaries of self and other clearly defined.

The same is true of our relationship with G-d. Even when we turn to face G-d at the closest possible moment, the Shmoneh Esreh, we say ברוך אתה - Blessed are *You*. There is me and there is G-d, seemingly.

But a deeper understanding shows that this is not so. Ultimately, we are all extensions of G-d's Will. His reality is total, even if the Kabbalists explain to us how it is possible for us to exist at all if that is the case. Living as we do, with constant messages to ourselves of our independent existence, this appreciation is very difficult to acquire and to maintain.

Here was the great benefit of the Korban. It restored for us the true perspective of what was happening. It showed us that all of us belongs to G-d, not just as an owner, but that we truly has no life except as an a function of His ongoing Will. The killing of the animal shows that there is no independent life - the bringing of the animal on the altar grants the animal its ultimate purpose and provides one of the greatest lessons which a man could learn.

Shogeg

A person is obliged to bring a Korban for various transgressions. The very possibility of atoning (through a Korban) for one's sin, shows that a person's inner essence remains pure, and it was only some happenstance superficial outburst which led to his sin. And so, the Korban comes to reconnect a person with all of his potential and direct every facet of his being towards serving His maker.

But these transgressions have to be Shogeg – accidental. If a person deliberately transgresses, there is no Korban. Logic would seem to dictate to the contrary – if one sins deliberately, surely one is in even greater need of atonement than if one sinned accidentally.

The law is all the more perplexing when in the case of an Ashem Taluy. A person brings an Asham where it is not even clear whether he sinned or not. For example, there were two pieces of meat in front of him – one kosher and one treif, and he doesn't know which one he ate. The person may not have sinned at all, yet still he person is required to seek atonement! This is because Torah has to become so integrated into the person, so much a part of him that such a thing would never happen.

Rabbi Frand explains: *I will give an example and ask your pardon for suggesting such an example. Does anyone ever leave home in the morning having forgotten to put on his pants? Never! We may forget our watch, our keys, our tie, or some other article of clothing, but never our pants. Pants are so integral to our existence, that it is literally impossible for a person to even make the mistake of walking outside his front door without his pants on.*

Torah, mitzvos, and fear of G-d, need to be such an integral part of a person's existence that he should not even be able to commit an aveyrach unintentionally. Imagine if a person wakes up Shabbos morning and goes into the bathroom, turns on the light, starts brushing his teeth and shaving and then remembers "Oh my gosh! Today is Shabbos!" It is true that his aveyrach was unintentional. It is true he forgot. It is true he was half asleep. But Shabbos is clearly not as vital and integral to him as wearing his pants. He never forgot to put on his pants before leaving the house. How could he forget it was Shabbos?

This is the concept of the atonement of 'Asham Talui' and 'Korban Chatas'. The atonement is about the fact that fear of sin was not real enough and not integral enough and not essential enough in a person's life to prevent him from even unintentionally and even possibly unintentionally committing an aveyrach.

This idea provides an explanation of the chinuch. The Korban olah, which which atones for various transgressions, including false oaths. This offering is unusual, as the financial means of the transgressor determine what he must do in order to gain forgiveness. The standard offering is a sheep or a goat, but if the person cannot afford a sheep or a goat he may bring two turtledoves or two young doves. If he cannot afford birds he may offer a tenth of an ephah (1) of fine flour in their stead.

Sefer HaChinuch (Commandment 123) explains that if a person with sufficient means were to

attempt to offer birds or flour instead of a sheep or a goat, he would not fulfill his obligation. Similarly, a poor person who would offer a sheep or a goat also would not gain atonement. His altruistic intentions notwithstanding, if G-d is providing a less expensive approach to fulfilling the mandate, he must not choose to overspend his means, explains Sefer HaChinuch, because it might cause him to steal at a later date when he cannot provide his family's needs. This mitzvah (Divine commandment) is the Torah's vehicle to teach the broader lesson that we need to be honest with ourselves about how much time, effort, and money we are prepared to expend for mitzvos. G-d knows exactly what we can and should do, and just as it is obviously inappropriate to do less than we can, it is likewise inappropriate to do more than we can, to stretch ourselves too much.

That being the case, the law that one does not bring a Korban for a Meizid becomes even more perplexing. The law is so sensitive to lack of Torah integration that there is a law of Asham Taluy – yet it allows for fragrant disregard of the Torah (Meizid) without any Korban requirement. Nor can the logic be that such a person has been so bad that he is beyond help. For, such a person can clearly do Teshuva and get his Kaparah on Yom Kippur.

The answer lies in the fact that it is the person's body, not his soul which is the transgressor.

However, a person's body is entrusted to his soul to look after. A body on its own has no ability to look after itself spiritually. On its own, it cannot fulfill its purpose - it is only through the soul which elevates it that gives the body the possibility of holiness. The soul is the shepherd of the body which leads it to serving its Maker.

Therefore, when the body sins, it is the soul which is responsible, which allowed the body to do this and it is the soul which needs to bring atonement. Look at the physical action of the body – can we tell from that whether an action was deliberate or unintentional. Rather, the difference lies only in the soul. It is only a distinction which the soul and not the body makes.

Now a korban is an animal, and therefore it cannot go beyond its own reality. It cannot atone for a person who sinned with his soul – i.e. who sinned deliberately (for the thoughts are in the soul). It can only atone for a person who sinned with his body – i.e. accidentally.

Hence the Torah says: א ב: אדם כי יקריב מכם קרבן ליהוה מן הבהמה

Which the Sages say means: להביא בני אדם שדומין לבהמה

What a person is bringing in a Korban is the animal side of his nature and consecrating this to a higher purpose.

Yet, even when a person sins accidentally, it is considered his sin. Were his soul pure enough, he would not have sinned, even accidentally. This is why the verse says אדם כי תחטא – “When *the soul* sins” and not אדם כי תחטא. The soul created the spiritual vacuum which allowed the body to sin.

When a person comes to be judged, his soul will say that his body was the one that sinned. His body, in turn, will blame the soul. G-d then combines the body and the soul and judges them as one. In fact, Rabbeinu Bachaya shows that the word Nefesh can refer to the soul and the body together. This seems to contradict what we said above, that it is the soul alone, and not the body which bears the culpability.

The Daas Zekeinim explains as follows:

There were two people who sinned against the king, a villager who lived far away from the palace and a close advisor who lived in the palace grounds. The king was far more upset with the close advisor, for his close relationship with the king implied a much greater treachery. So too it is with the soul and the body. The body when it sins gets thrown into a grave – it is the soul which is inflicted with the real suffering of the punishment.

How does this soul restore itself and the body. It brings a 'לדבן לך. The four lettered Name of G-d specifically is use – *Not killing – fresh restoration of life. ... What does die there is only that which is transitory and perishable when kept at a distance from G0d, but which, if brought in to the province of godliness, comes into the real purpose of its existence and partakes of eternal life.*

The mind (soul) had abandoned its post, leaving just the animal part of him – inevitably leading to sin. The Korban rekindles the alertness of the mind – restores the soul as the captain of the ship.

Of course, we live in a world where the soul, while perfect will always be in imperfect control. The full expression of the *Korban* idea, must await a future time, well into Techiyas Hameism when the soul will have total power of the body, and the two will move in harmony forever towards their Maker.

זה לחמי - This is My Bread

It is an accepted fact that there are anthropomorphism's in the Torah. G-d "gets angry" or "hears"; He "remembers", "sees", "knows" and "speaks". The Torah talks in the language of man. However, with the Korbanos, we read of something which, even with this understanding, leaves us perplexed. The Torah says a remarkable thing. It says that when we bring a *Korban* we are, in a sense sustaining Him! It is called 'His bread' and 'a pleasant odor to Him':

זה לחמי, אשה ריח ניחוח לד' (במדבר כ"ח)

G-d is obviously not lacking in anything that we can give Him sustenance in any way. Rather, this terminology is used because we are returning to G-d what belongs to Him. It is like bringing a drop of water to the ocean. The ocean is the source of all water. Even rain water is water which evaporated from the sea. So, the drop of water doesn't make a difference to the sea. But nevertheless, the action that was done can be defined as the bringing of a drop of water to the sea. So too, the action of returning an animal to the Maker of all Beings makes no difference to this Being of Beings. But the action done by the bringer of the sacrifice can still be said to be an action of bringing bread to G-d.

But why, then, did the Torah use such confusing terminology? However, G-d set the world up in such a way that using this terminology is highly appropriate. When G-d created the world, He created it incomplete and imperfect. Man was given the job to finish the creation. By doing so, man becomes a partner with G-d in the creation. G-d now, in a sense, "needs" man to complete the creation.

The material world we see around us is only a small part of the total structure of the world. Above this, there are many layers of spirituality – other worlds which are parallels of this one. Each world replicates the other at a higher spiritual level and level of completeness. They are also linked so that an effect in one of these worlds will transmit that effect to the worlds above and below it.

When G-d wants to effect something in this world, He expresses His will at a very high, spiritual level. This effect then 'chains down' (חשתלשל) or devolves through all the different spiritual levels (worlds) until it reaches our world. But, this same effect can also work in the opposite direction. Man may do something in עולם הזה which then affects all the worlds above Him. This structure explains how man, though he may seem like an insignificant speck in the cosmos, is really its primary mover and shaker.

All of this was set up so that G-d could give more to us. The 'bread for G-d' is like the effect of food on the Neshama. The food comes to sustain the body, not the Neshama. But the body in turn becomes the vehicle to hold something more spiritual, which in turn becomes the vessel for a level of spirituality above it and so on, in a series of many graded steps until the Neshama is reached. So the food for the body aligns the body with the Neshama in such a way that the Neshama can shine down step by step and ultimately affect the spirituality of the body.

This is what the Korban does. The Korban becomes the vehicle to bear the level of spirituality above it, and so on, until all these are linked to the Shechina, which then has a ready passage of graded spiritual steps, all aligned and in harmony with each other to come down into our world and to radiate.

The word אש is the name used for the lowest level of the ten levels of Malachim. And a Malach is none other than a vehicle for transmitting G-d's holiness.

So, when the verse says אֶת קַרְבְּנֵי לַחֲמִי לְאִשִּׁי, it really means, “This sacrifice will serve to provide a vehicle (לַחֲמִי) for the next level of spirituality (לְאִשִּׁי) to allow the higher worlds (and ultimately the Shechina) to connect to the lower ones”.

The world was set up like this to allow us to be the ones to finish, or perfect the world. By doing this man not only makes himself holy and thereby prepare himself for the world to come, but, he is able to sanctify the world around him as well. Ultimately, He has allowed us to earn our reward, in the truest sense and to thereby have an unusually intimate relationship with G-d.

When we do G-d’s Will by sanctifying the world around us, we actually ‘make place’ for G-d in the world. G-d set up This World in such a way that His Will is to respond to our actions, rather to initiate. Although “He wants a dwelling place in the lower worlds”, He leaves this to us to create. We do this through every act of holiness we perform. By choosing to do what He asks of us, we are ‘allowing’ Him to be with us. This is the greatest type of giving possible. Of course, He does not need this. But He wills it to be so.

One example (and the most literal way) in which we do this is by the building of the Temple. G-d gave us the blueprints, but we are the ones who build. Within this home that we have built for Him, we are capable of further giving back to Him, again through prescribed methods. Hence, G-d says that they are “for a pleasant smell before Me”. He enables us to give back to Him.

Man’s actions, even the smallest gestures, turn out to have cosmic implications. Man can relate to all of the cosmos and to elevate it because there is something inside of him which is the parallel to all that is outside of himself. Man’s soul, that whole world of the עוֹלָם הַקָּטָן, sustains all of time and space. This is because the soul of man ultimately reaches higher than these dimensions, and is therefore closer to the Source of spiritual energy. Every action and word, in fact every thought of man, impacts on all of these worlds.

Such is man and his enormous powers. This is an awesome responsibility, frightening in its implications. But it is also the greatest privilege man could dream to have.

Korbanos in Our Day

After the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, we nevertheless retain our ability to draw from the holiness of the Korbanos by studying about them and trying to understand them. Anyone who does this will draw from the mysterious power of the Korbanos.

Specifically, the Shomeneh Esreh was fixed around the times of the morning and afternoon daily sacrifices, for prayer like the Korbanos, is also called *Avodah*, i.e. *Avodah SheBeLev*. This is why Maariv was not an obligatory service until all men accepted the custom of saying it daily, for there is no *Korban Tamid* at night. Just like we make requests in the Shmoneh Esreh that G-d would provide us with our spiritual lack and our means to fulfill it, so too we would make such requests at the time of bringing the *Korban*.

In addition, it is theoretically possible for us to bring actual Korbanos in our day. For, although the first Korbanos required a Beis Hamikdash, the Kedusha of that Beis Hamikdash remains, even after it is destroyed. Once Hakadosh Baruch Hu's Shechina rests on the Har HaBayis, it does so forever. For this reason, Korbanos today are not dependent on the Beis HaMikdash. Theoretically, we could offer Korbanos, provided we could build the Mizbeach in its exact, designated place, which we don't. One major problem with this is that we are today all in a state of Tumas Meis, and there is no Parah Adumah to purify us from this. Rav Tzvi Kalisher of the mid to late 19 C held that this would not prevent us from bringing the Korban Pesach, since, the law is that when the majority of the nation is in a state of impurity, טומאה בחובו דחוייה בצבור. However, many other problems would still have to be overcome. We would have to have a Cohen Meyuchas (which maybe there is), we would need to identify for sure what is Techeles to include this in the Bigdei Kehunah. For these, and other reasons, the Gedolim of his and later generations did not agree with his proposal.

Fire

In this week's parsha, the Kohanim are commanded to light a new fire every morning, and not to allow that fire to go out. Even though in the First Temple fire descended from heaven, there was still a mitzvah to bring man-made fire. This was to hide the Miracle, to show that G-d is constantly guiding us with hidden miracles on a daily basis. It is all one source of Hashgacha, whether miraculous or through the order of nature.

The new Korbanos can only be given during the day – man should approach G-d when things are clear and lucid. However, they could continue burning that night, when things are confused and mixed up.

Then, just before dawn was the act of Trumas Hadeshen, the clearing away the ashes of the fire. The Trumas Hadeshen is seemingly the most trivial of the mitzvos. Yet the Cohen dresses up in full regalia for this.

The Trumas HaDeshen heralded the end of the cycle. Before the new cycle of the next day could begin, Trumas HaDeshen had to conclude the Avodah of the previous day. This shows that the mission of each day, of each generation, is really a continuation of the previous one.

All other things in the Beis HaMikdash, once one has completed doing the Mitzvah, can no longer cause Meilah. But one always transgresses Meila on the ashes of the alter. For these ashes represent the continuity of the Jewish people: Each cycle or generation fulfills a specific mission, yet each one draws and builds on the previous one.

We have seen that the fire was a combination of G-d's fire and our fire. G-d's fire is His Midas HaDin, that which burns away anything which is extraneous to serving Him. It leaves only the pure spiritually. This was not a natural fire, but rather a spiritual one, and the copper coated wooden alter was unaffected by its continual flames.

To this fire, man added his own, an arousal below which paralleled and perhaps even triggered the arousal from above. In fact, Yosef is compared to a fire. This is because he is the Tzadik par excellence – Yosef HaTzadik – and as such he is the one who fulfills the letter of the law – the Din – to the finest degree.

The fire of the alter reflected our specific aspirations to emulate the fire of Yosef. The fire is written specifically by the *Olah*. The Olah has two characteristics – 1. It is כולה לד' – it gets totally burned in dedication to G-d, hence its name. 2. The *Olah* atones for thoughts of the heart (הרהורי לב), i.e. for negative passions. 3. To this we must add the idea that the fire on which the Olah was burnt had to burn continuously, and was never allowed to go out.

We cannot wait to be inspired, for some wave of spirituality to overcome us. We must light our own fire, the fire that is within, developing a personal vision and a passion for that vision, and to keep the fire from going out once it is lit. But this fire – our passion and drive, is a double-edge sword. The most powerful motivator of man can be used for evil as well as good.

The only way out of this is to join our fire with G-d's. His fires will ensure that our passions will be channeled in the right direction.

Kaparah

א (ב) דבר אל בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם אדם כי יקריב מכם קרבן ליהוה
מן הבהמה מן הבקר ומן הצאן תקריבו את קרבנכם:

When a man reaches into his spiritual core – when he is called the greatest of names given to man - אדם, and through this brings himself or others close to G-d מכם כי יקריב, this is called a קרבן ליהוה. There is another way, however, for those who do not achieve this, who fall short and transgress - מן הבהמה מן הבקר - through the Korbanos he can get back to this level of greatness.

When a person sinned, there were special Korbanos which brought atonement. Atonement is a remarkable thing. It means that the person is not only forgiven for the sin, but that he gets rid of any of the spiritual blemish on his heart and soul which the sin might have caused.

Atonement means that a person is not stuck with the negative spiritual legacy of his past – that he can truly make a fresh start. This is quite amazing. A man kills another man. He regrets this and does Teshuva. The Beis Din is clearly instructed to put him to death despite his Teshuva, for the life he took cannot be returned. As the Yerushalmi puts it: *Prophecy was asked, "What is the punishment of the sinner?" Prophecy answered, "The sinning soul should die."*

The consequences of his action are not undone by his Teshuva. And so, surely, the blemish on his soul is fixed. And yet, the Torah tells us that a korban undoes all of this at some level. The Torah, whose whole purpose is to correct and complete man, wanted the transgressor to have a way out.

Korbanos were not the only type of atonement: there was also Yom Kippur, suffering, exile and even death – all coming as atonement for various things. There was a clear hierarchy of atonement, depending on the sin. To some degree, Teshuva itself is a Kaparah. It is vast in the range of sins which it covers and tides one over with a partial Kaparah until further atonement can take place.

Physical illnesses often require long processes of special diet, exercise and medicines. Spiritual healing often requires multiple layers of atonement and of Tikun Hamidos which, in severe cases, may take a life-time. A person may find himself concentrating on the exact opposite of his natural personality, on creating Kiddush HaSh-m when he sinned in Chillul HaSh-m. If a person was a מזיד, then he is just that much sicker, and requires a more careful, protracted and rigorous regimen.

But certain Korbanos (the חטאת, the אשם and certain types of עולה, for example) were quite unique in that their whole purpose was to provide for this atonement, at least for those who had sinned accidentally. Some Chataos were only brought on behalf of all the Jewish People or one of their leaders. One of these, the שעייר המשתלח, was so powerful that it could atone even for intentional transgressions. But the Chataos of our Parsha are brought by individuals, for certain types of inadvertent sins.

When a person shows by his transgressions that he has failed to integrate Torah values, that he has acted animal-like despite his elevated human status, then, the קרבן becomes a life-line back to Judaism. The Korban asks the person to act out his beliefs in a way which made a great impression on him.

According to Rashi, the Mishkan came as a result of the Chei HaEigal. The משכן brought the שכונה down to the Jewish people, after it had left because of their sin. The קרבנות did this on an ongoing basis – they helped to restore the שכונה whenever human frailty triumphed lofty Torah ideals. The word קרבן has as its root קרב, to come or to bring close. Therefore, the very nature of קרבנות was to be open to the sinner.

This stops the downward moral spiral, which a sinner inevitably feels. The naturally psychology is that someone who is wearing dirty clothes doesn't really care whether he makes them a little dirtier, whereas someone whose clothes are clean is careful to keep them that way. So too, with the sinner. He loses his moral and spiritual sensitivity to the sin. נעשה לו כהיתר – in his eyes this is something which is now permitted to do. However, after he would bring a Korban, he would know that he was once more spiritually pure and clean - or the process brought him a כפרה - and he would therefore be careful not to dirty himself again.

On the other hand, if his failure was so massive that he deliberately transgressed, then a קרבן will not help. For, a deliberate transgression means that he used his full faculties which cannot be atoned for by a mere animal. He could still, however, gain Kaparah in other ways, for a person could never sin right down to the recesses of his soul – there is always something a little irrational – non-שכלי – about man which allows him to do Teshuva and get some form of Kaparah.

But in the normal course of a שוגג, he now had to go to the significant trouble of taking his קרבן all the way to the בית המקדש, and go through all the stages of bringing a קרבן, a process which will make an enormous impact on him. (The very experience of being in the holy בית המקדש, and of thereby learning how he could turn himself into a human משכן, is in and of itself a large part of the intended education, as we have described elsewhere.)

The כפרות of each korban were very precise, requiring different קרבנות for different actions and even for different types of people. Moreover, a person was given a choice of animal, to reflect his specific personality and character makeup.

Shabbos HaGadol & the Korban Pesach

The Shabbos before Pesach is called Shabbos HaGadol because this was when the first Korban Pesach, in Mitzraim took place. The Jews took the revered god of their masters, the sheep, and tied it up to their beds, an act of such astonishing defiance that it would surely have led to a mass slaughter of the Jews. Instead, the Egyptian first born attacked Pharaoh's troops, in a desperate attempt to save their own lives - למכה מצרים בבכוריהם. Hence שבת הגדול – the Shabbos of a great miracle.

This Shabbos was the tenth of Nisan. Shabbos was fixed as the day of celebrating this event rather than the 10th, because of the intrinsic connection between Shabbos and Pesach. The Shabbos reflects the creation of the world and Pesach, G-d's ongoing involvement therein. Pesach without Shabbos or Shabbos without Pesach is meaningless.

With the Korban Pesach, the Jews clearly separated themselves from the idolatry of the Egyptians, placing themselves totally under the Malchus of HaSh-m. The Alshich says that wherever we are in Galus we are forced to receive HaSh-m's Hashpaas through the Sar of that nation. Therefore, our relationship with HaSh-m will be colored by the culture and spiritual realities of that nation. This was no different in Egypt. In fact, in Nisan the Egyptian הַש was at its peak. The Jews therefore had to totally destroy this Egyptian deity.

In future generations, the Korban Pesach was brought on Erev Pesach, the 14th of Nisan and eaten as a central part of the Pesach Seder, and we should all feel its lack from our Sedarim today. In preparation, all sheep owners brought their sheep to the stream to be cleaned and sold on the tenth. The hills of Jerusalem were so covered with sheep that the grass could not be seen. There was no man who took another's place on line, even if he was a great man, for in front of G-d there is no one who is great. On the 14th, the Leviim blew the Chatzotzros from a high tower, the Lul, on the Har Habayis, announcing that the shechita of the korban should begin. The nation, dressed in Yom Tov clothes, proceeded to the Beis Hamikdash.

The Korban Pesach is only one of two Positive Mitzvos which is punished by an איטור כרת for non-compliance. The other is Bris Mila, and that too was commanded to the Jews on that fateful night – בַּדְּמֵיךְ חַיִּי. The Korban Pesach and Bris Milah expressed a covenant with the Jews, just prior to their emerging from Egypt as a nation. Mila removed the impurity attached to their skin and Pesach then created the positive connection with G-d. This is why both of them involved blood, for it is through the blood that the soul enters the body. Both also involved Mesiras Nefesh, for as much as the Korban Pesach exposed them to the fury of the Egyptians, the newly-performed Milah would render them helpless and exposed.

Because Bnei Yisrael served idolatry they were considered as if dead. They now corrected this through their Mesiras Nefesh, not by dying for G-d, which they were willing to do, but by living for G-d.

The Korban Pesach is that it is the only seasonal mitzvah in the Torah that has a second chance – someone who missed Pesach could bring the Korban on Pesach Sheni.

The Korban Pesach has an unusual amount of other, independent Mitzvos attached to it: To eat the korban on Seder night, not to eat the meat raw or cooked, rather roasted, as kings would, not to leave any of the meat over, for only poor people have to save from one meal to the next. Since the whole essence of this mitzvah was to give testimony and express gratitude that G-d took the Jewish People out of Egypt and made a covenant with them, it was forbidden to include someone who denied the

faith or an uncircumcised Jew or a non-Jew in this Korban. One was forbidden to send any of the Korban outside of the chabura, for this would be the way of a poor man who, faced with the unusual prospects of a large meal, would want to share this unusual event with his friends and family by sending them samples. A king, on the other hand, is used to such meals, and eats them in his own palace without further thought. One was not allowed to break a bone, for only the poor would do so, in their attempts to reach every morsel of meat.

The reason for so many Mitzvos, says the Chinuch, is because each a person reinforces and integrates idea according to the actions which he does. The more he will do to remind him of the miracles of Egypt, the more he is conditioned to recognize and be grateful for its miraculousness. Although this is a principle everywhere, the centrality of the Exodus experience to the Jewish people ensures its repetition here, in the form of the above Mitzvos and many others besides.

Without the Exodus, we would not understand clearly that G-d is the creator of the universe, that He continues to be involved with this universe at a level of General Providence and Individual Providence, that we, the Jewish people, are His servants. In that sense the Korban Pesach is not different from any other Mitzvah which reminds us of the Exodus. But there is one fundamental which sticks out in the korban Pesach, the fact that it needed to be eaten in a chabura, and that chabura is focuses around the family.

שה לביית שיה לביית tells us that the Jewish way of transmitting the fundamentals of Jewish knowledge is around the family. Parents tell children, who tell their children in turn. The Pesach Seder is a fulfillment of ויהגדת לבנך, of getting children to ask, and of giving them the answers. The Korban Pesach was eaten just around then.

The other great mitzvah which was done as the Jews left Egypt was circumcision. This too was a mitzvah that was to be transmitted by father to son – מצווה על האב – for it is the father's mitzvah to circumcise his child.

שמיני

A Philosophy of the Kosher Keeping Human

Everything in the world was designed by G-d to be used by man to get closer to Him. But there is a fundamental difference between Jew and non-Jew on this. The non-Jew can use the world to sanctify himself. But he does not thereby sanctify the world. The Jew can actually affect the physical world he is engaging, to be **קוֹדֵשׁ הָעוֹלָם**, to sanctify the world and to connect it back to G-d. The secret of the Jews is the Torah. It allows us to rise spiritually and to take the world with us.

Hence, most of the sacrifices actually involved eating, either on the part of the Kohanim or on the part of the baalim themselves. A holy person is no different than the Mishkan. His actions are no longer physical. His eating has the same Kedusha effect as would sacrificing an Olah on the Alter.

Using the world correctly then becomes an enormous responsibility. When Yaakov Avinu sent his gift to Eisav, he was immediately punished for this by an injury to his thigh. For he had entrusted the physical to one who was not capable of using it properly. This was so even though it was purposeful (to make peace) and therefore permissible. Similarly, when he bought the birthright from Eisav for a pot of lentil soup, it says immediately afterwards that there was a famine in the land.

Man is a mini-world, an Olam Katan. Man is made up of all the elements that are in the world, and there is therefore always something inside of the man which parallels and connects to that which is outside of him. Through this connection, as he raises up his little, inner world, he raises up the larger outer world to which he is connecting.

There are actually many parallel and linked worlds, one more spiritual than the other. Man is so powerful that he effects all of these worlds. Man's actions, even the smallest gestures, turn out to have cosmic implications. These parallel worlds exist within man as well. Man's body is connected with his Nefesh, which in turn is connected to the higher levels of the soul.

The purpose of the soul is to purify the body. The soul, in turn, needs the body to express itself. There can be no contact with the outside world except through the Body. Without the Body we would neither see nor hear; we could not be aware of the physical world in any sense we understand it. But there is more than this. The Body is the instrument through which the Neshama does Mitzvos which almost always involve a physical component. And the Body is that which allows the Neshama to engage the world, raise it up to holiness, purifying the Body in the process.

The Jew is charged not only to be holy, but to make the world holy and food represents an extraordinary opportunity to do this. For food is that part of the physical world which man actually ingests – makes a part of himself. Man has to relate to food – without it he cannot live. Per force it will either drag us down or we will raise it up and sanctify it.

Unlike air and other necessities, food is one of our most central, sensual desires. If food was purely a physical activity, and if we desired food simply as a defense to ensure that we eat when we are hungry, then we would take the minimum amount, prepared in the simplest ways, and perhaps go into a private room, like a bathroom, to do what we have to do.

It is clear that the Torah attitude to food is very different from this. Food is a center-piece of Shabbos and the festivals, of weddings, bar-mitzvahs and circumcisions. We make kiddush, kiddushin and havdalah over wine. Food is the source of umpteen Torah mitzvahs: we leave Peah, Leket and Shichacha for the poor, take Trumah for the Cohen and Maaser for the Levi and keep Shmittah, Orla and Nata Revai in the land of Israel.

Turnusrufus, the evil Roman emperor once asked Rabbi Akiva. “Whose actions are greater, G-d’s or man’s?” Rabbi Akiva surprisingly answered that man’s deed were greater than G-d’s, giving as proof an example from food: G-d produces wheat kernels, inedible, in that form to man. But man takes those kernels and processes them until he produces bread, edible and tasty to man. This is because G-d created the world in such a way that man should become his partner in completing it.

But the making of the bread is not yet the end of the process; it is the eating which completes the partnership. When a Jew takes his great sensuous desire for food and harnesses his eating into a spiritual experience, the physical world becomes a perfect server of the spiritual, all of the physical reality unites with itself as well as with the spiritual reality.

Every animal has sparks of holiness (nitzotzos kedusha) inside of it, waiting to be released. For even the most despicable of animals was created and is maintained by G-d’s creative Will. However, only those which are kosher have kedusha which is accessible to us. The Hebrew word מותר – permissible, actually means unbound, meaning that the holiness in that animal is unbound or available to us. If we will eat such animals in the proper way we grant ourselves and the animal purpose. Unkosher animals are אסור – forbidden, which actually means bound, since their holiness is bound up in the animal and not accessible by us. We are therefore forbidden to eat them, since our act could not elevate the animal and therefore would not increase the holiness in this world.

The mystery of forbidden foods is that, not only can we not affect us, but they act on us in a negative way. They cloud our spiritual sensitivity by layering it and blocking its expression. Hence the verse says – וְלֹא תִטְמְאוּ בָהֶם וְנִטְמַתֶּם בָּם - the reason for not eating such foods has to do with their spiritual impurity. וְנִטְמְאוּ – is written without an א - וְנִטְמַתֶּם. Chazal read the word וְנִטְמַתֶּם, which means to be block up. spiritually. Prohibited food are missing the א, the spark of light that raises us up.

Non-kosher food turns the body into a less perfect vehicle to hold the soul. Since the body is the instrument through which the soul expresses itself, the soul finds itself blocked. In turn, if the soul is blocked, our character will be affected. We will become more like the animals we eat.

The Torah is not a health book, though eating kosher is consistent with a healthy diet. In fact, again and again the Torah stresses holiness as the purpose for the dietary laws. The body is an enormously complex and subtle mechanism, and G-d, the maker of man understand well what will disturb the exquisite equilibrium of body and soul. It is His total concern for our well being that He keeps us away from anything damaging in that regard. Imagine if G-d had revealed to us the exact mechanism. Biologists, doctors and other scientists would have gone to work and began to claim that a particular damage only occurs in a particular climate or under certain circumstances. Better that we take His word for it, and stay away, He the doctor of all doctors. And therefore, the fact that we eat physical food to maintain our biological mechanism and that this, in turn nurtures our soul is ultimately a mystery, one that leads us to appreciate the kindness G-d is doing for us.

But if Kosher food is then the 'good food' for the soul, why is it only for the Jews? The Zohar takes up this question, stating that the Jews are like the heart of a body. The very centrality of the heart as the organ of organs makes it more sensitive, more in need of exactly the right foods.

Nadav & Avihu – Holy and Unholy Human Logic

On the eighth day of the consecration of the Mishkan, the two greatest Jews on earth, Nadav and Avihu, thought to add their own fire of burning incense to G-d's Heavenly fire from above, and for this, they paid with their lives. The Heavenly fire went straight through their nostrils and, without touching their body, touched their Neshama, separating it from their body and causing their instant death.

Theirs was the sin of overflowing and enthusiastic love for G-d. Love is a powerful and beautiful thing. But the Torah here comes to tell us that it is not always a good thing. For it sometimes leads to an overflow of one's own feelings, where sometimes what is required is a tremendous punctiliousness and awe of G-d.

Fire is the passion and drive that is the great motivator of man. Nadav and Avihu understood that, though G-d's fire comes down from Heaven, man has to bring his own fire. They were in fact correct for all occasions other than this.

Moshe and Aaron had not taught this law – but they felt that the limitations of teaching in front of your teacher could not possibly apply. They became convinced that the leadership had failed on this point and they would therefore have to take matters into their own hands - all this with the purest of intentions – all to save the Jewish people. Chazal tell us that they were drunk – intoxicated by their mission. This led to fire in the wrong place. G-d's reaction was immediate and decisive – such people can no longer live amongst the Jewish People.

We talk of their death on our holiest of days, Yom Kippur to teach us that the death of the righteous provides an atonement for us and for them. But it is also to teach us, on a day when we are feeling holy and spiritual, the dangers of misapplied righteousness.

Immediately after this event, while Aaron and his sons were still on their first day of mourning, we see Aaron use his own logic to apply a Torah law. Moshe now asks Aharon why he and his sons did not eat the Chatos in the Temple area, being that it is Kodesh Kedoshim. Aaron answers that what Moshe heard was only for that one korban but not for the generations.

This is the first time that we see the application of logic in the Torah, and human logic we learn not only has its place in Torah law, but creates it. For something which is perfectly logical, with no alternative logical argument to oppose it, is considered to have the status of *חוק* law. But, that being the case, what is the difference between what Nadav and Avihu did on the one hand and Aaron on the other?

The world we live in is a world of grey. There will always be different ways of understanding things. Nothing on earth is totally pure or totally impure. One Sage, seeing the purity of a thing, may see the purity as decisive; another may focus on the impurity. Both are required to use the best of their human faculties to decide which facet will determine normative Jewish law. G-d, in his wisdom, built the Torah - and man – is such a way that truth would emerge from this process.

Moshe Rabbeinu's soul was so great that it encompassed all these dimensions. He received all 49 aspects of the purity of any object and all 49 aspects of its impurity. Aaron, in turn, as the Kohen Gadol, was the embodiment of Torah She'Baal Peh, applying the logic of the Torah. Anyone thereafter, learning Torah, may not see the whole picture on his own, but all the opinions of all the qualified rabbis at any one time would give a total Torah view.

Nadav and Avihu differed in two crucial ways from Aaron. Aaron had applied his logic to set the parameters of a law. The parameters of this law were not known and Aaron had to make a decision one way or the other. But, in bringing their fire, Nadav VeAvihu sought to use their understanding to supersede Moshe Rabbeinu's prophecy, breaking the golden rule that prophecy is clearer than human wisdom.

Secondly, Nadav and Avihu thought to attach themselves to G-d and to holiness directly, bypassing Moshe and Aaron. Now, even though they were greater than Moshe and Aaron, they failed to grasp that the way to cleaving to HaSh-m is through the leaders of the generation. *Cleave to Him* – וְבוּ תִדְבַּרְךָ – includes cleaving to the recognized scholars of each generation. By making their own decision, they were guilty of paskening Torah in front of their Rabbi, and they weakened their bond to G-d in the process. A Torah scholar who becomes the leading Sage of the generation becomes the vehicle through which the wellsprings of heavenly spirituality are passed onto the nation. Only through him can one fully access spirituality. Nadav and Avihu died for failing to grasp this vital point.

תזריע

Leprosy: Providence, Punishment and Rehabilitation

Last weeks parsha, Shmini, ended with the laws of kosher and non-kosher animals. This weeks parsha moves on to people who are tahor and tameh. Just as animals preceded humans in creation so they precede them in laws of purity and impurity. Man has greater the potential for greatness for being the pinnacle of creation. But, just because of this, his Tumah is greater when that potential is not fulfilled. For impurity is nothing other than a reflection of failed human potential.

Our Parsha begins with the words אָדָם כִּי יִהְיֶה – a man. We are dealing here with the full potential of man, and the implications when he fails to use this potential. This loss of potential is a partial death for man – and his skin accordingly turns white. The loss is not just personal. His failings effect society around him, and therefore his whiteness must be visible to others. He is a מְצוּרָה – a מְצוּרָה רָע, and he must be separated from the society he is undermining.

One of the great sins causing Tsaraas is Loshon Hora, for Loshon Hoa causes more separation between people than anything else. And so the metzora is also separated, to reflect on his deeds. On Shabbos and the Chagim, however, the Cohen does not judge him to send him out of the camp, for those are the days on which he has the best chance of improving his attitude and relationship with his fellow man.

First, he is declared in a state of הַסָּגֵר, intermediate isolation for seven days, giving him a chance to be alone to seriously contemplate his situation. If he fails to do this, then stage two, הַחֲלִיט, must now be declared. One indication of this would be if his hair, which is the protective covering of his skin, now shows that it is not only not protecting him, but letting negative elements in. But if he has already gone too far, if his whole skin is white, then הַחֲלִיט is not going to help him, and he is declared טָהוֹר.

Although Tzaraas expresses itself on physical objects (including the human body), it is not a physical ailment. No such known physical disease afflicts houses and clothing, in addition to people. It is a remarkable sign of Providence that man could do something spiritual and that this would reflect on him in a physical way, a smaller sin on his house, a slightly bigger one on his clothing and a bigger one still on his body. A Jew is hereby given an early warning signal of his spiritual alienation: The plague has already reached your clothes. Do Teshuva now before it spreads to your body!

The idea that one's spiritual state can affect the body in physical ways is not restricted to Tzaraas. Hence Moshe Rabbeinu's face began to glow after he came down from the mountain and Jerusalem and there is no question that the originally the naked bodies of the First Man and Woman looked a lot less physical than our bodies look today.

נגַע means that “the person effected is נגַע, literally ‘touched’ by the finger of G-d. It is a weaker form of גַּגַּע, from which we get מַגְפָּה, the sudden stroke of death.” G-d's Providential input gives us immediate feedback on our spiritual well being. But the Tzaraas is not just a sign of a problem. It is the beginning of the cure. Hence צָרַעַת from the words מְצוּרָה רָע – to get the evil out. In fact this is why the Cohen, who is a source of blessing for the nation, is the one to declare him impure.

Loshon Hora is the greatest of the sins which cause Tsaraas. Loshon Hora is the greatest of the sins which cause Tsaraas. *Remember what G-d did to Miriam.* Here

was on older sister who had endangered herself to save him. Nor had she intended to say anything to his detriment, rather erring in comparing him to other prophets. Nor was Moshe hurt in any way, for he was the most humble of men. Nevertheless, Miriam was immediately afflicted by Tzaraas. Should we not acquire from this the incredible spiritual sensitivity the Torah wishes us to have towards Loshon Hora, to flee from people who speak it, and to be super-careful ourselves! It is such a slippery slope – we humans are capable of starting one day with a blasphemy against a fool, building up the insensitivity that allows us to criticize great people, and ending off with complaints against the Almighty Himself!

This is why a Metzora had to go out of all three camps even though Tumas Meis only goes out of the first two camps. The Baal Loshon Hora, who caused division and separation amongst his fellow man, is in turn entirely separated from all of society, and, deprived of recipients to listen to his evil trade, and with plenty of time to reflect, the baal loshon hora now gets the opportunity to focus on the source of his problem.

The real problem is Kinah. The inability to enthusiastically appreciate that everyone has their own blessing, that my blessing is all I need, and my neighbor needs all of his, is the cause of us talking badly about others. But, this is such an anti-Jewish attitude, that it throws such a person out of any Jewish settlement, literally and spiritually.

The Metzora brings the Korbanos which precisely fit the atonement he requires: He who did an act of chattering should bring a Korban of twittering birds. The birds represent the wild, unrestrained animal life. The slaughtering of the one bird represents the bringing of the animal side in man under control. The fact that one bird is kept alive means that man is not asked to get rid of this side of himself, just to channel it properly.

The Metzora also brings what appears to be two contradictory things – hyssop (אֶזְרָא) (which was used in Mitzraim to sprinkle the blood which would protect the Jewish first born from being destroyed) and the תולעת – indicative of lowliness and humbleness, and הָאָרָז - which shows an element of pride. When he first comes to correct the sin he should go to an extreme of lowliness to correct the underlying arrogance which led to the sin. But any extreme is neither healthy nor sustainable and requires one to move towards the center – this is the אֶזְרָא.

But humility is an awfully difficult thing to acquire. It requires a long and arduous process. And in fact, even after his Tahara, he is still barred from the Sanctuary itself, or even from entering his own tent until he undergoes a further process on the eighth day. By then the Metzora has been through a lot. He has learned that G-d is involved with every detail of his life. He has suffered pain and humiliation. The shock treatment of complete isolation and shame is meant to be a turning point for the Metzora. The shaving of his hair and the mikvah which follows reflects a new start, a dipping into the primordial waters. The emphasis is on rehabilitation. G-d is not interested in the death of the reshaim. He is interested in their Teshuva.

Loshon Hora

Of the seven things which the Gemorrah in Erchin tell us as the source of Negaim, the Rambam focuses on the speaker of Loshon Hora. Similarly, the Parsha of Miriam's Loshon Hora against Moshe Rabbeinu is brought next to the parsha of Tzaraas. In fact, say Chazal, the word נְצוּרֵט is related to the word מוֹצִיא רֵט – he who produced evil from his mouth. The purification of the Tzaraas involves two birds, to atone for the unbridled chirping of this person.

There are five sins of loshon hora: By speech alone – hence two ‘chattering’ birds; by actively going out and spreading the loshon hora – hence blood is sprinkled on the toe of his legs; By receiving the loshon hora – hence blood is sprinkled on his ear; failing to rebuke or stop the loshon hora speaker – hence blood is sprinkled on the hand that could have stopped the person; sophisticated loshon hora hidden in subtle messages – hence the noiseless oil, the cedar, which first raises up his friend, and the hyssop, which then comes to lower him.

Loshon Hora is so damaging because it destroys people's lives, much more effectively than physical acts (short of murder) could have done. The blood of the dead bird comes to drive this lesson home. Words kill, and they kill at a distance. That which is protected by the American Constitution (freedom of speech) is utterly forbidden by the Torah, considered as the ultimate stealth weapon. Once fired, the words may be retracted, but their effect is usually permanent.

Therefore, the impurity caused by Loshon Hora are worse than any other form of impurity. Even Tumas Meis only requires that a person remove himself from the Machaneh Kehuna, but a Metzora had to go out of all three camps, into complete social isolation. This is Midah KeNeged Midah. The Baal Loshon Hora caused division and separation amongst his fellow man; he in turn is entirely separated from all of society, and, deprived of recipients to listen to his evil trade, is now in the best position to begin the process of purification.

The Sages seem to say things about the Loshon Hora speaker which, on the surface, seem quite exaggerated. It is as if he has denied the basic premises of our faith, they say. His sins extend up to the heavens. It is as bad as if he had committed idolatry, adultery and murder all in one. And much more.

Rabbeinu Yonah explains that this is because of the accumulative effect, since a person who speaks Loshon Hora tends to do so repeatedly, until it becomes second nature to the point where one does not realize that one is speaking Loshon Hora. Teshuva then becomes difficult – one is not aware of what one has done, and one does not realize how much harm he has caused, so one will not be truly sorry for what he has done. One cannot ask the forgiveness of the person whom he has damaged because one will never remember all the people about whom he has spoken. Besides, sometimes one stigmatizes whole families, including generations as yet unborn, for which, one cannot possibly do Teshuvah.

But there is more than that. The deeper explanation requires us to go to the root of what language is all about. Language is not just a tool to communicate ideas, but the very stuff of which man is defined. Speech is the point at which the spiritual and the physical, interface. Man takes an abstract idea and translates it into a physical sound using voice box, lips, tongue, etc. This sound then makes a physical impact on someone else's ear who translates it back into the abstract idea.

In fact, this regulation, between the physical and the spiritual reflects man's capacity for choice. Angels are no more able to choose than animals – the latter is driven by instinct, the former by its pure intelligence. Only when both the physical

and spiritual components exist in one being is their choice – and it is speech which shows that man is such a being.

Abuse of speech is then an abuse of our highest human faculties, and therefore it brings us so low, to a state of Tzaraas. Other sins effect one part of the person, but the rest of the body remains whole and can be drawn on to mend the damaged part. But Loshon Hora leaves no part of the body unaffected, just as a poison would spread through the whole body.

Speech is not really a physical action. Its source is in the spiritual realms, and therefore we are enormously energized to speak, especially when it is Loshon Hora. Yet, therein lies our hope – for our speech is naturally holy, and we have only to get in touch with our true selves to use it for holiness.

מצורע

Tumah

Tumah and Tahara are spiritual concepts which are ultimately Chukim, beyond human understanding. ששה סדרי משנה סדר טהרות is the last of these because these are the most difficult areas of all of the Torah to understand.

Tahor is a state of spiritual and moral fitness and life. is related to צהור, which means clarity or brightness, hence צהרים, afternoon, the time when the sun is brightest. טומאה represents the loss of that state. The word טמא is related to the word צמא – thirsty – indicating that טומאה is a spiritual thirst. טומאה means literally a blockage. So too, טמטום – spiritual blockage - is related to צמצום – a contraction. טהור

We learn that the Greeks טמאו את כל השמינים, they made the Temple vessels impure. This means that they blocked the paths of wisdom and prevented spiritual access to clarity. So, for example, a women during her menstrual cycle (טומאת נדה) experiences a kind of spiritual distancing. And this is just how Unkelus translates it - that, to be in Nidah is to be in a state of distancing.

טמא is related to טמה, a mixture, and טמיון, is used by Chazal to mean complete ruin, implying somehow that it was the mixture, the lack of boundaries which caused the ruin.

To be impure (at least to the point where this impurity now transmits to others), an object must first have had some spiritual potential, for טומאה is the exact opposite of purity and holiness.

The great principle of impurity is: The greater the loss of potential, the greater the טומאה, for Tumah draws on Kedusah for its power. The death of a human is the greatest loss of potential – and therefore the טומאה of a dead body is the greatest – it is אבי אבות הטומאה, the most powerful impurity of them all. There is no greater spiritual loss than death, because the soul is then separated from the body, and the body then becomes an ugly lump of pure physicality. The body is merely the outer casting of the soul – לא תנוחב נפשי לשאול. The empty body is now מטמא while the soul continues to contain the real nucleus of his personality. Remarkably, however, the body of a totally righteous person does not transmit impurity, for his body has been completely purified by the soul. Thus, when Rebbe died, even the Cohanim participated in his burial, even though this is normally forbidden.

Tumah can also come from utensils, but only in so far as they reflect their connection to the potential of man, i.e. when they are usable and portable, For, only when man uses objects do they rise above physical laws and move into the spiritual plane. The exception is metal, which is meant to be used as tools, not containers. Tools represent Man in his manufacturing or creative activities. Earthenware vessels are designed to hold food, so they become impure even through the air they enclose.

Since Humans are unique sensitivity to spiritual realities, our contact with these vessels affects our own spiritual realities to some degree.

Things attached to the ground, such as water and plants, cannot become impure unless processed in some way by man. Similarly, animals are never described as being intrinsically impure. Rather, they are discussed as טמא הוא לכם – *they are impure for you*. All beings other than humans fulfill G-d's Will to the utmost. They are always in a state of actualization – never potential. Only man, who can be in a state of unfulfilled potential can be impure and can render objects impure. This is

why, concerning many of the more serious sins the Torah says - **וְלֹא תִטְמָא הָאָרֶץ** – it is you, by your immorality that will introduce impurity into the land.

Man is a body-soul being was created at the two extremities of creation – the soul of man before all of creation and the body at the end. Should man fulfill his purpose, he becomes a soul man, and he precedes all. But should he fail in his mission then we tell him that even an insect and a worm preceded him, for his body as a body alone is blacker and more putrid than the lowest of creatures.

Similarly, says the Midrash, the Parsha of human impurity comes after the Parsha of animal impurity. Impurity is, as we shall see, a reflection of failed or lost human potential, and its source goes back to the sin of the First Man and Women.

Plant life is higher than the mineral and non-living world. But, when plants are separated from their life-source, they lose not only life, but quickly have less reality than even stones and minerals. Animals are higher than plants in turn. But dead animals are worse than dead plants – their rotting bodies testimony to their once elevated status. Humans are higher than animals: a human has not only physical but spiritual life as well. Consequently, he can be physically or spiritually dead, in part or in whole. And Jews, who were granted an extra spiritual potential, can go even lower still.

Non-Jews cannot become impure nor, as far as the Torah is concerned, render objects impure. For, although they have some potential to grow, this does not include sanctifying objects and raising them up. Since they do not have this potential to begin with, they cannot become Tameh with its loss.

All other forms of Tumah draw from the death idea in some way, or the loss of potential life. The *Metzora* includes the withering and dying of the limbs of the leper. The Rabbis taught that a leper is considered as if he were dead. So too, semen is the loss of potential life and a *nidah* loses an unfertilized ovum, which could have become a new life. When a woman goes to the mikvah at the end of this period, she is dipping, so to speak, in the primordial waters at the beginning of creation, thereby renewing her creative energies for the coming month.

A woman during her menstrual flow is focused on re-preparing her body for a new cycle, a kind of healing process. Since her bodily energies are more focused on this, she is less available for the kind of wholistic spiritual, intellectual and emotional unity which ought to accompany relations with her husband. Hence relations during this time would become more of a base, physical act and is thus prohibited.

Tahara

It is a great misconception that man must submit to the power of physical forces, to the power of Tumah. The real human being cannot be touched by the powers of physical force. The body is merely its envelope and, as long as man chooses to express his real self, his soul, he will achieve holiness and purity.

In fact, we are born pure and G-d puts our souls directly into our bodies. *Family purity represents ... the joyous Jewish affirmation of life and the abhorrence of death and suffering. The institution of the mikveh, through the symbol of the waters, offers the possibility of a magnificent beginning for human life in love with life."*

Only our death causes a type of Tumah in the body, now devoid of the soul, which cannot be corrected until the soul will rejoin the body again.

Yaakov Avinu totally purified his soul, restoring for us the First Man's pre-sin soul, and left this as a legacy for all future generations. This is the guarantee that the impure Jew will always be able to find his way back to holiness and purity. Our core remains holy and hence G-d remains connected to us even in the midst of our impurity.

But it goes further. Not only is 'Jewish' Tumah is not our intrinsic state, but the state of impurity is part of our growth toward purity. The Metzora meditates in isolation, undergoes a whole series of steps and returns to society greatly strengthened.

Or take the time of separation between husband and wife during a woman's menstrual flow. The נדה period is not just a period of abstinence. It is meant to have its own positive dynamic, allowing the couple to focus on certain aspects of the relationships which otherwise would not be given attention. The physical relation, if expressed without a break, can actually prevent certain dimensions of non-physical communication and bonding from maturing:

Any relationship must first have a basic foundation of respect. On this has to be built trust. Once there is trust there can be love. If the parties don't respect each other, they won't come to trust each other either. And if trust is lacking, love will never endure. A woman's cycle is meant to allow for this structure to unfold.

First there is respect. When a woman is in Nidah, a man is taught that his wife is not an object - his possession - to be made available to him at all times. Rather, she is a partner with whom to create holiness.

Then there is trust: Firstly, there is the expression of trust which the Almighty puts in his people. No man made system would ever have created a system of counting 7 days, where all the checking is completely dependent on the trustworthiness of the people doing the checking (the women) and the commitment of both parties to something which is totally hidden from public view.

Secondly, for the same reason, there is the trust, which a husband places in his wife. A husband is, after all, חייב כרתת if he has relations with his wife while she is still in נדה. Yet, he is totally dependent on her integrity to avoid this.

Trust facilitates joy: In fact, this period, despite the Tumah involved, has its own, unique joy. Whereas the words גילה, רנה, דיצה, וחזרה (in the שבועה ברכות) apply to a woman is טהורה; שלום ורעות; אהבה, אחוה, applies when a woman is בנדה.

Finally, there is love: The physical relationship can now be renewed, after the transformative effects of the Mikvah (discussed below), with renewed freshness and passion.

In many cases of Tumah, the person had to count a certain number of days until they were pure. (e.g. a Nidah and a metzorah.) Counting is done in Judaism to show that something is dear to us. G-d commands Moshe Rabbeinu on several occasions to count the Jewish people rather than just tell him how many. This says Rashi, reflects G-d's love of the Jewish people. G-d, so to speak, wants to keep on recounting his people. Counting towards something also creates expectation, the longing and looking forward to an event, as in the Sefiras HaOmer.

Another component of purification is Mikvah. We do not ultimately understand how water purifies, but we do know that it provides the spiritual component, the form or inner content, to the physical reality. The waters of the Mikvah represent the primordial waters of creation. These waters filled the earth, and all of creation emerged from them. Someone who goes into a mikvah is undergoing a process of re-creation. Similarly, in the case of a metzorah, the person cut his hair to show this new beginning – everything would grow from today.

Therefore the water has to be מים חיים – attached to a natural source of water, attached to the ground and not in a self-contained utensil. For it is the natural sources of water in the earth, that were original waters created by G-d. These are the waters over which G-d's presence hovered and to which the person now wishes to return and be reborn. The mikvah is like a womb, the womb of the original creation. The fact that water is the source of all physical life (and hence is called מים חיים) is but a parable to its deeper powers.

Jeremiah calls G-d the Mikvah of the Jewish people - מקוה ישראל, for He is the רוח אלוקים המרחפת על פני המים which is the source of the Mikvah's remarkable powers.

Water, being a fluid, represents transition. The original creation was all water, all change, which was totally unstable and therefore destructive until G-d, hovering over the water, brought the water and His control and created a place of stability, (dry land) so that the water could now be a mikvah – a process of positive change:

(י) א (ט) ויאמר אלהים יקנו המים מתחת השמים אל מקום אחד ותראה היבשה ויהי כן:
ויקרא אלהים ליבשה ארץ ולמקוה המים קרא ימים וירא אלהים כי טוב:

The fact that a person emerges from the mikvah as 'a new person' means that the מקוה always comes as a transition from a lower to a higher state. For example, a נגו goes to the mikvah as the final transition from non-Jew to Jew. Similarly, there is a custom to go to the מקוה before שבת and the חגים and as a חיוב before יום כפור. Women go after their menstrual cycle and there is a custom for some after תשובה from being a נחומר. All of these are transitions, entering a higher dimension of time or, in the case of the non-Jew, connecting with a higher level soul, a soul which will now be in harmony with the Torah.

The same applies to other forms of transitions. The Kohen Gadol went to the mikvah on Yom Kippur connected with his going into the Holies of Holies. The Sages have decreed that we should wash our hands - נטילת ידים – before eating bread. This is based on several reasons, but it is modeled after the requirement of to purify our whole bodies (in a mikvah) before entering the Temple. The Sages decreed that we should practice this holiness when eating a meal, which is meant to be elevated by us, turning it into a קרבן . The table becomes the מזבח; the salt is in memory of the (קרבת). The blessing we say is על נטילת ידים – *on the raising of our hands*, for we raise all aspects of the meal up through mikveh-like water. In fact, even the utensils (if they are made by a non-Jew) get dipped in this Mikvah.

אחרי מות

The Yom Kippur Avoda

G-d promised the Jewish people that He would dwell in our midst even when we are Tameh – טמא: השוכן אתם בתוך טומאתם – טמא. In addition, he provided us with specific processes of Tahara when we mess up. But Tumah, indeed all forms of negativity, leave their legacy, some impression, even after purification. To get rid of all of the stains of sin G-d gave us the gift of Yom Kippur.

The atonement of the day joins forces with Teshuva, itself a mysterious phenomenon. Without this beautiful gift our sins would multiply and we would all be headed towards self-destruction. We can and should do Teshuvah any and every day. But here lies a day whose very essence is a kaparah and which has, according to some, a special mitzvah of Teshuvah all of its own.

On this day, the Jews are like angels, beyond food and drink, standing, without shoes. At Sinai, the Jews reached the level of the First Man before the sin. This was lost with the Cheit HaEigel. On Yom Kippur we received atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf. Some impression of the pre-sin level remained with the Jews. It is this which we tap into on Yom Kippur.

In the times of the Beis HaMikdash, all the Korbanos of Yom Kippur were brought exclusively by the Cohen Gadol, who was central to the Kaparah process. He wore only four, white garments, reserved exclusively for Yom Kippur, when he went into the Heichal (The Kodesh and the Kodesh HaKedoshim), where he performed the special Avodah of the day. So too, we wear white on Yom Kippur, signifying purification from sin. The reason that the Cohen did not wear his golden garments for this part of the service is because Bnei Yisroel used their gold to build the Golden Calf and therefore אין קטיגור נעשה סניגור – that which comes to accuse simultaneously be that which comes to defend.

The Cohen Gadol brought korbanos with 3 Viduyim for 3 sets of people:

1. For his own personal atonement
2. For the entire priestly family
3. For the entire Jewish people

The Korban for the entire Jewish people was a Seir, a goat. Similarly, the Seir HaMishtaleach, which had to be thrown over a cliff was a goat. These had to be similar in appearance. The blood of one of these goats becomes a חטאת הפנים – sprinkled in the Holy of Holies itself. Normally, going into that place would bring death to himself or any other Jew. Even on Yom Kippur, there are a series of offerings that he had to bring, before he was ready (and it was safe) to enter the Holy of Holies. But there was one more thing – טז ג: בזאת יבא אהרן אל הקדש – “With this” Aaron should come into the Holy of Holies. Chazal tell us that “this” is the Jewish People. It is because he is representing the Jewish people, that they are all united under him that the Cohen Gadol can do such an awesome thing.

The Kodesh Kedoshim is a place so thick with holiness that, if a person were to go there under normal circumstances, his soul would fly out of his body and he would die. The holiness of Yom Kippur was such that it raised the Cohen Gadol sufficiently so that he could emerge from this awesome place, soul and body intact. Even then, there were many cases when the Cohen Gadol's personal level was

inadequate. The consequences were swift, predictable and final. A rope was attached to the Cohen Gadol to drag him out, should he not make it out alive.

In fact, our parsha starts off with a warning – get too close to G-d like Nadav and Avihu, and your souls will soar upwards to HaSh-m, leaving your body a lifeless mass. **אל יבא בכל עת אל הקודש ... ולא ימות**. Something about this day, when we remove ourselves from the physical world – no eating, drinking, or physical pleasures of any kind – allows us to be like Malachim. And a Malach – at least the appointed High Priest Malach – can go safely where no man could survive. On this holiest of days, the holiest level of the three dimensions of the world merge – **נשמה, נפש, ועולם**. The soul of the High Priest begins to soar beyond the dimensions of time and space. And together with him, to some degree, is the Jewish People – they would stand shoulder to shoulder in the Beis HaMikdash and yet still find plenty of room to bow – literally defying space.

The Beis HaMikdash was a place which, to begin with, lent itself to higher dimensions – the Aron stood in the Holy of Holy Holies and, though it has definite dimensions – was not included in the spatial arrangements of the Beis HaMikdash.

The Cohen Gadol reached his awesome level of holiness through a combination of several factors: The day itself certainly did its bit, but it also required enormous preparation on the part of the Cohen Gadol to take full advantage of this holiness.

Seven days before, the Kohen Gadol went to live in the Temple area, was twice sprinkled with the ashes of the Parah Adumah and learned what he had to about the Yom Kippur service. Yom Kippur night, the Kohen Gadol did not sleep at all. The first part of the night he studied with the Chachamim. At about midnight, the avodah began, starting with the Trumas HaDeshen.

The Cohen Gadol was also helped by the Avos. Moshe Rabbeinu himself had only achieved his holiness on Har Sinai in the Zechus of the Avos. Each one of the Korbanos the Cohen Gadol brought was carefully chosen to simulate the animals which the Avos brought on different occasions.

The second factor was the power of the Jewish people as a whole. **בזאת יבא** – **“With this”** – with the merit of the Jewish people. Aaron was able to go where no man dare tread because he emerged as a part of Klal Yisroel, and used their power to enter. Aaron entered the Temple as the Shaliach of Bnei Yisrael. It was as if the whole Jewish people was entering this Holy of Holies. No man on his own would have the spiritual power to transcend normal human limitations and emerge from the Holy of Holies with body and soul intact. Like Moses, the Cohen Gadol had a general soul, covering the spirituality of the whole Jewish people. While the Cohen Gadol was in the Holy of Holies, it says of the nation – **והכהנים והעם** – the **עזרה** comes from the word **עזר** to help. For the nation and the Cohanim were the helpers of the Cohen Gadol in his task.

From the very outset, Moshe is told concerning Aaron:

שמות כח: ואתה הקרב אליך את אהרון אחיך מתוך בני ישראל

Nadav and Avihu, in their great holiness, found themselves unmarried and without children, cut off from their Jewish brethren. And in this act they lost sight of the source of their power, the Jewish people, and could not sustain entry into that holy place.

The Avodah of the Kohen purified the nation to the degree that they were then ready to receive the final Slichah and Tahara from HaSh-m. That could only come through directly facing their maker – **לפני ד' (לבד) תטהרו** - and for this we need a day of fasting and Teshuva. Yom Kippur beckons.

The Seir HaMishtaleach

As a part of the Yom Kippur service, two similar looking goats get chosen by lots and go in opposite directions. One goat goes into the Holy of Holies, the other, the Seir HaMishtaleach does not make it as a korban in the Beis HaMikdash at all. It gets thrown, backwards, over a high, rocky cliff called Azazel, its limbs breaking into pieces before it is half way down. Somehow, this process has a great atoning power, and the verse testifies that the Seir carries all the sins of the Jewish people.

Chazal state in point blank fashion that understanding the purpose and nature of the Seir HaMishtaleach is an intellectual challenge. Seemingly the grandest and holiest moment of the year, the disappearance of the Kohen Gadol behind the Paroches, was really not as comprehensively effective as a goat that had no place as a Korban even on the outer Mizbeach and instead got thrown over a cliff!

The viduy which the Kohen Gadol made for the Jewish People was done on the Seir HaMishtaleach rather than on its look alike, the Chatos Hapnim. It seems strange though, that seemingly the grandest and holiest moment of the year, the disappearance of the Kohen Gadol behind the Paroches, was really not as comprehensively effective as a goat that had no place as a Korban even on the outer Mizbeach and instead got taken to a totally barren desert, thrown over a cliff witnessed, at a distance, by just a handful of people.

The Seir which becomes the Chatos Hapnim comes to connect us more strongly to G-d, while the Seir HaMishtaleach comes to break our ties with impurity. The former is chosen by the right hand of mercy, the latter by the left hand of justice. Both were given as gifts by man to G-d. The Cohen Gadol does a semicha on the Seir HaMishtaleach and confesses for the sins of the whole Jewish nation. The Seir then receives all the sins of the Jewish nation. When it does this it becomes so impure that it is considered dead long before it is killed. The Cohen who takes it also becomes impure. The nation then waited with baited breath for word that the Seir had reached the desert. As the Seir fell down the cliff, a purple ribbon which hung in the Beis Hamikdash which, at that time, turned white, as an indication that the sins of the nation had been forgiven. The symbolism is clear. Here is something, designated to carry all the sins of the nation, which becomes so weighted with impurity that it can no longer be sacrificed on the alter.

If the sins of the Jewish people were a part of their essence, there could be no such event as the Seir Hamistaleach. It is only because the Yetzer Hora is an artificial invention that allows us to throw it over a cliff. And in fact, it is the very act of choosing the one goat for the Holy of Holies that renders the second goat the Seir HaMistaleach. The first goat is raised up in holiness, automatically separating from the evil, and evicting it from all human existence where after it will perforce destruct.

The Seir represents one of the intermediary forces which G-d set up to bestow His goodness on us. The force of the Seir is the one that gives us choice and hence is the force through which all destruction, dispute and human separation flows. This is represented by the destructive cliff in a barren desert over which the Seir is thrown. In fact, the person who accompanied the goat died within the year. The cliff was in a barren desert. Were it to be in a fertile plain, the Seir would cause it to become barren.

Yom Kippur is a day when even these forces line up to support rather than destroy the Jewish people. This wretched agent of G-d also gets to participate in the holiness of the day. It does so by accepting all the evil of the Jewish people on itself,

leaving the Jews pure and holy. It shows that ultimately all that happens in this world has its roots in the Divine Will.

Like the only other animal to be sacrificed outside the Temple grounds, the Parah Adumah, its purpose is decidedly one of purification. The Goralos – the lots – to choose between the goats also shows that this is not our choice. We bring the two goats to G-d's door so to speak – they are both given to Him. And it is His choice to give the one goat to be sent to Azazel. We are but agents of His will.

In another generation, Haman was also to draw lots to determine the future of the Jewish people. But G-d had already drawn the lots of the Seir on the side of the Jewish people and shown how even destructive forces will ultimately line up with this. So Haman's lots start the process of his own destruction.

Haman was the descendent of Eisav, the bitter enemy of his brother Yaakov. Yaakov ultimately won the battle of the birthright and his father's blessings by bringing two goats. One he used as the paschal lamb and one he brought to his father, to appease his father's request of a gift from Eisav. These two goats were the forbears of the two goats brought on Yom Kippur. The first is the goat brought into the temple. The blood of this goat represents the blood of the Jewish nation, for goats blood, unlike other animals, looks similar to human blood. (This is why Yosef's brothers used goats blood to soak his coat and claim he was killed.)

The second is the Seir Hamishtaleach, which was thrown over a cliff was in lieu of Eisav's gift. It may seem superficially that these two goats are the same, that Eisav looks, dresses and speaks like Yaakov. But a deeper look will show the complete opposites of their real essences – one to the Holiest of Holies and one to utter destruction.

The verse states that the Seir comes to bear כל עוונותם, all the iniquities of the Jewish people. The Midrash interprets עוונותם as עוונות תם - The עוונות of Yaakov, איש תם. The Seir comes to reveal that the core of the Jewish people remains pure. We will have nothing to do with the Seir Hamishtaleach and the ideas it represents. The cliff of destruction, the impurity of the accompanying Cohen, the whole procedure creates a huge distance between us and that Seir, as indeed there always was. With or without the physical procedure, Yom Kippur is just a time of that clarity.

Homosexuality & the Concept of Family

In this week's parsha, the Torah unequivocally bans male homosexual relations: (ואת זכר לא תשכב משכבי אשה תועבה הוא.) The prohibition for women is included in the verse: ויקרא יהוה כמעשה ארץ מצרים אשר ישבתם בה לא תעשו. In addition, there are up to four other sources of the same-sex prohibition, including the spilling of seed. It is also prohibited for non-Jews.

The Torah makes reasonable boundaries. It allows us to eat many foods, forbidding others. It allows us to have male-female relations, but directs this to the context of marriage. Man's sexual urges are particularly powerful, therefore, G-d says at the beginning of the laws of morality אני ה' אלקיכם. I am your Creator. I know your nature, and I would not give you something that was not perfectly in your interests and well within your capabilities.

The Torah terms all sexual immorality in general, as well as a number of separate *arayos* prohibitions by the word תועבה, which means *Toeh Atah Ba* - a mistaken or even an unnatural and therefore repulsive act, one which Jews themselves did not normally express. The word תועבה is also used for several other things, most extensively in the context of idolatry. The *arayos* called תועבה were also acts practiced by the surrounding idolatrous nations. Yet, homosexuality is singled out for this title of תועבה.

Most *Arayos* prohibition, adultery, bestiality, relations with a sibling, etc., and these have all been easily understood by most of mankind through most of time. The Torah includes homosexuality in this list. We should develop a shared repulsion towards all those things even should we be so unfortunate to live in times and places where the local sexual mores will begin to eat away at our own understanding of why these things are forbidden.

The Torah considers marriage to be the only viable vehicle for bringing up children, and it therefore prohibited all other kinds of sexual contact. The great defect of a homosexual is that he cannot have a family as the Torah defines it and it is only on such families that he causes His Shechinah to rest. G-d chose the family as the primary vehicle through which He would filter His presence on earth. It is the defining framework through which a person ceases being a private person and connects to the broader Jewish community. We need to understand why this is so and why can other relationships not duplicate this?

Every created being is but one part of the whole of creation. On its own, it remains isolated and is doomed to be an incomplete part of a whole. Initially, man was alone and therefore in a state of independence in which he did not feel the need to relate to others. *And G-d said: "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make for him a helpmeet against him. Targum Unkelus translates לא טוב as לא תקין, i.e. this is an uncorrected or incomplete state. Man, at that stage, was in an intrinsically not good reality for the only being that can stand alone and yet still in a complete state of unity is G-d himself. Therefore, man had to have a partner.*

The animals also have partners. But, the animals were created as two beings from the very outset. Man alone was first created and only afterwards was his partner created from him. Man therefore displays a higher level of unity than the animals. He is not a total unity like G-d, for, as a created being, he needs a partner. Yet he has a dimension of unity to him, being created one at the outset and making him more connected to unity, more able to achieve that state of unity which he began with at the outset.

G-d then took Adam himself and created two beings from one. Now, Adam found himself divided causing him to feel the lack of half of himself. Each half of **אדם** now had a back, representing the missing half. **אדם** now exists as a potential to be actualized, like the ground he comes from.

By uniting, man and woman are simply returning to their natural state, i.e. their original condition. They become one because they were once one. By actively re-creating this state themselves they are re-creating G-d's original act of the creation of **אדם**. Hence, the goal was unity, not love. *Therefore should a man leave his father and his mother and he should cleave to his wife and they should become one flesh.*

A same-sex relationship can never achieve this. Such a relationship can be very warm and caring, loving and committed. But it can never achieve *dveykus* and *achdus*. Two gays together, remain two people, never one. For the original Adam was male and female, not two males or two females. Even were such a relationship not based on licentiousness – rather on the desire to give to each other, it would still not imitate G-d's giving. For it would not be the kind of giving that would be achieving a higher unity in the world. This is an incredible loss of the person's potential and therefore the Torah forbade it.

The Torah position does not negate the possibility that people may be born with homosexual urges. Judaism accepts that the feelings of the homosexual are real for him. In fact, Orthodox and other homosexuals are often in great pain. Some homosexuals will never overcome their urges, and indeed Judaism recognizes that many of our yetzers will be with us for the rest of our days. However, this does not mean that the battle should not be fought. There are urges, even overwhelming ones that are never cured; people learn to cope with them. "Keeping *halacha* was never said to be easy, only right."

The Mitzvos come to transform us. We are not meant to stay as we are, and to give unrestrained expression to this, especially in the area of our sexual urges. The reason that we make a *bris milah* – a covenant with G-d, is just so that we would sanctify that part of our body as well. When a physical relation takes place between a man and a woman who are married to each other, great holiness is produced.

Some homosexuals have maintained their orientation but have been able to bring themselves to the point where they were able to marry and love a woman as well. For others, it may be that their *avoda* is *prishus*.

The homosexual is not being asked to deny his nature as a homosexual, but nor should he deny his Jewishness. It is the homosexual act rather than the person which the Torah derides.

In the words of Rav Aaron Feldman (abridged): *He is obligated to achieve life's goals by directing his life towards spiritual growth, sanctity and perfection of his character -- no less than is any other Jew. He will merit the same share in the world to come which every Jew merits, minimally by being the descendant of Avraham Avinu and maximally by totally devoting his life towards the service of God.*

Family and children are important in Jewish society but one who does not have these need not feel that he is not a full-fledged member of the community.

Can a homosexual be expected to live as a celibate? I believe a Jewish homosexual can accomplish this if he decides that the Jewish people is his "wife and children." It is possible to do this if he throws his every spare moment into devotion to the welfare of his people. There are many areas where he can do this. ...

Because he does not have a family, a homosexual can make serious contributions to Judaism which others cannot. For example, bringing Judaism to smaller communities where there are no facilities for raising a Jewish family....

Activities involving much travel, such as fundraising, a vital aspect of Jewish survival, is best accomplished by someone who is not tied down to a family....

It is no accident that homosexuals are generally more sensitive to the needs of others and to matters of the spirit (viz., the high percentage in the arts) than the rest of the population. This is because their function in society is meant to be one where their family is the Jewish people. Their sensitivity is an emotional tool which they were granted for devoting themselves to, and empathizing with, others....

The fact is that neither homosexual or heterosexual activity has the capacity to grant happiness to humans, as even a cursory glance at our unhappy world will demonstrate. The only activity which can give us happiness is striving towards reaching the true goals of life. Life is not meant to be an arena for material satisfaction. It is to be used to carry out G-d's will by coming closer to Him and serving Him by keeping His commandments. ...

Sexual activity, by which the family unit can be built, is only one of the activities with which a man can serve God. But someone who does not have this capacity still has a whole life and unlimited opportunities to serve God....

It is difficult for us to understand why certain people were given certain shortcomings as their challenge in life and other were not. We cannot fathom God's ways but we can be sure that there is a beneficence behind these handicaps. When these shortcomings are met they will grant us a greater satisfaction from our lives and a deeper devotion to G-d than if we were not given them....

I will add that I do not think that it is necessary for you to give up on the hope of someday having a family. The ways of Providence are manifold. "Can the hand of G-d ever be inadequate?" ...

Struggling Torah Jews, regardless of their problems, are beloved in the eyes of HaShem. They did not seek this problem. HaShem gave them a terrible test, and nobody really knows how to solve it. May HaShem enlighten us to know how to deal with it.

We can never presume to understand the pain a homosexual, grappling with his issue, may go through. Yet it is important that we express some appreciation that many homosexuals struggle greatly.

We need to strike a balance between de-stigmatizing the homosexual as person, while maintaining our deep repugnance to the acts he may be involved with.

Many gay people, faced by the impenetrable wall of the prohibition against homosexuality, just give up on Judaism. This need not be so. A person does not have to face this issue at the outset. No-one should be asked to face what they view as the most difficult and challenging issue of their life, right at the beginning of their relationship with Judaism.

There is no category of a "homosexual" within halachic frameworks. Judaism doesn't define people based on sexual desire; we do not define people who lust over married woman or people who desire non-kosher food in separate halachic groups. Jewishly, he is not a minority with fewer rights. He is a Jew who, like all Jews, needs to repress his evil inclination in general.

Outreach for homosexual Jews ought to be done as much as some might advocate outreach to an intermarried couple. "We must create a situation which offers a positive alternative to the gay synagogue and to the even worse choices of complete abandonment and assimilation."

קְדוּשִׁים

To Be Holy

The Jew is charged not only to be good, but to be holy. In fact, one cannot be truly good if one is not also holy. When the Jews get chosen at Sinai, the emphasis was on them being a kingdom of priests (ממלכת כהנים) and a holy nation (גוי קדוש).

Three times in this week's portion is the Jew charge to "be holy!". The first time has to do with man's basic sensuality; the second with idolatry – beliefs of the mind and holiness of thoughts - and the third with food.

This Mitzvah permeates and informs all others. One can be strictly kosher but still eat like a pig. One can observe all the laws of family relations, and yet miss out on the deep spirituality inherent in husband and wife conjugal relations. One can be technically within the bounds of Jewish law, and use that to justify all kinds of animal-like behavior. So, to the all these commands was added a meta-command – "be holy".

All of the 10 Commandments are hinted at in our Parsha ; it is as if we go through all the fundamentals of the Torah again, now infusing them with holiness. And in fact all the Jews gathered to hear these words as they did when they first received the Ten Commandments.

G-d gives a reason for His demand that we be holy – כִּי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי – "for I am holy". On the one hand, "for I am holy" means that you are not being asked to be holy like me –an impossible request. But on the other, I am telling you that because I am holy, so can you be – for you are made in My image. Moreover, the way that my holiness is reflected in this world is through you.

Holiness must also infuse our every action. We need to radiate both the letter and the spirit of the Torah – to be infused with holiness . So too in areas not proscribed by the Torah at all – all are covered by the huge embrace of being holy.

When G-d took us out of Egypt, He commanded us to separate ourselves from the impurity of the Egyptians. Here we see a negative definition of holiness – the idea of being separate and apart. At Sinai, the positive aspect of holiness was reflected - the Shechina rested on the Jewish nation and we became a holy nation. We could now infuse all the world around us with this holiness. Rather than being dragged down by the material world, this world gets elevated by the holy Jew when he chooses to use it. The paradigm of this is the Shabbos, where we do very material things; we eat and sleep and dress at a higher level than the weekday, and yet the holiness of the day elevates and spiritualizes all these activities. Such a person is like a Tabernacle, and any food he eats is like a sacrifice brought on an altar.

Holiness - Kedusha is finally a Heavenly gift, not something a bodily-laden human could achieve on his own. What we can do is make the plunge into Kedusha by withdrawing from all things negative, thereby turning ourselves into worthy receptacles for G-d's bestowment of positive Kedusha as well.

Unlike other Mitzvos, holiness is not clearly defined. . Each individual will relate to this Mitzvah differently. Each will have his own starting point, and therefore לְכַל אֶחָד מֵאֵלֶיךָ יִשְׁרָאֵל – speak to each individual according to his uniqueness,

according to his own spiritual challenges. It is up to our own spiritual creativity what we will achieve as holy people.

Moreover, since this is a Mitzvah that ultimately reaches to get closer to G-d – their really is no upper limit to this Mitzvah. Therefore the words are put in the future tense – קדושים תהיו – “You will or should be holy”, for this mitzvah will be constantly unfolding before us.

As we would expect, the idea of holiness permeates the prayers. Interestingly, though, the *Kedushas* we say all require a minyan, the minimum unit of community – אין דבר דבקדושה פחות מעשרה. Seemingly, one can only truly become holy when attached to a community. Our instincts are the opposite – we imagine a holy hermit, living simply in a cave, and meditating all day. The opposite is true. Holiness can only be achieved by engaging this world, by building a community, by spiritualizing the environment.

Not to Hate

לא תשנא

ויקרא יט:יז - לא תשנא את אחיך בלבבך, הוכח תוכח את עמיתך, ולא תשא עליו חטא

You should not hate your friend in your heart [rather] you should surely rebuke your neighbor and you should not bear because of him a sin.

There are two separate ways of understanding this posuk. The simplest way is to see the whole verse as telling us how to avoid hatred. According to this, the verse should read as follows:

If your friend has in some way wronged you, even if he has not done something objectively sinful, do not be reticent in discussing the issue with him, thereby building up negative feelings towards him (לא תשנא); rather have it out with him in order to resolve the issue (הוכח תוכיח), otherwise your feelings toward him may actually lead you to the sin of hating him (ולא תשא עליו חטא).

Let us say that you did not get an invitation to a close friends' wedding and your feelings were hurt by this. Your friend has certainly not done any objective transgression by not inviting you, and the best thing would be for you to simply forgive the person and move on. But let us say that your feelings of hurt are out of control. You begin to get angrier and angrier. This can begin a vicious cycle which will end up in your actually hating your friend, and transgressing this Torah prohibition. At this stage, one has to have it out with one's friend. This is what the Torah means by *Tochacha* (rebuke) in this context.

One possibility is that the whole thing was a misunderstanding. The invitation got sent but never made it, etc. Another possibility is that your friend really did mean to leave you out, because he was inviting only family members, or a very small crowd.

However, there is always a possibility that you were intentionally left out, perhaps because your friend didn't think you were that close any more. Perhaps, when your friend realizes that you were hurt, he will feel that he made a mistake, apologize and make up.

So the purpose of the *mitzvah* is two-fold. It is there to prevent you from sinning by hating, erroneously, your fellow-Jew; and it is there to help your fellow-Jew to correct any wrongdoing to you.

Even where the other person agrees with you that he is in the wrong, but still refuses to request your *méchila* (forgiveness) or to make up, some opinions do not allow you to bear resentment. All opinions agree that it is better even in such a case to forgive the person.

The trouble with sorting out these kind of things is that they take time – sometimes lots of it. A carefully written letter, for example, can take many hours. We do not realize that, in the long run, we probably will spend more time worrying and fretting over the issue than we would just taking care of it, and things of this sort easily escalate. Besides, the Torah clearly commands us to take care of the matter. When we are committed to something, we always find the time for it. An observant Jew would not claim that he does not have time to keep Shabbat, to daven or to make a *Pesach seder*. Sorting out our conflicts with our fellow-Jew should be no different.

Yes, it may be intimidating or embarrassing to confront a friend or a stranger over an outstanding issue. We may think that it is useless to try and change that person's mind, convincing ourselves that people do not change in general. But the Torah believes in people enough to tell us to make the attempt, and we should surely believe in them just as much, and to act on that optimism. The results are not guaranteed, but the obligation to act is clear.

Some hold that the prohibition of לא תשנא applies only to one who hates his fellow Jew in his heart and hides this fact. However, if he reveals his hatred through word or deed, then the prohibition of לא תשנא does not apply. Such hatred is still prohibited, but because of the prohibitions of ולא תטור and לא תקום and because of the positive mitzvah of ואהבת לרעך כמוך but not because of לא תשנא.

The issue of hating a Rasha is much more complex. The Torah perspective on evil people is not that we want them destroyed – rather we want them to Tshuva. As Rebbe Meir's great and wise wife, Bruriah, pointed out, it is the sin we want destroyed not the sinner. Although the Gemorrah tells us that it is either permissible or even a mitzvah to hate a Rasha, one has to first rebuke the person and attempt to get him to do teshuvah first. Today, we may never reach the stage which would allow us to hate him. According to Tosfos, we are not allowed hate the person in a normal sense, as one would hate an enemy. Rather, our hatred has to be a "hatred of fulfilling a mitzvah". We hate the person because that is what the Torah tells us we have to do, not because of some passionate feelings of negativity and rejection that well up from within us.

Only when a person has the status of an אפיקורוס or a מיין is it a מצוה to hate the person unconditionally. Then, in fact, one may not be obligated in the מצוה of תוכחה at all.

The א תני states that what one ought to do is to hate the evil deeds of the *Rasha*. Simultaneously however, one would love the good that is hidden in him. How else are we going to genuinely have the person's interests at heart? And if we do not have the person's interests at heart, how are we going to rebuke them properly? Imagine, writes Rav Moshe Cordevoro, that this רשע were to channel all his energies into goodness; picture this person, then, becoming a בתורה; do you not long to help this future great to fulfill his potential?

The Oirkei Avos (אבות פ"א מ"ב) Aaron is described as a אדם שלום. When Aharon saw someone doing something wrong, he would befriend him and become so close to him that this person would say to himself: "Aharon is my friend because he thinks that I am a good Jew. Were Aharon to know that I am having these evil thoughts he would no longer wish to be my friend." He would thereby be encouraged to leave his evil thoughts and do teshuvah.

This poses a difficulty, for we are enjoined not to befriend a sinner, and, even to hate him at some level. The commentators explain that it is permissible to befriend a sinner if the whole purpose of the friendship is to change his behavior for the better, and not because of any real interest in the friendship per se. It would have to be clear, however, that such a friendship would not endanger one's own Yiddishkeit in any way.

However, the weight of opinion appears to be with those who limit the friendship to a more superficial one. In addition, there are certain types of sinners towards whom one is entirely exempt from giving any rebuke .

Tochacha

ויקרא י"ז - לא תשנא את אחיך בלבבך, הוכח תוכח את עמיתך, ולא תשא עליו חטא

You should not hate your friend in your heart [rather] you should surely rebuke your neighbor and you should not bear because of him a sin.

The Torah perspective on evil people is not that we want them destroyed – rather we want them to Tshuva. As Rebbe Meir's great and wise wife, Bruriah, pointed out, it is the sin we want destroyed not the sinner. However, the Torah mandates a complex set of feelings we are supposed to have towards such a person. We are in fact enjoined to simultaneously hate his evil deeds but love the good that lies deeper within him. How else are we going to genuinely have the person's interests at heart? And if we do not have the person's interests at heart, how are we going to rebuke them properly? At best we will say the right things but the person will recognize that we are not coming from a place of love. At worst we will won't even get the words right.

The *Mitzvah* of *Tochacha* requires unusual wisdom, exceptional sophistication and great forethought. Chazal learn from the double language - *הוכח תוכח* - that we have to keep on rebuking the person until we get it right, or at least until the recipient has gotten angry with you. Once one is exempted from rebuking one's neighbor, it then becomes prohibited to do so. But until that stage, one has to keep on trying.

Of course, repetition on its own is not what the Torah is referring to. Rebuke has to be done in a way which stands the best chance of being effective. This involves first and foremost a gentle approach. This may mean commitment to a process, rather than a discreet act, and it may require great subtlety.

If one knows that repeating the rebuke is not going to help, and perhaps even make matters worse, then one is required to take time out to think of a different way of approaching things. Perhaps someone else could be more effective.

But it is not just the ends – the person's Teshuva – that you have to get right, The means, the way your rebuke, have to avoid embarrassing the person. (*ולא תשא עליו חטא*.) This makes things much more challenging. It is much easier to just give someone a blast on the street. But that is the way of this world - doing the wrong thing is almost always much easier than doing the right thing!

Someone may be completely committed to Judaism but still require our help to get some aspect of Torah observance right. Perhaps, someone in a very special relationship with that person (e.g. a Rosh Yehsivah, parent or close friend) could help this person address an underlying personality defect or the gaps in their education. Often there is just a knowledge gap. Even Torah Jews are sometimes ignorant (or otherwise שוגג) of a Torah law. We could define this kind of rebuke as *העמדה על טעות*, helping the person to realize his/her error .

Sometimes, however, *תקפה יצר*, the person knows that he is doing wrong but gave in to his baser impulses. Theft, adultery, and driving dangerously often fall into this category. Here we see an interesting thing. If the transgressor is a Talmid Chacham, the law says that one can presume that, by the next day, he done Teshuvah.

Most Jews today, however lack a basic commitment to keeping the Torah. It is clear that any demand of immediate behavioral change will be a total failure. One is therefore exempt from *תוכחה* of that form. Here rebuke becomes a process of long term education .

In the case of an entire community, the rebuke will be more challenging. In such cases, where the rebuke will not help at all, the person is exempt from the Mitzvah.

Rebuke is an art – it has to be woven into a fabric of positive words and love, to approach him in a way which preserves his sense of dignity and honor. Human nature is such that it is simply counter-productive to rebuke in a hostile, threatening or aggressive way. Today, in particular, we are not capable of receiving "tough" Tochacha. One should talk gently and softly and give a person to understand that this is for his own good.

Someone is not capable of rebuking in this way, is exempt from the whole *Mitzvah*.

There is no formula as to what this approach is going to be most effective - it has to be worked out for each individual recipient, your relationship to the recipient and other local variables. But rebuke, done properly, is rarely worthless. Even where one does not see immediate results, one is actually getting through, bit by bit to the person.

Ideally one should not simply point out erroneous behavior - to the recipient what he has done wrong, it is preferable that one gives the person the insight into how to correct his behavior. People in the thick of their own problems and transgressions find it hard to "get out of themselves" and to see how to go about correcting their situation. In fact, the word הוֹכִיחַ comes from the word כַּח, strength. Part of the מִצְוָה is to provide the wherewithal (strength) to the מוֹכֵחַ to be able to change.

Lifnei Iver

ויקרא יט יד: לא תקלל חרש ולפני עור לא תתן מכשל ויראת מאלקיך אני ד

Do not curse a deaf man and before a blind man do not put a stumbling block and you should fear from your G-d; I am your G-d

This verse tells us not to cause others to sin, nor to give inappropriate advice to someone who will not be able to discriminate for himself (i.e. someone who is blind in this matter). For example do not tell someone, "Sell this field and purchase a donkey with the money," when really you are telling him this because you want the field."

Rather you should fear G-d (ויראת מאלוקיך) Since people cannot know whether this person intends by his advice good or bad, therefore the verse states that you should fear your G-d, (for) He knows what your (true) thoughts really are.

One transgresses *Lifnei Iver* by telling someone to do a transgression by giving, selling, fixing or lending an article which will be used to this purpose or in any other way, accidentally or deliberately making it easier for that person to sin. We all understand that it would be immoral to give a potential murderer a knife; nor would we lend a drunk money to go and buy liquor. By the same token, we should not lend someone an electric drill whom we think is likely to use it late at night and keep the neighbors up or to lend someone a sefer kodesh whom we know will read it in the bathroom.

Although the Torah did not prohibit this where the person was capable of doing the transgression on his own, the Sages prohibited this as well (מסייע בדבר (עבירה).

One does not have to be concerned about unlikely but prohibited usage of an article. Similarly one can sell an article to someone, even if there is concern that he will in turn re-sell the article to a second party who will then use it for forbidden purposes.

One is allowed to engage in a Mitzvah, even if by so doing one might indirectly cause others to do a transgression. Therefore, a mohel may perform a circumcision on Shabbos, even if people may drive to the Bris or smoke at the ceremony.

It is not clear whether the prohibition of לפני עור applies to a situation where the person is already transgressing. An example of the latter would be a newspaper which is being produced on Shabbat by a Jew. Whether you buy the newspaper or not is not going to determine whether the newspaper continues to be produced or not. But it does add to the circulation figures, encouraging the overall success of the newspaper. However, if your aid to the person will increase his transgression, then it is prohibited.

Examples of לפני עור include:

Acting as the witness to an interest taking loan between two Jews. In addition, both the lender and the borrower transgress לפני עור.

Failing to mark gravesites (כהנים) are prohibited from impurifying themselves by walking over a gravesite. They will not now know where this gravesite is.)

Passing or selling non-kosher food to a non-observant Jew. (One may do so with an observant Jew because there is no concern that he is going to eat the food himself.)

Giving something to be fixed to a Jew who is likely to fix it on תבט ;

Selling food to a non-Jew which he is forbidden to eat according to the Seven Noachide Laws (i.e. the limb of the living creature) .

Hitting an older (teenage) son provoking him to hit back.

Printing invitations to a Jewish wedding which states explicitly on the wedding that there will be mixed dancing. (Unless the person could just as easily take the invitations to a non-Jew to be printed.)

Love Your Neighbor – All Jews are Responsible One For the Other

In a few verses, our Parsha, deals with some of the most remarkable instructions concerning our relationships with our fellow man. We are commanded not to damage him (לא תלך רכיל) to save his life (לא תנמוד על דם רעך), not to lead our friend astray (לפני עור), not to hate him and to rebuke him if he offended us. The Torah then takes us up a rung and tells us that we are not allowed to take revenge on someone who has definitely wronged us (לא תקום), nor even may we hold feelings of resentment in our heart (לא תטורד). And, finally, we are commanded to love him (ואהבת לרעך כמוך). This tells us that love is a process which demands the achievement of all the other stages as well.

All of this is in Parshas Kedoshim, making it clear that this is not just human decency, but emerges out of, and ultimately can only emerge out of, a Torah commitment to holiness.

Rabbi Akiva states that loving your neighbor is a great principle of the Torah – זה ספר תולדות אדם. Ben Azai brings an even greater principle – זהו כלל גדול בתורה. The Shoel U'Meishiv explains that Ben Azai is not coming to argue on Rebbe Akiva. If we look at the end of the verse which Ben Azai quotes, we see it says:

זה ספר תולדות אדם ביום ברא אלוקים את האדם בצלם אלוקים ברא את האדם
זכר ונקבה בראם ויקרא את שמם אדם ביום הבראם

man is created with the name אלוקים, a plural name, even though it obviously refers to one G-d. This is to show that, although man is created man and female, he too is ultimately one, in the image of his Creator. Therein lies the possibility of loving your neighbor like yourself. We really are one big body, comprising different limbs.

Can we really be commanded to love – to have an emotion? Furthermore, does not that same Rebb Akiva who told us that loving our neighbor was a great Torah principle, also the author of another principle - that חייך קודמים – that your life comes first. However, the verse does not command a feeling - ואהבת את רעך. Rather, it says ואהבת לרעך – you should love or want for your neighbor that which you have yourself.

If you have a roof over your house, don't rejoice at your uniqueness; you should want that everyone have a roof over their heads like you. And you should work at ensuring that everyone be as blessed as you. So too with respect to other people's honor and health. You should want all the goodness and richness that you experience in your life to be had by others as well. Even in the area where you think you are unique and special you should want your friend to be like you.

When Hillel formulated this principle, he did it in the negative: What is hateful to you do not do to your neighbor. But surely the Mitzvah is not talking here only about not harming someone? Some say that Hillel phrased things negatively because he was talking to a non-Jew and that is as far as a non-Jew could go.

Hillel's formulation does not lead to giving, it does not tell you what to do in a positive way. It is more a harm principle – don't hurt your neighbor if you would not want to be hurt by him in that way. As one non-Jewish philosopher stated it: "Act in such a way that whatever you do can become a general principle." This is a great way to know that it is wrong to kill and steal. But it is not a great way to become a giver. The principle relies on me to first want to act and then ask the question. It does not

tell me where I ought to want to act to begin with. “Love your neighbor like yourself”, by contrast, tells us to actively think about all that we have, materially, in terms of self-image, emotional well-being, spiritually - and to want and work for all of that for our neighbor. Now we begin to see its greatness.

It is true that we are trained to love family members, great people, holy rabbis, friends, etc., to love some people more than others. Our body has a head and it has a heart; it has hands and it has hair. Some things are more central than others. But still, we relate to all of these as part of one body. Love is not equal to all – but it is there to all.

How far you can go with this is a function of how big you are. If you are a small person, you end with your body. A bigger person ends with his family, and a great person ends with the entire Jewish nation. (Rav Shimon Schkop). That nation includes evil as well as good people. In a remarkable statement, the Sages tell us that even a murderer who has received the death penalty is owed our love in so far as he should be killed as quickly and as painlessly as possible.

The underlying principle of this Mitzvah is to see that your neighbor is but an extension of yourself. To hurt him is like the right hand cutting the left, to love him, the same. Therefore, all Jews are responsible one for the other (כל ישראל (ערבין זה לזה). We all share each others' spiritual reality. Each one of us literally has some of our neighbor inside of us. There is, in fact, no possibility of us connecting to G-d, and receiving the rewards of that connection, if it does not lead also to unity with our fellow Jew.

If my fellow Jew does not fulfill a Mitzvah, it is then as if I did not do that mitzvah. A Tzadik cannot simply get up in the morning and say, “I am doing everything I am supposed to be doing. What does the Rasha have to do with me?” Somebody who gets up in the morning, dovens, studies Torah and does Mitzvos can still be in big trouble. The Rasha is a part of his (now missing) shleimus. He, the Tzadik, will be punished for him as much as for yourself.

When the Jews complete the Mishkan, the verse says that “*The Jewish nation did all that they were commanded by G-d*” (Shemos 39-32) *ל ט ל ב: ו ת כ ל כ ל ע ב ו ד ת מ ש כ נ א ה ל מ ו ע ד ו י ע ש ו ב נ י י ש ר א ל כ כ ל א ש ר צ י ו ו ה ד' ל ד ב ר כ נ ע ש ו*

Even though some Jews brought materials and others helped with various aspects of the building, the Torah talks of all of Bnei Yisroel as having done what G-d had commanded. Each person made a contribution to the building of the Mishkan as a part of the collective body of the Jewish people. Together, they created a model of one large Neshama.

Similarly, we are given Taryag Mitzvos - each one of the positive Mitzvos come to *metaken* one of our limbs, while each of the negative Mitzvos are *metaken* one of our *gidim*. Yet none of us is capable of doing all of the mitzvos. Some mitzvos only a Cohen, or a Yisroel and not a Cohen can do, for example. Does this mean that we are doomed to incompleteness? No, says the Ohr HaChaim, we will achieve completion through each other. We are all one whole, and your mitzvos fulfill me also.

אמור

Kiddush & Chillul HaSh-m

Sanctifying G-d's Name and its opposite, desecrating His Name occupies but one verse in the Torah, yet all of our Avodas HaSh-m ultimately amounts to this. Kiddush HaSh-m in its broadest terms means "any action that makes G-d's truth more apparent" and this is achieved every time we do His Will, for we were created for no other reason. Rabbeinu Yonah declares that *the main reason why G-d sanctified us with His Torah and Mitzvos to be a nation to him is in order to sanctify Him and to be in awe of Him.*

By keeping the Torah, we give testimony to His very existence. When we, as G-d's Chosen Nation, fail to keep His *Torah* this is a great Chillul HaSh-m. Alternatively, when someone decides to do Tshuvah and to keep his תורה, it is a great act of Kiddush HaSh-m.

Kiddush HaSh-m can be divided into two primary components – those situations which require us to die as a Jew, and those situations which require us to live as a Jew. The Rambam says that there is no middle ground where one may choose to die even though the halacha does not require this. According to the Rambam, a person who gives his life voluntarily is committing suicide.

One should rather die than commit idolatry, murder and adultery. These three commandments are so fundamental, that transgressing them gives the appearance that one is denying G-d's existence. In turn, one who gives his life for these, has done an act of Kiddush HaSh-m. If this is in front of ten Jews, then this is called Kiddush HaSh-m Barabim, which is the Mitzvah of our parsha - וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל .

For all other Mitzvos, one does not have to give one's life, unless it is a time of Gzeiras Shmad. In such circumstances, any attack on even the smallest of halachik details becomes an attack on the whole of Judaism.

All Jews are required to prepare themselves for the possibility that they too may be face with giving their lives for G-d. Twice a day we say in the Shema, וּבְכַל יוֹמֵנוּ and again, בְּכָל נַפְשֵׁנוּ. When he would say those words, Rebbe Akiva used to paint vivid pictures of giving over his life על קידוש השם. He would put himself through sacrificing his life for G-d every morning and every night. When he was finally faced with the Romans flaying his flesh to death, he was ready.

These laws are no theory. Tens of thousands of Jews faced the Inquisition, and were face with death or conversion. The Jews in Iran faced the same horrible, horrible dilemma. Some Jews chose to become Merranos, or in Iran, Mashadis.

The law itself allows for a compromise of sorts – someone who is faced with imminent torture to convert out of Judaism and who feels that he will not handle this, may commit suicide.

Over 20,000 Israeli soldiers have died for the sake of the Jewish nation. Millions died in the holocaust because they belonged to that nation. Jewish law regards all of these people as dying a holy death. Even though these Jews may have not consciously died as an act of Kiddush HaSh-m, he is still considered to have fulfilled the Mitzvah in all its glory. This kind of "Passive" *Kiddush Hashem* we learn from G-d's declaration of "*Bikrovei Ekodesh*" in regard to Aharon's sons Nadov and Avihu, as the verse declares, בְּקִרְוֵי אֶקְדֵּשׁ.

Jews have shown historically that they are prepared to die like Jews. But we are also required to live like Jews and to know that as Jews, we represent G-d's

people on earth. Many of the most inspiring stories from the Holocaust show just this – the phenomenal dedication and self-sacrifice to achieve a little Mitzvah or keep some small part of a chag.

Sefiras HaOmer

In counting of the 49 days of the Omer takes place from the second night of Pesach and finishes just before Shavuos. Just like each week of seven days culminates in Shabbos, this grouping of seven weeks, culminated in the receiving of the Torah, Shavuos, on the 50th day. This follows the pattern of seven Shmittah cycles. The verse tells us to count from Shabbos to Shabbos. What the verse actually means is to count from the day after Pesach until the day before Shavuos. followed by the 50th, Yovel (Jubilee) year.

The counting takes place from the spring of Pesach until the summer of Shevuos – from the time of that the first wheat begins to mature, until the fruit on the tree is ready to be picked. This is no accident. The spiritual laws of the Torah are in harmony with the physical laws of nature. The seasons of the year are aligned with their spiritual counterparts, the festivals. Our spring was the Exodus – our freedom. But now we need to give that freedom content, we need to accept the Torah. That is our maturation in the summer.

We count because we are looking forward to receiving the Torah, our betrothed.

Each one of these days led to the Jews leaving one of the 49 levels of impurity they had sunk to. Each exit from impurity was only through entering a new level of purity, 49 levels in all. These 49 levels are arranged in seven levels of seven – so clearly that the weeks are called Sabbaths - *Shabbasos* – not just a week, but a week that together equals a Shabbos – a pure week – שבִּבְתוֹת תְּמִימוֹת.

Somehow the secret of the counting itself is a purification process.

For this, the terminology of Shabbos is used, for Shabbos is קְבוּעַ וְקִיּוּמָא – it is holy whether we keep it or not. Shabbos is a relationship begun by G-d to which we merely respond. The very name Shabbat, means a resting from all human efforts. True, we have to open ourselves up to that Kedusha by making Kiddush, etc. but this is but the opening of a needle-head to let G-d's holiness pour in.

Sefirah is similar in the sense that all we do is count – that is our entire effort to achieve holiness. We try to purify our thoughts, and allow G-d to do the rest.

The counting begins on the day the Omer, a measure of barley, is brought. The Omer is the first grain of the year, reflecting the efforts of man to sustain himself. Yet, the product of that very effort he gives over to G-d, in recognition that everything really comes from G-d. All impurity is rooted in the failure to recognize this – and all it takes is to change one's understanding to immediately reap the results in holiness and cleaving to G-d. ,

Pesach was clearly a day when we saw the pitifulness of human action – clearly this was an act of G-d. But the holiness of this day was like a flash of lightning that produced great light and then disappeared. Because of this, the Exodus itself was certainly a purification, but not enough to prepare us for the giving of the Torah. We had to now begin the slow process of acquiring Kedusha through our own actions. But even this we begin by bringing the Omer to G-d – by showing that even our actions and efforts are really products of G-d's energizing us to begin with. This very recognition is what allowed us to take the original holiness and extend it into our own actions. This is why Pesach is referred to in the verse as Shabbat (מַחֲזִיקֵת הַשַּׁבָּת). For it is just the Shabbos part of Pesach – the Kedusah that is fixed by G-d, that is the Torah is coming to emphasize.

After the elation of the initial redemption, we suddenly realize the enormous spiritual growth we have yet to do before Sinai. And so, on the second day of Pesach,

while still in the midst of the Chag, we immediately start counting, working through all 49 aspects (פנין) of the Torah until we graduate to the 50th level, accessing the inner secret of the Torah itself.

Now the 49th day is simply called Shabbos, similar to the first “Shabbos”, i.e. the first day of Pesach. We count from Shabbos to Shabbos, in an attempt to turn action and effort initiated by man into permanent, G-d-inspired holiness. This is in fact achieved when we reach the 49th level – a completion of the cycles of seven. Counting the Omer flows into Shavuos, when we offer a מנחה חדשה – a *new* Mincha Offering- the idea that what we have achieved will now be renewed and fresh on a continuous basis. This is the level of the Torah, as opposed to the level of nature – for the Torah remains always fresh and renewable to us. Shavuos means weeks – its whole strength draws from the counting of seven whole weeks. The very counting – the desire that each day be dedicated to holiness – brings us to this level.

בהר

Shemittah

Just like there is a Sabbath in time, there is a Sabbath in space – this is Shmittah, the Sabbath of the Holy Land. Shabbat in time testifies that G-d created the world. Shemittah actualizes our faith that G-d the creator looks after us at each and every moment. The cycle of seven days is a concentrated form of the cycle of seven years – as if time stretches out from Shabbos into Shemittah. There are many other cycles of seven, for in general, G-d arranged time in cycles of seven and He ensured that each cycle would end in *Kedusha*, in holiness. Seven is the unit of holiness because the physical world exists in six dimensions.

Shemittah is one big act of faith. Three years of crops are effected by Shemittah. Yet, in a remarkable statement, G-d promises us that we will have enough to eat during the Shemittah year. We are asked to believe that not only is our food for this time placed completely beyond human effort, but that our unique relationship with the land is dependent on us keeping Shemittah. The Sages attribute our *exile [to being] the external manifestation of an inner connection that had gone awry. (Rabbi Uziel Milevsky)*

The verse tell us that Shmittah was given at Mt. Sinai, to teach us that *Just as both the general principles and the details of Shemittah were said at Sinai so too both the general principles and the details of all Mitzvos were said at Sinai.* But, why was the Mitzvah of Shemittah chosen amongst all the Mitzvos to teach us this?

Shmittah was chosen because of its lesson in faith. We might rephrase the Sages as saying: What is the continuity of faith that is taught in lesson of Shemittah which builds on the faith of Har Sinai? Shemittah teaches us a faith that will inform all of the Torah and all of its commandments. We will absorb its lessons and apply them to the next six years, so that also when we plough and reap, and do business and consult, we will understand that it is G-d who gives us the strength to do all of this and it is He who determines the results. It is He who created and owns all things, including the very land we attempt to master.

If we understand this, then we will have no problem giving back to Him in the seventh year. We realize that we are but custodians of His possessions, mandated only to use this world according to His Will. We buy, we sell – we act as masters – but none of this is permanent. Sales last only until the Yovel and every seven years we remind ourselves that, even until then, it is G-d who grants us whatever usage we have. For here, on this earth, we are but wanders – our true place is with G-d in the World to Come.

On Shemittah, we cease to do physical labor and invest instead in spiritual labor, just like the First Man did before the sin. Shemittah in a sense, is a recreation of the level of the First Man before the sin. At Har Sinai the Jews again achieved this level of the First Man before the sin. And even though they lost it again with the Cheit HaEigel, there remained some impression on their souls. This is what we tap into each Shemittah – a continuation of the Mt. Sinai experience. Just like we rose above nature during Sinai, so we maintain our bond with that level through Shmittah.

To work land for six years and then desist for a full year seems foolhardy. When Yovel followed Shemittah, there would be three years without planting. Had Moses made the Torah up, and claimed that it was G-d given, he would have been caught out the first time a Shmittah-Jubilee cycle came around, when mass starvation

would have exposed him as a fraud. Yet, not once did Jews who kept Shmittah die for lack of food. Not once did their great leap of faith, to open their fields to all comers without any expectation of any repayment, go unrewarded.

The verse says: *And if you will ask, "What will we eat?"* This is a strange wording, to have recorded in the Torah a promise by G-d as a response to a question we ask Him because our faithlessness undermines the natural blessings of Shemittah, G-d needs to promise a blessing even to those kind of faith-racked Shemittah keepers.

בחקתי

Blessings, Curses & the Purpose of This World

This weeks Parsha begins with Brochos and Kelalos. The order is important – the brachos come first. For G-d is really only interested in giving blessings not curses. G-d wishes to give even to the evil man – but He cannot in a normal way. So He created mechanisms to clean the person and to facilitate that which He wished to give at the outset. It is true that the Brochos are mentioned in general terms and in brief whereas the Kelalos are mentioned at length. But this is only for effect – to awe the people into obedience of G-d's Will and to get people to repent. This is confirmed by the fact that the Kelalos are in increasing level of severity.

However, our Parsha does not talking about reward and punishment in the true sense. שכר בהאי עלמא ליכא – reward is not in this world – it is in the next. The purpose of this world is different, to maximize G-d's acts of giving to us. G-d, being perfectly good, wanted to share that goodness with others. In His desire not only to give, but to give as perfectly as possible, G-d created the world in such a way, that we could get as close to Him as possible. This required that G-d create a two stage process, This World and The Next. For, had G-d simply created man as spiritual as possible to begin with, man would be very far from G-d in one respect: G-d would be an active bestower of good, whereas man would be a passive recipient of good. G-d would be a giver, and man would be a taker, getting his reward as a handout like charity to a pauper. Man would be far away from G-d on this vital point.

In order to overcome this, G-d had to create man in such a way that he, man, could be an active creator of goodness in his own right, a giver and not a taker. Man had to earn his reward, necessitating an environment which is perfect for choice, עולם הזה. Once man has acquired this trait of being a “creator” of good, he is now ready to leave this environment and enter a second environment, one perfect for getting close to all of G-d's other attributes. G-d therefore delays the goodness He wishes to give to us in order that, in the end, He will be able to give to us even more.

The mechanism which G-d uses to create choice in this world, is הסתרת פנים, a hiding of His Face or a limiting of His expression. עולם הזה is a state of הסתרת פנים, while עולם הבא is a state of הארת פנים. When there is הסתרת פנים, it is hard to see that everything ultimately reflects G-d's unique Oneness; things seem to be material, having independent existence, each one with its own identity. This applies to our body as well (though not to our soul). In reality, G-d is only hidden, not absent, and it is this which allows us to use the very materials which seem so distant from G-d to actually get close to Him.

Therefore, the Brochos and the Kelalos of our Parsha have nothing to do with reward and punishment. The main purpose of the Kelalos are to get us to do Teshuva, and they therefore come in ascending order, from the least to the most severe. G-d provides us with the smallest possible pain to alert us to our own spiritual ill health and only increases the dose if this does not help.

The Ramban tells us that these Brochos and Kalalos do not apply to individuals at all. The idea of our well being being linked to our spiritual wholesomeness is a national, not an individual idea. They apply only to the Jewish People as a whole, and only while they are living as a nation in the land of Israel. This is why the entire section is in the plural. The physical well being of the Jewish nation is extraordinarily linked to its moral and spiritual behavior.

The reason that this is a national idea is because G-d chose to make a covenant with the Jewish people through these blessings and curses. The curses are not simply curses – they are אלות הברית. Through the blessings and the curses, the bris with HaSh-m is strengthened. Hence, by the blessings it states: *And I will establish my covenant with you (26 9)*. Similarly, by the curses it says: *Because you have not done all my Mitzvos and have therefore annulled my covenant. And I will remember my Bris with Yaakov and also my Bris with Yitzchak and also I will remember my Bris with Avraham and I will remember the land. (26: 15-16)*

G-d tells the Jewish people that the type of covenant that He is making with them is such that their mitzvah observance will lead to blessing and their non-observances will lead to a curse.

In the course of our history, G-d has made several covenants with us. In Parshas Eikev, we see another Bris, similar to this one. There too, a clear pattern of national reward and punishment for our behavior emerges.

Each covenant has come to strengthen our bond with Him, to tune in to the specific G-d-man relationship needs that we have needed at that point of our history. There will be one more covenant at the end of days:

30. Behold, the days are coming, G-d says, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Yehudah; 31. Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt - My covenant which they broke, although I was their master, G-d says. 32. But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, G-d says, I will put my Torah in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Yirmiyahu 31: 30-32)

The Brachos

The brochos we receive if we do G-d's Will are greater than the klalos we will get if we don't listen to him. There will be blessings within blessings. Take rain. Rain cleans the air, the water in the rivers and the lakes are healthy, the fruit is wholesome, and people live healthily, able to bear children and with lowered mortality rates.

The blessings will roll one into the other – they will literally fill our year, we still be busy reaping from the previous crop when the next will call out attention. The threshing will last until the time of vintage, and the vintage will last to the sowing time. The fruits of the land will last for three years. Most significant, you will be able to enjoy all this blessing, because peace, that vessel which holds all the blessings, will reign.

Despite the enormous quantities of food, we will eat a little and feel satiated. The very food itself will heighten our spiritual sensitivities rather than being a physical act. Since food will become more spiritual, it will no longer be subject to the physical realities of time. The older wheat will now become like old wine, improving with age. The extra wheat will be given to the non-Jews who will now also do Teshuva.

All these blessings will take place in this world, up to an including the Messianic era, but not the next. For this is not about reward. What we are being taught here is that our material well being is a function of our spiritual behavior. לא על הלחם לבדו יחיה האדם - within the food there is a spiritual element which is the real sustenance – כי על כל מוצא פי ד' יחיה האדם –

It is not natural for there to be such a link between moral and spiritual behavior on the one hand, and the world of nature on the other. A spiritual law of nature is really a Nes Nistar, a clear expression of G-d's Providential Hand in man and his world. A Tzadik who receives blessing for his goodness does not stick out – for G-d may choose also that the evil should prosper, for reasons we explained above. But, that the entire country should live year in and year out with the kind of prosperity and blessing described here, is a wondrous thing that will get everyone to sit up and take notice: *And all the people of the world will see that G-d's Name rests on you and they will fear you. (Deut. 28:10).*

Someone who is living during these times could get sick and go straight to the spiritual roots of the disease. The prophet can be his doctor, repentance his cure. According to the Ramban, all of this can only happen in the Holy Land, for only it has sufficient resonance with the spiritual source of these blessings. Moreover, these are blessings that will rest on the Jewish nation as a whole, one of

The blessings are facilitators: If we obey G-d, then He makes those resources fully available to us, knowing that we will use them for the right things. The Blessings are alphabetical, indicating that we will gain access to the full range of resources which this world has to offer. As Chizkuni puts it: If you will do what you are supposed to do, then the natural world will do what it is supposed to do. If you will serve me continuously, then your blessing will also be continuous. Even the wild animals will return to their pre-Adam Harishon Cheit essence, and no longer attack man. For really the world was set up to produce man's needs – to be a world of blessing. Blessing is the natural state of the world. אם בחוקותי תלכו is no promise of reward – it is but a description of the laws by which the world was set up.

We see this idea in Joseph as the ruler of Egypt. All the Egyptians had put away wheat during the years of plenty in expectation of the famine, but their wheat rotted, and only Joseph's remained edible. It became evident that the flow of blessing could only flow through him. Joseph now tells the Egyptians that, in order to be eligible for food, they have to circumcise themselves. Without this, the Egyptians would continue to be immersed in their licentious lives, and any grain they received would continue to rot. The circumcision corrected their spiritual imperfections, a prerequisite to receiving physical blessing.

The very first letter of the Torah, at the beginning of creation, is a ב. The Beis has a numerical value of two, which is the beginning of multiplicity (ריבוי). The beginning of creation meant that there would be now not just the One G-d, but also a multitude of created beings. The ב stands for ברכה. The כ in ברכה is also the beginning of multiplicity, i.e. it is 20 after the oneness of 10. And so is the ך, which has the numerical value of 200. Blessing is that which adds to what already exists – the “two” after the “one” – it is the filling up of something. And the ב at the beginning of the Torah tells us that that is how the world was made.

The world of nature is set up in an exquisite and delicate balance. The slightest disruption can have vast consequences. Our Parsha tells us that these disruptions come from spiritual imbalances in man. It is our sin, not the poisonous snake which kills. Or, put differently, if we abuse those resources to get further away from G-d then He removes those resources from us. or images of The curses are merely the mirror of the blessings. חטה – the wheat for which we have to work so hard after the sin was but חנטה – the natural blossoming of the trees before the Sin. But the sin caused the ן to fall, turning it into wheat.

The blessings end with a description of our spiritual well-being. G-d's presence will be in our midst in the form of the Temple, and we will be welcomed and beloved in His presence. His Providence will become clear and public and will remain with us even if isolated individuals should sin. Our bodies will become perfect receptacles for our souls, and our souls will not have to return to earth to complete its Tikun.

The Kelalos

We have seen that, even in terms of the World to Come, punishment is but a means to an end. It is really just the natural consequence of a person denying G-d to give to him as He wishes, and is a way in which G-d can ultimately get to give the person as He originally desired. For ultimately, nothing can stand in the way of G-d's Will, and it is His Will to do good to us. Punishment, including Gehinom, then, is simply a temporary means to an end, and is not an absolute good. Serving only to facilitate G-d's eternal giving, it will ultimately disappear.

If this is true of punishment in the World to Come, it is certainly true of the klalos in this world. They reflect our disharmony with our spiritual calling. The moment we correct this, we restore the natural blessing we are supposed to have at the outset.

The klalos apply to the nation as a whole. A man may suffer because he is sinful and yet so may a righteous person, each for different reasons. But that a whole nation should find their stay on the land, their rain, their produce and their peace disappear into war and barrenness when they sin, is a phenomena inexplicable by the laws of nature. Even the nations of the world will understand that this is only because the Jewish people failed to keep G-d's holy covenant.

There is a fundamental difference between the blessings and the curses. The blessings reflect the state of nature as it should be in its intrinsic form, as it was in fact, before the Sin of the First Man. The curses represent a corruption of that state. The Midrash states that the blessings were from א to ת (although they are quite short), while the curses (though much longer) are from ו to ה. Moreover, the Brachos are in order, whereas the Klalos are in reverse order. The blessings show a state of nature in harmony with all the worlds, whereas the Curses reflect an aberration of nature.

Hence, the blessings are in alphabetical order – the intrinsic order of the creation, and they go from Aleph to Tav – they span the entire gamut of creation. They are not a novelty – a chidush – of creation; rather they reflect the reality of creation as it should be. The klalos, on the other hand, are alphabetically reversed, an aberration, and reflect but a small part of the reality of nature (from ה to ו).

But if we will go deeper we will see that also the curses are really blessings. Do these tragedies not prevent us from assimilating, giving us time to reflect on our calamities, regroup as a nation, and go forward?

G-d promises that even when the Jews will be in exile in the land of their bitter enemies, G-d will hold firm to His covenant with His people. In fact, it is just because G-d has made a promise that the Jewish nation will be eternal, giving them a feeling of immunity, which necessitates the need to introduce consequences for their misbehavior. On the other hand, if they do, they need a mechanism of purification to get themselves back on track. But the opposite is also true – no matter how difficult our exiles and suffering, we know that, as a nation, we will come through in the end.

But there is more. The Torah not only gives us a warning of the curses we might experience as a result of our spiritual downfall. And it not only tells us that we will survive this. It also gives us an insight into how we should grow in this situation of pain – a situation of Hester Panim, of G-d's Hidden Face. In situations where we cannot see G-d clearly, we need to fall back on faithfulness – on our trust that He is there for us nevertheless, that He still cares and is nurturing us through the pain – all for our own good.

פסח

Slavery in Egypt

From the time of Avraham Avinu, the Jews committed themselves to fulfilling the purpose for which the world was created. The world without the Jews was so devoid of purpose that it faced destruction. The question then arises, how could the Egyptians, who, like others, are dependent on this purpose for their survival, come to subjugate the Jews? Wherein lay their great power?

The answer is that this was a part of the Divine historic plan for the Jews to reach their true potential, foretold by G-d to Avraham Avinu. To go from family to nation, the Jews must go through slavery. Thus the Jews are not placed in exile because the brothers sold Joseph, or for any other sin. Rather, it is the other way around. The brothers sell Joseph because G-d has decreed that the Jews should go into Egypt. Had not G-d sent Yosef to Egypt first to attract his father there, Yaakov would have had to have been dragged to Egypt in chains.

Thus, when we say in the Hagadah - *We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt and the Lord our G-d took us out of there* - we are not only praising G-d for taking us out of Egypt, but for putting us there to begin with. The slavery was totally non-productive and therefore literally soul-destroying, undermining any sense of human dignity of the Jews. It was as if the Jews were destroyed in Egypt and recreated anew, a nation literally built on the ashes.

The timing of when Yaakov went into Egypt was very precise. Here was now a people whose number (70 souls) equaled the number of nations in the world, and indeed bore the spiritual responsibility for all those nations.

After Yosef and his brothers die out, a generation grew up in Egypt not knowing anything else. They multiply and begin to move out of Goshen into Egyptian neighborhoods. They underwent a process of rapid assimilation, ascending right to the top of this most 'civilized' of nations. In so doing, they abandoned their heritage, stopping even to do bris milah. The Jews did not need the sealed borders of Egypt. They had become slaves of Egyptian civilization.

In the beginning, the Egyptians presented a social action plan, designed to help the Jews overcome inequalities. **בפנה רך** - ויעבדו מצרים את בני ישראל בפרך. With a soft mouth, under the cloak of civilization. There will be *no Torah learning*; this will help the Jews to integrate. We will ban *Milah*; this will save them from barbaric mutilation. We will abolish *Shabbos*: This will help them get parnosa. We are not Jew-haters, the Egyptians declared. We are concerned with only with humanity and progress. וירעו אותנו המצרים ויענונון - *The Egyptians acted in a friendly manner towards us* (from רע as כסילים) [concerned, they claimed, with our welfare] but it was that very friendliness that וירעו אותנו המצרים - Rather than enslave the Jews, the Egyptians tried to corrupt the Jews.

The Egyptian plan worked. The Jews, now in possessions of full civil rights, applied the full force of their acumen to becoming super wealthy, prominent socialites and represented way beyond their number in conspicuous halls of theatre and culture.

The Jews were now massively influenced by this great culture. This was the very opposite of Avraham Avinu who was the influencer par excellence. Avraham Avinu also faced an environment in which was in total antipathy to all that he stood for. And yet, because of his incredible faith, he was able to break through all of this and not to be influenced by his environment. On the contrary, Avraham Avinu influenced the whole world with his great revolution of Monotheism. Somewhere,

deep in the soul of every enslaved Jew in Egypt, lay the inherited faith of their forefather, Avraham Avinu. But how could this faith be activated? Egyptian culture was so powerful that it seeped into the very way the Jews thought. The physical slavery that occurred later was just a reflection of their spiritual enslavement.

The slavery was, ironically, their salvation. For it was only when the Jews realized the physical pain of being in Egypt that they realized the spiritual price. The suffering made it very clear to them that they had to get out of there, and, by so doing, abandon it culture, its values and all that might be associated with it. Egyptian anti-Semitism forced the Jew to realize that all his efforts at integration were a total failure.

Slavery is the ultimate relationship of dependence - the slave does not really exist except as an extension of his master. The solution to this was for the Jews to cleave to G-d, to feel that their source of nourishment and existence came from an independent source. It was their faith that gave them the ability to latch onto something higher than their Egyptian masters that restored their identity as independent people. Slavery and its horrors led the Jews down the only path that was now available to them – they cried to G-d through the deepest prayers because nothing else was left. And He heard, not because of their Teshuva or because they were worthy of redemption, but because of the suffering itself.

The suffering of the Jews acted to purify them, like a drop of pure olive oil that requires the crushing of the olive to produce it. And oil, once produced, even when mixed with other substances (= other nations) will sooner or later emerge to float on the top. It is the very core-goodness of the Jews to begin with that allows for the suffering to help in this way.

G-d heard, not only because of their cries, but because the Jews were now pure and ready for redemption. כאשר יענו אותן כן ירבה וכן יפרוץ - The very act of the ענוי, the affliction, is what caused their rise to holiness. ומרר את חייהם becomes a part of the Geula, not just the שעבוד. And this in fact is the lesson of suffering everywhere. Somebody who is graced with all manner of pleasure becomes more physical thereby. Someone in pain will actually find himself greatly aided by that very pain in his quest for spirituality.

But for this to be true, the core of the person must be holy. G-d Himself maintained this holiness. Had he not promised Yaakov that He would go into exile with the Jews as a guarantee that would never be totally absorbed by the Egyptians? Galus HaShechina was not just a personal favor to Yaakov. At the burning bush, G-d explains to Moshe אהיה אשר אהיה – “I will always be there to establish and maintain things for their own intrinsic value. The death or demise or destruction of something, is never why I created it. Therefore, I will always be opposed to perversion and cruelty, which lead to loss and destruction. Therein lies my opposition to the Egyptians.”

The Jews with their faith, G-d with His justice, and ultimately with His love of mankind and His desire to grant them their purpose leads to the collapse of a great civilization, the freeing of the Jews and our march to Sinai. Sinai is the end of the Exodus – it is the culminating act of our freedom – freedom to be truly, spiritually fulfilled.

Redemption & the Haggadah

Pesach is not just a celebration of the miracles of the Exodus, but of the lessons they come to teach. The Seder night reminds us that, in the end, good does triumph over evil. The vehicle for that good became the Jewish People.

At the time just before the Exodus, the Jews were helpless - no other force whatsoever could have redeemed them - אני ולא מלאך - "I, and not an Angel." The impurity of Egypt was so powerful that had an Angel been sent to redeem us, the Angel would also have been absorbed into the impurity of Egypt. The Jews were too caught up in their Egyptian culture to have recognized the providential nature of an Angel. מתחילין בגנות - we begin the Hagaddah with a tale of our shame. The גנות is not the physical hardship, but the טומאה the spiritual slavery, into which we had sunk.

Only a powerful revelation from G-d could save us now. For this reason, Moses is not mentioned even once in the Hagada, for not even his greatness could bring us the redemption.

However, G-d did require some response from us, an act of השתדלות to reinforce and integrate our בטחון. And so - בדמיך חיי - by your blood you shall live - we had to earn our Exodus by engaging in the Pesach sacrifice and circumcision, two acts which separated the Jews from the Egyptians in acts of tremendous Mesiras Nefesh. On the other hand, the fact that the night of the redemption the Jews were confined to their own homes and were not even allowed to prepare food for the way, underscores our recognition that it was purely HaSh-m's role that cause the redemption.

We have to follow the formula as if we ourselves are coming out of Egypt. We have to have faith that there is indeed an Exodus of each generation. Each and everyone one of us were included in the כלל of those who went out, and we all draw on the spiritual life of that experience. Whatever relationship we have with spirituality comes only through the spiritual הארה of יציאת מצרים. Each individual has his own spiritual challenges, his own spiritual exodus, which he has to make. The possibility of overcoming that challenge was all released in the spiritual energy of יציאת מצרים.

The גאולה led to the birth of the Jewish nation, G-d's Chosen People. Because this birth was unnatural, our survival is also unnatural, a source of our Nitzchiyus. While their oppressors through the ages disappeared, the Jews lived on. Pesach is a celebration of that Nitzchiyus. Other nations celebrate their beginnings by fire-crackers, parades and picnics - We do it with a seder - an order - the understanding of how the history has an exact an orderly unfolding according to G-d's Providence. We spend the night in thought and contemplation. We begin with our slavery - מתחילין בגנות, because that is a part of our spiritual redemption. Therefore the Maror is only a דאורייתא when there is a פסח. The suffering is only in the context of the Geula.

The Exodus is so fundamental to our identity that we have umpteen Mitzvos to remind us - we mention it every morning and every night; we write about it on our mezuzos and our Tefilin, we remind ourselves about it when making Kiddush on Shabbos and Yom Tov and, of course, we dedicate the seder night to talking about just this. The Exodus teaches us that G-d daily renews the world, that He is omnipotent and omniscient and that He uses prophets to communicate with the world.

During the Seder, we connect to the real spiritual meaning of freedom. The holiness of the original Exodus is recreated. This itself is a great aid in bringing the final Redemption.

But what does freedom mean? The only being that is completely free, is G-d Himself. Every other being is only free to the degree they attach themselves to Him, or to His Will, as expressed in the Torah. Finally on Sukkos we surround our whole body by Mitzvos.

Klal Yisrael prepared for Exodus by imbedding their covenant with G-d on their flesh (Bris Milah) and my risking their lives to obey G-d's will in tying up the idolatry of the Egyptians (the Korban Pesach) - קבלת עול מלכות שמים. Seven weeks later, they found a more reliable way to become permanently free, through the Torah they received at Sinai – קבלת עול תורה ועול = אין לך בן חורין אלא מי שעוֹסֵק בתורה – מצוות.

But the few acts of commitment by the Jewish people were not enough to integrate and consolidate a whole relationship with G-d. This took 40 years to do, (as we explain in our essay on the Exodus in this section). We imitate this by taking care of our own preparations as we would a newborn baby: “The newborn, Pesachdik Jew requires a setting far removed from materialistic infection. At such an opportune time, there is not room for complacency or laxity. Everything must be done energetically with alacrity. Our whole spiritual life-line is on the line. Laxness, which deadens our Avodas HaShem, has to be completely removed. There is not room for tarrying and letting the dough rise and turn sour!”

Pesach is the beginning of the annual cycle, the beginning of our relationship with G-d. It occurs in spring, when all of nature is regenerating.

Potentially, this Exodus could have been a complete redemption, requiring no more exile. However, we did not finish the growth we were sent to do in Egypt, and we are now really just completing the Egyptian exile. Hence, יחץ, we break the middle Matza and hide part of it to show that our redemption is incomplete. (צפון) We are like the broken, half-piece of Mitzvah. Just like our brethren in Egypt, we feel ourselves spiritually impoverished, and, like a poor man, we long for completion and redemption.

Hence, we say at the end of the אה לחמא section of the Hagadah, השתא עבדי – now we are still servants. While we are in exile, our relationship with G-d is like that of a servant to his master.

But this is only temporary. In the second part of the Seder, after the meal, we focus on the future and final redemption. We recognize that G-d uses broken utensils, that He listens to the (materially and spiritually) poor. We take out this hidden middle matza and we eat it as the Afikomen. It is with that taste of final redemption in our mouth, that we remain for the rest of this special night. In the end of the sentence we quoted above (השתא עבדי) we say בני חורין – next year we will be as free men. The wording here says that now we are servants but next year we will be בני חורין – the *children* of free people, for after the exile we are like children to G-d.

The Exodus from Egypt introduced into history the elements that would allow for the final redemption. That process is now unstoppable.

Yitzias Mitzrayim

On the surface, Yetzias Mitzraim seemed like a sudden event: At midnight, the Egyptian first born started dying. By the morning, 2 million Jews from all over a large country were on their way out. Those same Jews, some of them slaves and some of them free men, who had become totally part of the fabric of Egyptian society, instantly emerged a nation like a baby delivered from his mother. Even Pharaoh joined the chorus of all mankind in cheering the Jewish Exodus from Egypt. In the Hagaddah, we express this by saying Kiddush. Kiddush means to sanctify – the positive entry into Kedusha. This is followed by ורחץ, the cleansing ourselves from the Tumah. This is strange. Normally we would need to withdraw from the Tumah before trying to sanctify ourselves, as the verse states - סור מרע ועשה טוב. Do we not know that one who purifies himself in the Mikvah while still clutching onto a source of impurity remains impure.

However, when the Jews came out of מצרים, if HaSh-m would have waited for Klal Yisroel to be pure before elevating them in Kedusha then we would not have made it. Therefore, He gave us a great חסד of taking us out of Egypt בהפזון, swooping us up to such high levels that within a week we were at the Red Sea saying זה קלי – experiencing the presence of G-d at the highest of prophetic levels.

This chesed is repeated every time we are in our own personal ‘Egypt trying to get back to our basic, fundamental relationship with G-d. He allows us to first engage Him in a relationship and only afterwards get rid of our old Tumah. We are given the opportunity of riding with the momentum of our initial spiritual inspiration, without having to engage the torturous work of changing our character.

We learn this from the Ten Commandments. The First Command tells us to believe in HaSh-m while we are only told us to get rid of our idols in the Second Command. We take on our belief of Him while the idols are still in the corners of our rooms, or the recesses of our hearts.

However, once we have connected in this way, a long period of consolidation must take place. This is just why we experience the Seder as one of כל המרבה לדבר הרי זה – as a process of speaking things out as much as possible, rather than trying to emulate the great haste of the original Exodus.

In fact, a deeper look will show that the Exodus was a 40 year process. It began with a jolt of אתערותא דלעילא – a pulling of a slave people out of the 40th level of Tumah by their bootstraps. Even this had its stages. The night was the redemption of the body, the day the redemption of the Nefesh. גאולה שכלית was קריעת ים סוף.

But, because this initial burst of holiness was all from G-d, the Jewish people had not integrated it. They were now required to undergo many stages of growth and consolidation. In fact, some of the slave legacy would remain with them for the rest of their lives. For one, their Bitachon was still skin deep, requiring G-d to take them on a circuitous route away from the Philistines, lest, faced with war, they promptly turn around and go back to Egypt.

The word Plishtim, comes from the word מפולש, something which is open on both ends. This nation was like a half-way house between the Egyptians and the Canaanites. Their roots were in the former and their domicile next to the latter. This would be no way for the Jews to make the final break from Pharaoh and all his values - כי קרוב הוא – they are too close culturally and in values to the Egyptians. Just because

it was the shortest way it would ultimately be the longer way spiritually and therefore physically.

And this concern was about the best 20% of the nation, but a remnant of their numbers in Egypt. A group of slaves could not transition that fast into being a trusting nation - the growth of the Jewish people would require further stages, and that takes time. For this, the difficult conditions of the desert were ideal. Here they were utterly isolated, just them and their G-d. As ex-slaves they had to now take control of their lives, learn strength of character, acquire sympathy for others and deepen their trust in HaSh-m.

The rapid exit from Egypt was necessary to give the Jews the cleanest break from their current reality. The Jews were to become the eternal nation, and the Chipazon was as close to timeless as they could come. Indeed, the Exodus became the spiritual model for all future spiritual undertakings. But we celebrate the Exodus in just the opposite way – by spending as much time as possible around the Seder Table – כל המרבה לדבר הרי זה משובח. Our Seder emphasizes the integration. The rapid Exodus – the clean break – must be followed by a long period of consolidation

The next leap in Klal Yisroel's transformation was to be Krias Yam Suf. A huge nation of 600 000 males is suddenly terrified of the shattered remnants of the Egyptian army. They are ready to give up without raising a single hand in defense. But these were their former masters, and they were slaves, not fighters. Things would go well for a short while, but at the next challenge the old slave psychology would set in: "In Egypt at least we were secure. We knew that we would get a little food every day. We knew that we would eventually get to sleep with some roof over our heads. At least there we stood a chance of surviving."

The slightest thing could throw them off. One moment they were competing with each other to jump into the sea. The very next, a bit of mud causes an immediate regression. "The sea has mud just like Egypt. Let's go back."

Then came a further step in the transition of a slave-people to G-d's chosen nation - the Manna. Imagine! Someone who was 19 years old when the מן began to fall was 59 years old when it ended. He did not believe in the מן because he was taken by surprise. He had a chance to take out all his scientific instruments and conduct any scientific verification he chose.

Yet the מן was a huge Nisayon. It required enormous Bitachon to eat your last morsel for breakfast in a hostile and barren environment and trust that the next morning it will again fall. And this trust has to be in a totally strange foodstuff, that was never known before. This was not a food source they could master, and grow themselves, reducing, so to speak their dependence on G-d. The resulting total dependence in HaSh-m was vital to allow trust in G-d to build up. And once they trusted G-d to look after their physical lives, they would come to trust Him to be their doctor in their spiritual lives as well.

Food supplies are one problem. Water is more serious. Klal Yisroel first face a challenge of bitter waters and then a higher challenge of no water at all. Beni Yisroel understandably cry out to HaShem, and get criticized for their appeal. They were still making their Avodas HaSh-m conditional – if G-d provides we serve, and if not, not.

All of these are graded challenges to move Klal Yisroel, as rapidly as possible, onto the Sinai experience. Ibn Ezra is of the opinion that this generation would never fully get over their slave status. Their exalted spiritual level was not, could not be, fully integrated. It would take the next generation to go into Israel and take on the powerful Knaanim.

Krias Yam Suf

(see also Parshas Beshalach in Sefer Shemos, an essay by the same name.)

Krias Yam Suf is one of the seminal events in Jewish history. We dedicate a Yom Tov to it, the seventh day of Pesach, and we repeat the song sung on that occasion every morning in our prayers.

It is perplexing that קריעת ים סוף is regarded as so special that it merited a day of קדושה, Shvii shel Pesach. Bnei Yisrael leave Egypt armed for battle¹⁷ – though in the end, the victory by a group of slaves over the Amelekites and others remains an astonishing miracle. But we do not have a Chag on the miracle of the Ark, or the miracle of the manner in the desert, or Miriam's well or the Clouds of Glory which protected us¹⁸. Something extraordinary, even by the criteria of miracles, happened at the Red Sea.

Shiras Hayam was one of only nine times when a level of Shira was achieved¹⁹. A tenth time will be achieved at the time of Meshiach. At קריעת ים סוף, we achieved a level of faith that would only again be achieved during the Messianic era²⁰. Hence the language is in the future – אז ישיר – *then, at the time of Messianic Era, they will again sing as they sang now*²¹, ויאמינו בד' – (*lit. and they will believe*) and they had the faith that the Jews are destined to have in the future²². Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov – none achieved this exalted level of Shira²³. Chizkiyah, who had the

¹⁷ רש"י יג יח: וחמשים - אין חמושים אלא מזויינים (לפי שהסיבתן במדבר גרם להם שעלו חמושים שאלו היה דרך יישוב לא היו מחמושים להם כל מה שצריכין אלא כאדם שעובר ממקום למקום ובדעתו לקנות שם מה שיצטרך אבל כשהוא פורש למדבר צריך לזמן כל הצורך וכתוב זה לא נכתב כי אם לשבר את האוזן שלא תתמה במלחמת עמלק ובמלחמות סיחון ועוג ומדין מהיכן היו להם כלי זיין שהכו ישראל בחרב ברש"י ישן) וכה"א (יהושע א) ואתם תעברו חמושים. וכן תרגם אונקלוס מזרזין כמו (בראשית יד) וירק את חניכיו וזרזו.

¹⁸ Which the Iben Ezra says was the greatest of the נסים on which there is no Chag. The Ramban says that the Torah is נסים כולה

¹⁹ (Targum). The tenth song will be sung when we will be redeemed from exile. The other nine songs are:

Adam Harishon when his sin was forgiven on Shabbos – מזמור שיר ליום השבת – שירת הים

When a well of water was given to Bnei Yisrael in the desert –

במדבר כא יז: אז ישיר ישראל את השירה הזאת עלי באר ענו לה

Moshe before he died: (דברים לב א) האזינו השמים

Yehoshua when he stopped the sun (יהושע י יב)

Barak and Devorah when Bnei Yisrael defeated Siserah (שופטים ה א)

Channah when she had a child (שמואל א ב א)

David on all the miracles (שמואל ב כב א)

Shlomo HaMelech – שיר השירים

²⁰ שם משמואל, פסח (ויקרא עמ' קה): יורדי הים באו למדרגה שלעתיד ... יורדי הים אמרו זה קלי ואנוהו ולעתיד הנה אלוקינו זה קוינו לו וגו'

²¹ שמות טו א לפי דעת הרבה מפרשים. אמנם רש"י פירש בופן אחר, ע"ש

²² שם משמואל, פסח (ויקרא עמ' קה): שבאו לבחינת אמונה שלעתיד.

²³ שמות רבה פ' כג: מיום שברא הקב"ה את העולם ועד שעמדו ישראל על הים לא היה אדם שיאמר שירה להקב"ה אלא ישראל וכו', אברהם מכבשן האש ומן המלכים, יצחק מן המאכלת, יעקוב מן המלאך ומן עשו ומן אנשי שכס ולא אמרו שירה וגו'

opportunity of becoming Moshiach, did not achieve this because he failed to say Shira at the opportune time. Shira is not something that one can just produce. It is a consequence – a result of a certain spiritual level. If Chizkiyah didn't say Shira, he couldn't – and he was therefore not worthy of being Moshiach²⁴!

Kriyas Yam Suf was all about faith – about deepening our understanding of how G-d runs His world. The Exodus provided us with Emunah Peshuta – a belief in the omnipotence of G-d and a deep understanding that it was a 'ביד ד' כולה כולו without our involvement at all²⁵. Kriyas Yam Suf had something of that as well. Hence, when G-d says עלי²⁶ מה תצעק he is saying, “Do not even think that even your השתדלות of the השתדלות will help. This is totally up to me.”²⁷

But there was something more: A person at this level of faith has a certain response to hardship. He understands that suffering is ultimately good in that it purifies the person. But there is another level – a level where the person not only realizes the cleansing power of the suffering, but that the advantages of such suffering extend much deeper and further than that²⁸.

On the surface of things, Beni Yisroel could not see that the whole episode of being trapped by the Egyptians was necessary. They did not have to reach Sinai via the Red Sea. But they began to believe that if G-d had so arranged then there must be a cosmic plan to be fulfilled. They began to believe very deeply that whatever G-d does, however inexplicable to us on the surface, must be full of the most profound meaning and benefit to mankind²⁹.

In the beginning, the waters did not split until Nachshon ben Aminadav went into the waters up until his nostrils. This seems to repeat of the principles of every miracle – take hishtadlus as far as it will go in order for the miracle to kick in. But here there was a difference. Nachshon was following the orders of HaShem. This was not an act of hishtadlus as much as an act of Bitachon. For Nachshon the result was already predetermined by G-d. The water may split at his toe, at his knee or his belly – it was all the same to Nachshon. There was nothing about his stepping into the water that was, from a natural point of view going to help the process. The miracle was, as the verse states – ביד רמה, which the Mechilta translates as בגבורה גבוהה

²⁴ שם משמואל, שם: ולפי זה יובן למה לא נעשה חזקיה משיח שהרי לא אמר שירה ולא נתפעל, וע"כ שעדיין לא בא לבחינת האמונה שתהיה למשיח

²⁵ שם משמואל, שם קד: ונראה דתרי גוויי אמונה ניהו, אמונה פשוטה שהקב"ה כל יכול ... ראו זאת במצרים,

²⁶ יד (טו) ויאמר יהוה אל משה מה תצעק אלי דבר אל בני ישראל ויסעו:

²⁷ אבל ברמב"ן שיטה אחרת בדבר וז"ל: מה תצעק אלי אמר ר"א כי משה כנגד כל ישראל, שהיו צועקים לו, כמו שאמר ויצעקו בני ישראל אל ה' וא"כ למה אמר מה תצעק אלי, ראוי להם לצעק ואולי יאמר מה תניחם לצעוק דבר להם ויסעו, כי כבר אמרתי לך ואכבדה בפרעה (פסוק ד) ורבתינו אמרו (מכילתא כאן) שהיה משה צועק ומתפלל, והוא הנכון, כי לא ידע מה יעשה, ואף על פי שאמר לו השם ואכבדה בפרעה, הוא לא היה יודע איך יתנהג, כי הוא על שפת הים והשונא רודף ומשיג, והיה מתפלל שיורנו ה' דרך יבחר וזה טעם מה תצעק אלי, שהיית צריך לשאל מה תעשה ואין לך צורך לצעוק, כי כבר הודעתך ואכבדה בפרעה, ולא סיפר הכתוב צעקת משה, כי הוא בכלל ישראל:

²⁸ שם משמואל, שם: אלא בריעת ים סוף נתחדשה להם אמונה שכל עניני האדם, הדחקות והמניעות רח"ל, אף שהם למירוק ודיחוי הפסולת, מ"מ עוד יש בהם תועלת עצומה ותוספת מרובה, כמו שהיה על הים

²⁹ שם משמואל, שם: שלכאורה היה זה ללא צורך, שהרי דרכם לסיני לא היה דרך הים כלל, ומתחילה היו סוברים שזה למחרוק לשבר את הלבבות שיזדככו עוד יותר אבל אח"כ ראו את המעלות הטובות שהשיגו על הים

ומפורסמת.³⁰ For the Jews had reached a level of clarity of G-d's involvement in man where they could point and see tangibly – זה קלי – this is my G-d³¹.

It is difficult to understand how revolutionary this approach to faith was for the Jews. Here was a nation who could not be taken directly to Israel because they were likely to return to idolatry, a nation who, in fact, later committed the sin of the Golden Calf³². A vast nation who saw their old masters, the Egyptians, coming with but a remnant of their army and yet would be led meekly back to Egypt³³. This nation was to shoot to a level of absolute clarity of G-d and His presence on earth at this one seminal event.

The crossing was at night. Things were still dark and a little unclear. The Shira was said in the morning, in the clarity of the day³⁴. By then, Bnei Yisrael now reached a kind of Messianic level – גילוי יחודו – when they saw everything come together – all of history. אז ישיר – then when it entered their hearts to sing³⁵, then they sang a song which really lives in the future, that the time of the resurrection of the dead³⁶. Even the מעשים of the רשעים became understood as part of this fabric at this time. Makkos Bechoros taught us that we only exist if we are הטבע מן; so now we were literally operating at that level, seeing the whole picture – למעלה מן הזמן (אז – then can apply to the past and it can apply to the future).

³⁰ רש"י יד ח

³¹ רש"י טו ב ד"ה זה אלי - בכבודו נגלה עליהם והיו מראין אותו באצבע ראתה שפחה על היס מה שלא ראו נביאים

³² משן חכמה יג יד: ולא נחם אלקים כו' קרוב הדבר לשוב למצרים כו'. ויתכן כי הושרש בלבם טעיות העו"ג והבליהם בהוציאן כו' את האלקים כו' קרוב הדבר לשוב למצרים כו'. ואמיתתו אשר הופיע עליהן פתאום לשלש חדשים ומושגיהם הזרים לכן לא פעלה עליהם התגלות כבוד ה' ואמיתתו אשר הופיע עליהן פתאום לשלש חדשים לעקור מלבם כל רע וכשעשו אחדים מהם וערב רב העגל לא היה אחד [לבד חור] אשר התנגד עליהן ומיחה בידן כי עוד לא נחקק בליבותם הוד מציאות אלקי יחיד בלתי מושג משגיה על כל ומנהל כל בהנהגתו הפרטיות, ועל זה אמרו ובלבם יכזבו לו כמו שדרשו רז"ל, (שמות רבה מב-ו) ואם היה מביאם תיכף אל ארץ האמורי ארץ מלאה כל פסל ותבנית אשר נהבלו בכל העו"ג ותועבותיהן אז לא נעקר מהם ציורים הרעים ומחשבת און, לכן הולכין במדבר ושם ביד ה' ינחנו ונעקר מלבם ונתרחקו מכל תעלוליהם והבליהם ונתקיים ואין עמו אל נכר (דברים לב, יב) שאין אצל ישראל שום שורש מאל נכר, וזה שאמרו כי קרוב הוא הדבר כו' תעבדון את האלקים כו' ולכן קרוב הדרך לשוב למצרים ליסודות מדעי חרטומיהם וכהניהם וזה הסיבה אשר עכבו השיר"ת נורא עלילות להוליכן במדבר ארבעים שנה ודו"ק.

³³ אבן עזרא יד יג: התיצבו וראו את ישועת ה' - כי אתם לא תעשו מלחמה רק תראו את ישועת ה' אשר יעשה לכם היום. יש לתמוה איך יירא מחנה גדולה של שש מאות אלף איש מהרודפים אחריהם. ולמה לא ילחמו על נפשם ועל בניהם. התשובה כי המצרים היו אדונים לישראל וזה הדור היוצא ממצרים למד מנעוריו לסבול עול מצרים ונפשו שפלה. ואיך יוכל עתה להלחם עם אדוניו. והיו ישראל נרפים ואינם מלומדים למלחמה. הלא תראה כי עמלק בא בעם מועט ולולי תפלת משה היה חולש את ישראל. והשם לבדו שהוא עושה גדולות. ולו נתכנו עלילות. סבב שמתו כל העם היוצא ממצרים הזכרים. כי אין כח בהם להלחם בכנענים עד שקם דור אחר דור המדבר שלא ראו גלות. והיתה להם נפש גבוהה כאשר הזכרתי בדברי משה בפרשת ואלה שמות:

³⁴ שם משמואל, ויקרא עמ קג (פסח): הנה קריעת ים סוף היתה בלילה והשירה אמרו ביום כברש"י, ובדאי לא במקרה היה, כי הלילה רומז לזמן שאין השכל מאיר והוא מתחזק באמונה זהו שאנו אומרים אמת ואמונה ערבית. וע"כ הירידה לים שהיתה במסירת הנפש ונסיון גדול, בודאי לא היה השכל אצלם כ"כ מאיר דאלמלא כן לא היה נחשב נסיון ע"ש

³⁵ רש"י טו א ד"ה: אז ישיר משה - אז כשראה הנס עלה בלבו שישיר שירה וכן (יהושע י) אז ידבר יהושע וכן (מ"א ז) ובית יעשה לבת פרעה חשב בלבו שיעשה לה אף כאן ישיר אמר לו לבו שישיר וכן עשה ויאמרו לאמר אשריה לה. וכן ביהושע כשראה הנס אמר לו לבו שידבר וכן עשה ויאמר לעיני כל ישראל וכן שירת הבאר שפתח בה אז ישיר ישראל פירש אחריו עלי באר ענו לה (מ"א יא) אז יבנה שלמה במה פירשו בו חכמי ישראל שבקש לבנות ולא בנה למדנו שהי"ד ע"ש המחשבה נאמרה זהו ליישב פשוט

³⁶ רש"י שם: אבל מדרשו ארז"ל מכאן רמז לתחיית המתים מן התורה

The מכות showed that HaSh-m is משגיח over the whole world and punishes the wicked – הנהגת המשפט³⁷. הנהגת המשפט showed the Jews that ongoing השגחה was not enough for their whole existence – it required a special act of השגחה for them to come into being. Kriyas Yam Suf gave them an insight into the Hanhagas HaYichud, which underlies the HanHagas HaMishpat. And the result is song.

The Jews sing, not only because they are happy, but because this is the vehicle to communicate to the world that new level of insight³⁸. They are not happy for their victory, but because they reached a new level of clarity of G-d's mastery of all: ויאמינו בד' ובמשה עבדו - Because they believed, they were able to sing³⁹. They are now עבריים – those who have crossed the sea⁴⁰. They will never be the same again.

Up until חסד ויתור to חסד משפט³⁷ Pachad Yitzchak: This was the beginning of change from now, HaSh-m has maintained the world artificially. Each generation needed a new handout of , one for each of the generations הגדול in the לעולם חסדו. This is why there are 26 חסד up until then. These generations were not building one on the other; each one was sustained by HaSh-m's חסד, even if they did not deserve it. מכות-HaSh, which we have to earn, and which we can claim, חסד, a חסד משפט began to introduce according to the laws which He chose to set up. You deserve to drink water: You the Jews . Because you have מצרים will drink at the very same time that the water is blood for the earned it, you can build on it. Led by Nachshon, you showed extraordinary faith at the Red Sea – you will be judged favorably and the waters will split for you.

רש"י יד יט: וילך מאחריהם - להבדיל בין מחנה מצרים ובין מחנה ישראל ולקבל חצים ובליסטראות של מצרים. בכל מקום הוא אומר מלאך ה' וכאן מלאך האלהים אין אלהים בכל מקום אלא דין מלמד שהיו ישראל נתונים בדיון באותה שעה אם להנצל אם להאבד עם מצרים

Now is the stage of , each generation building on the חסד of בנין, a single יבנה חסד previous one. See also the , who explains in ח"ב דף רנ"ט (פסח) מאמר on ח"ב דף רנ"ט (פסח) in greater detail and in an easier form.

³⁸ רש"י טו ב: ואנוהו - ד"א ואנוהו לשון נוי אספר נויי ושבוcho לבאי עולם כגון מה דורך מדוד דודי צה ואדום וכל הענין:

³⁹ תנחומא

⁴⁰ שם משמואל, ויקרא עמ' קד (פסח): שכל שמם עבריים ע"ש עברו ים