



JEWISH HOLIDAYS

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

Book 1

ROSH HASHANNAH

through

CHANUKA

*“God created
one human race.
Therefore, He gave
mankind only
one religion.”*

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim
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JEWISH HOLIDAYS

Book 1

SELECTED WRITINGS

on

JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

*Dedicated to
Scriptural & Rabbinic Verification
of Authentic
Jewish Beliefs & Practices*



RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM
Founder: www.Mesora.org

*In dedication to my
teachers, parents, brothers
and friends. Your words
and actions foster, direct
and impassion my search
for God's truths and the
concern to educate.
Together we have taught
many – may we teach
many more.*

*May God guide us always
to discern and select
true from false,
good from evil and
proof from belief.*

*Thank you all,
Moshe*

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Rosh Hashannah: God's Decrees

“All man’s needs are decided for him, from Rosh Hashannah until Yom Kippur - except for his expenditures for Sabbath, for Holidays, and for his son’s Torah study: in these, if he spends less, these funds will be detracted; if he spends more, he will receive more [for these].” (Talmud Betza 16a, first words)

A number of questions arise: why are not ‘all’ of our needs decided...why these three ongoing exceptions? What is the significance of these three mitzvahs? And in general, why is there a yearly decree at all...such long-lasting effects? That is, why must there be a yearly decree that remains unchanged until next year? Nonetheless, for some reason, it is necessary that God decree for man in these two fashions: yearly, and regularly. Can we determine why this must be?

The plain understanding of this Talmudic portion teaches that man receives a monetary judgment for the coming year. During the 10 Days of Repentance, we accept that we are being judged, so we act our best. This is the purpose of being informed of the judgment: God wants our judgment to be the best. So He warns us to be on guard and act in pristine style, and our actions will determine our sustenance, since how we act during these days, is truly a display of our innermost values. Thereby, God is judging us not based on a distracted lifestyle, but a manner of living that truly conveys what we feel is most vital. God is generous with this judgment, by not viewing our actions year round as a sampling of our values, but we are judged based on these 10 days alone.

So the question arises: why are there three exceptions? We also wonder why the response to our generous spending on Sabbath, Holidays and our son’s Torah study, is met with a reimbursement. Why that specific response?

It would appear that God is relating to us, according to how we relate to Him. If we are not cheap with our spending on these three mitzvahs, then we demonstrate a proper relationship to our wealth: its primary purpose is in service to God. If this is how we act, then God will grant us more wealth for next Sabbath, and other holidays. We should not worry that spending our earnings on these mitzvahs will in any way detract from what we need for rent, mortgage, clothes, etc. This is a justifiable concern, that we might exhaust our funds long before the year is over. So God responds by reimbursing expenditures on these three mitzvahs. But why these three mitzvahs in specific? Why are we not reimbursed for purchasing beautiful Tefillin, Tzitzis, Mezuzos, and other objects of mitzvah?

Sabbath celebrates the idea of God as Creator. Holidays recall His intervention...His providence. And providing not for OUR Torah study, but our children’s, we show a concern that future generation benefits from receiving the Torah transmission. And this transmission’s content is concerning the fundamentals of God – the Creator, and God as the One who remains involved in human affairs, as He expressed in our salvation celebrated on the three Festivals. Thus, Sabbath and Holidays focus on the “knowledge of God”, while providing for our son’s Torah insures this knowledge is transmitted to the “next generation”.

So inasmuch as we demonstrate a correct relationship to our wealth by giving generously to these fundamental mitzvahs, God guarantees us that we will not lose anything thereby, and He will reimburse us, so we are not concerned about lacking anything else. God does not wish that these three mitzvahs were tempered in enthusiasm, by our monetary considerations. Therefore we are promised His reimbursement.

Perhaps also significant, is that Sabbath and Holidays are not momentary actions, as are Tefillin, Mezuzah and other commands. These are “days”, large units of time requiring a sustained attitude. These days are opportunities to revamp our very lifestyle. The drive of the Torah is that man alters his orientation away from personal, emotional and infantile interests, redirecting himself towards God’s wisdom and virtue. Sabbath and Holidays have Torah wisdom as their target...as does our son’s study. Mitzvahs of such duration can offer the greatest impact on our perfection. But there is more...

As we said, God judges us all in two spheres. From Rosh Hashannah to Yom Kippur, we are judged for the next year to come. But we are also judged throughout the year, at many intervals. We are judged each week regarding our generosity in creating a beautiful Sabbath. And we are judged on how we beautify the Holidays. Finally, we are judged on how we respond to our son’s Torah study. Do we forgo personal pleasures to insure our sons have the best teachers? Let’s understand this distinction...why two spheres of judgment?

MAN’S TWO WORLDS

I believe God is responding to the two spheres in which man lives.

We are first, Earth-bound creatures. How do we relate to this existence? Are we money-hungry, gluttons, egomaniacs, and lustful? Or are we charitable, kind, and sympathize with others? Are we interested in the well being of all God’s creations, now...and future generations?

If we take care to recognize God’s relation with man: His Creation (Sabbath), and His sustained providence over us (Holidays), then we are living correctly. And if we take care to provide the next generation with Torah – securing our son’s learning – then we are not only in full agreement with God’s will, but that His will should endure on Earth...for others. That is perfection on the loftiest level: when the self is not the concern, and we spend money to insure that others realize God’s will.

This is our Earthly perfection, on which we are judged at these intervals: at securing beautiful Sabbaths and Holidays, and instilling in the next generation – our sons – a fear of God, and His teachings, although we will be long gone. In these three areas, God metes out a type of reward and punishment throughout the year. Our perfection of spending our money on Sabbath, Holidays and the next generation’s Torah education is enhanced by God’s providence of replacing our expenditure, so we might continue. Thereby, God increases our perfection. Such a person realizes the true value and purpose of wealth, and therefore, he receives more. But if a person does not spend on these three areas, which express God’s relationship with man, then God removes our monetary means. He does not wish that we are successful, if our monies are not spent well. For that would encourage a wrong lifestyle.

So this reimbursement is not our final reward, but since life by definition has duration, God regularly attends to our choices. God intervenes so as to secure our growth in these three mitzvahs.

But we also live in another sphere, outside an Earthly existence. We are cognizant of our ultimate existence: the eternal existence of our souls. This is quite literally our true existence. For it is in this final stage of our lives, that we are permanently fixed. Even 1000 years on Earth does not compare. Perhaps the fact we are judged yearly, and judged on whether we live or die as well, is a means through which God generously awakens us to this denied reality of our “mortality”.

God wishes that we don’t ignore the eternity of our souls, but simultaneously, He does not wish we live in morbidity, “Also the world (immortality) has He placed in their hearts”. (Koheles, 3:11) This, Ibn Ezra says, means that man denies death. But our denial appears to be God’s will, since “He placed the world in our hearts”. Therefore, only 10 days each year, do we focus on a decree with long-lasting effects: the decree that is sealed each Yom Kippur. Realizing this yearly decree, we are now awakened to the ultimate decree: the decree we face at

death. But this realization is a gift, to refocus us on our true mission. The yearly decree is to remind us of the truly everlasting decree. If we are wise, we prepare for the final existence, so we might enjoy it thoroughly. As the Rabbis teach, “One who prepares for Sabbath eats on Sabbath”.

This Talmudic discussion teaches man that in both spheres of our existence, God is providing us with direction. He wishes us to earn the next, final world. So we are reminded once yearly through an Earthly model of a decree for a year. Waking up to the fact that our actions during the 10 Days of Repentance can determine our yearly fate, we thereby realize the ultimate fate that is determined by our lifetime. Thereby, God awakens mankind to our temporal stay, and the dire need for our attention to this vital matter. But the Earth goes on...and we must also realize its significance. So God metes out reward and punishment at many yearly intervals to keep us on track regarding our values, here.

But as we engage life on a day-to-day basis, even more often than once yearly God removes the blinders that convince us all that exists is our physical existence. He reminds us that the physical world is controlled by a higher world: God’s providence. We learn this by seeing that whatever we spend to beautify these three mitzvahs does not diminish our wealth. People, who realize this is so, do not become desperate. They do not assess their situations based on observable phenomena alone. They are convinced God can and will assist them. And being judged for the entire year, we are further focused on our true existence that outlives our Earthly stay.

Just as a yearly judgment calls to our minds our eternal afterlife, weekly too, God endorses the man and woman who detach from physical values, and spend generously through reimbursing them.

Rosh Hashannah: How God is Found

“Seek out God [in a manner that] He is found; call to Him when He is near”. (Isaiah 55:6)

This verse commences our Torah reading on fast days. At first glance, it implies that God is not “always” approachable. However, that is impossible, for the Ashray prayer teaches us “God is close to all who call Him, to all who call Him in truth. The will of those who fear Him He fulfills; and their cries, He hears and saves them”. These two “traits” of God are not further qualified that God only responds at certain times. So if God is readily accessible at all times, what does our verse above mean?

Radak cites three explanations on “call to Him when He is near”. He first quotes his father: “This means when one seeks out God with his “entire” heart, as it says “God is close to all who call Him, to all who call Him in truth”.

Notice, that verse does not mention any idea of an “entire heart”. Rather, it refers to our need to call Him in “truth”. Radak’s father clearly equates “all one’s heart”, and “truth”. Only when one seeks God earnestly, and exclusively, is he in line with truth. For when one relies on God alone, he agrees with what is true in the universe: God is the only one who can respond. To be clear, this explains, “when He is near” to mean, when we call to God and no other. God is close to such a person and performs their will, as this will endorse the truth God wishes spread in the world: God alone answers man. But if one does not feel convinced God alone can respond, and he relies on anything else, God will not respond, since that would endorse that falsehood.

If we do not value our relationship with God over all else, with our “entire heart”, then we have the wrong view of God. He must play a central role in our lives, for He created our lives, and maintains them! How can anything else take precedence? So the command to love God with all our hearts is simply stating what the facts demand. Shema says this as well: “And you shall love your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might”. Deuteronomy 30:6, 4:29 and Selichos repeat this crucial message.

We see from this that it’s not just New Year’s or fast days, but this concept of approaching God with our entire heart should be expressed throughout the year.

Radak then quotes the Rabbis who explain “Call to Him when He is near” as referring to “before our decree”. This means before Rosh Hashannah and Yom Kippur. Our fate is decided at this time, so we are admonished to seek out God, establish a relationship, and repent, before our decree is written. And lastly, Radak quotes Yonasan ben Uzziel as referring to prior to death: “for one can only call to God while alive, and not after he dies. For in the grave, there are no actions, knowledge or wisdom”. On this, King Solomon said, “At all times, let your clothes be white [clean]...” (Koheles 9:8) This refers to the need to be without sin at all times (clean garments) since we do not know when God will call us to the next world. So be always ready in case it is now, in order that we are without sin as we enter the Afterlife, so to escape punishment.

In fact, there is no argument among these three views. Radak’s father is advising us of what the Torah says in so many places: we can only truly relate to God, when our ideas of His exclusive and omnipotent nature are obtained. For if our ideas are false, we are not relating to God, but to an imaginary being, and no imaginary thing can help us. So we must strive to be accurate in our understanding of what God is and is not, as much as we can, basing ourselves on Torah. Then we will realize He alone must be the sole recipient of our prayers. This is what it means to “call to Him when He is near”. God is not physical, so one cannot be “near” God. “Near” means when we have an accurate understanding of Him, and we express it by calling Him alone.

The Rabbis, Rashi, and Yonasan ben Uzziel teach that before our decree, we are wise to act. These views focus on the “gravity” of what is at hand: our lives. They address the absoluteness of God’s decrees, not the “method of approach” described by Radak’s father.

In our verse, Isaiah is addressing this time of year, when our fate will be written. He is concerned for us all, so let us be concerned, and review our ways. Make amends with those you have wronged; ask God’s forgiveness for sins between you and him and resign never to repeat such actions; and earnestly seek an ever-growing understanding of what God is, so your prayers reach the One who can help.

With so many conflicting views today, concerning what are Judaism’s core fundamentals, we have but one choice: agree only to that which your mind sees as clearly as $2+2=4$. Anything less, means your mind does not agree with a notion, so what use is it to parrot the words “I agree”, when you do not?

In Halacha – Jewish Law – we must follow the Rabbis of old, and of today. But in philosophy, Hashkafa, there is no such thing as a Psak, a ruling. Any Rabbi, or anyone cannot tell us, that we believe what we truly do not.

God gave us each a mind. Why? He wants each one of us to use it. If you do not use it, but follow the crowd, even the religious crowd, or Rabbis, then you violate God’s will.

I mention this, since we are discussing the need to call God “when He is near”, meaning, calling Him accurately. The most fundamental thing you can do, now before your fate is written, is to first insure you have the right notions of God. Most schools never teach this. Most adults cannot answer, “What is God?”. Many pop-Jewish groups talk about sefirot, parts of God inside man, and other inconceivable and dangerous notions. Who is correct? How do we know? “Reason” will tell you. God gave you reason, so as to dismiss fallacy, and accept truth. If like me, you do not know what mystical ideas mean; it is most probably because such notions are meaningless, and because mysticism – belief in powers other than God – isn’t part of Judaism and reality.

Do you want to know what ideas are true? Then refer to Moses' words, and all the prophets. They never spoke of mysticism, or things that made no sense. Just the opposite is the case: Moses told the Jews not to forget what their eyes saw. He asked no belief whatsoever, but that each Jew accept reason to determine what is true, and what God is. No prophet ever endorsed amulets, segulas, praying to the dead, or any of today's popular falsehoods. Moses and the prophets endorsed reason, and abiding by God's commands, "Do not add or subtract from the Torah". They did not invent new styles of clothing as a means to publicize false piety. They added no new practices, and they never ran to others to bless them. They sought God "with their entire heart". They sought God alone, and nothing else.

Go back to the source, to the Torah. If you cannot find it there, don't follow it.

The Shofar

What is the significance of the shofar - the ram's horn? Its primary focus is its blasts, blown during our prayers on Rosh Hashanna. We also have the custom to blow it each morning during the month of Elul. This month precedes the month of Tishrei - the first day of which is Rosh Hashanna. During this month of Elul, the shofar is to act as a "wake-up call". "Uru yshanim mi-shinasschem", "Awaken you slumberers from your sleep." At this crucial time, when we are soon to be judged for life, prosperity, and health, the shofar alerts us to our impending judgment. We are to arouse ourselves, waking up from our routine activities and backsliding during this past year. We are to examine ourselves, detecting our flaws, and responding with a renewed strengthening of Torah values and actions. But why use a shofar? What is its significance?

PURPOSE OF THE BLASTS

We learn that the blasts of the shofar are meant to resemble the weeping and sobbing of Sisra's mother. This is why we have long and short blasts, as weeping takes on different types of cries. Sisra's mother awaited his return from battle. (Judges, Chap. 5) Sisra delayed in returning. Sisra's mother assumed he was dividing great booty, so this must have taken time. But later, her assumption of good, turned towards reality, and she realized he must have perished at war. Her sobbing was a response to recognizing reality. The shofar blasts are to make us associate to Sisra's mother's sobbing - her return to reality. We too must return to reality, that is, returning to a life of Torah. This is enforced by Rosh Hashanna, a day when we direct our attention to God's exclusive role as King, Who knows all our thoughts and actions, and Who rules the entire world. During our last prayer on Yom Kippur, "Neila", we say, "so that we may disengage from the oppression of our hands." Our daily activities of work, family and other pursuits distract us from what our true focus must be - the study and application of God's Torah system.

Talmud Rosh Hashanna 26b teaches that a shofar used for Rosh Hashanna must be bent, not straight. This is to resemble man's "bent" state of mind - he is bent over in humility. This parallels a contrast: God is King, but we are His creations. Our undistorted recognition of God's role as our Creator and King, results in our sense of humility.

SHOFAR AND SINAI

We find the shofar associated with many events. The shofar waxed increasingly louder at Sinai when God gave us His Torah, “And it was that the sound of the shofar went and grew increasingly loud...” (Exod. 19:19) Why was shofar integral to Sinai? Sinai was also much earlier than Sisra. So does Sinai’s shofar convey a different idea than sobbing? It would seem sobbing is unrelated to Sinai. What is Sinai’s shofar to teach us? Rashi states that it is the custom of man that when he blows for a long period, the sound gets increasingly weaker and more faint. But here, at Sinai, the sound grew louder. Rashi clearly indicates the lesson of shofar is to teach that man did not orchestrate this event. Shofar is to reflect the Creator’s presence. Why was this lesson required at Sinai? Perhaps the very act of accepting the Torah is synonymous with our recognition that this Torah is God’s ideas. Only such an appreciation will drive our studies towards answers, which resonate with absolute truth. God’s knowledge is the only absolute truth. Truth is the purpose of Torah study. Torah was therefore given with the sound of the shofar, embodying this idea. Rashi also mentioned that the sound of the shofar on Sinai “breaks the ears”. This means it carries great impact. Why was this quality of “sound” necessary? The miracles alone proved God’s existence!

There is one difference between a sound and a visual: sound is perceived unavoidably. You cannot “hide” your ears. Turning away from a visual removes its cognizance, but this is inapplicable to sound, certainly a loud sound. It would appear that besides the grand spectacle of Sinai ablaze, when receiving the Torah, the Jews required uninterrupted attention. The shofar blast kept them attentive to the divine nature of this event.

ABRAHAM’S SACRIFICE OF ISAAC

Talmud Rosh Hashanna 16a: “Rabbi Abahu said, ‘God says blow before Me with a ram’s horn, so that I may recall for you the binding of Isaac, son of Abraham, and I will consider it upon you as if you bound yourselves before Me.’ Since the ram is what Abraham offered in place of Isaac, our blasts of the ram’s horn are to recall this event before God. It is clear from this Talmudic statement that Rosh Hashanna demands a complete devotion to God - we must render ourselves as if bound on the altar, like Isaac. We accomplish this via our shofar blasts. This act attests to our commitment to Abraham’s sacrifice. We gain life in God’s eyes by confirming Abraham’s perfection. We follow his ways. This merit grants us life. The lesson of Abraham is not to end when Rosh Hashanna ends. This holiday is to redirect our focus from the mundane, to a lasting cognizance of God’s presence and role as Creator. He is to occupy our thoughts throughout the year. “Bichol diracheha, da-ayhu, vihu yiyashare orchosecha”, “In all your ways, know Him, and he will make straight your paths.” (Proverbs, 3:6)

But let us ask: why is the binding of Isaac central to the theme of Rosh Hashanna? There were many instances where great people sacrificed themselves in the name of God? Let us take a closer look at that event.

When Abraham was instructed to sacrifice his son Isaac, and was subsequently commanded not to do so, he found a ram caught in the bushes: (Gen. 22:13) “And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and behold, he saw a ram, after it was caught in the thicket by its horns, and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up as a completely burned sacrifice in place of his son.” Why did Abraham feel he was to offer the ram “in place” of Isaac? This was not requested of him. Sforno suggests that Abraham understood the presence of the ram as an indication that it was to be sacrificed - a replacement for Isaac. It appears from Sforno, that God wished Abraham to “replace” his initial sacrifice of Isaac. It also appears from Sforno that Abraham wished to fulfill the perfect act of sacrifice, although subsequently he had been instructed not to kill Isaac. Yet, Abraham wished to express the perfection of adherence to God’s command. Therefore, God prepared this ram. Ethics of the Fathers 5:6 teaches that this ram was one of the ten miracles created at sunset on the sixth day of creation. This clearly teaches that God intended this ram to be offered. Why was it so essential that Abraham offer this ram?

My close friend Shaya Mann suggested the following, insightful answer: Abraham was not “relieved” when subsequently; he was commanded not to slaughter his precious Isaac. The sacrifice of the ram displays a subtle, yet important lesson about Abraham. Abraham did not remove his attention from God, once ‘he had his son back’. Only someone on a lesser level of perfection would suddenly be overcome with joy that his son would remain alive with him, and then indulge that emotion with no attention to anything else. But Abraham’s perfection didn’t allow such a diversion from the entire purpose of the binding of Isaac. Although commanded not to kill Isaac, Abraham’s attention and love was still completely bound up with God. This is where Abraham’s energies were before the sacrifice, and even afterwards, when his only son was spared. Offering the ram teaches us that Abraham never removed his thoughts from God, even at such a moment when others would certainly indulge in such joy. Abraham did not rejoice in Isaac’s life, more than he rejoiced in obeying God. The ram teaches us this. Abraham remained steadfast with God. Abraham’s perfection was twofold; 1) he was not reluctant to obey God, at any cost, and 2) nothing surpassed his attachment to God.

MAIMONIDES ON THE BINDING OF ISAAC

Maimonides discusses the significance of Abraham’s binding of Isaac. I will record his first principle: “The account of Abraham our father binding his son, includes two great ideas or principles of our faith. First, it shows us the extent and limit of the fear of God. Abraham is commanded to perform a certain act, which is not equaled by any surrender of property or by any sacrifice of life, for it surpasses everything that can be done, and belongs to the class of actions, which are believed to be contrary to human feelings. He had been without child, and had been longing for a child; he had great riches, and was expecting that a nation should spring from his seed. After all hope of a son had already been given up, a son was born unto him. How great must have been his delight in the child! How intensely must he have loved him! And yet because he feared God, and loved to do what God commanded, he thought little of that beloved child, and set aside all his hopes concerning him, and consented to kill him after a journey of three days. If the act by which he showed his readiness to kill his son had taken place immediately when he received the commandment, it might have been the result of confusion and not of consideration. But the fact that he performed it three days after he had received the commandment proves the presence of thought, proper consideration, and careful examination of what is due to the Divine command and what is in accordance with the love and fear of God. There is no necessity to look for the presence of any other idea or of anything that might have affected his emotions. For Abraham did not hasten to kill Isaac out of fear that God might slay him or make him poor, but solely because it is man’s duty to love and to fear God, even without hope of reward or fear of punishment. We have repeatedly explained this. The angel, therefore, says to him, “For now I know,” etc. (ibid. ver. 12), that is, from this action, for which you deserve to be truly called a God-fearing man, all people shall learn how far we must go in the fear of God. This idea is confirmed in Scripture: it is distinctly stated that one sole thing, fear of God, is the object of the whole Law with its affirmative and negative precepts, its promises and its historical examples, for it is said, “If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this Law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, the Lord thy God,” etc. (Deut. xxviii. 58). This is one of the two purposes of the ‘akedah’ (sacrifice or binding of Isaac)”

Maimonides teaches that the binding of Isaac, represented by the ram’s horn, displays man’s height of perfection, where he sacrifices what he loves most, his only son, for the command of God. Shofar, the ram’s horn, thereby conveys the idea of the most devoted relationship to God.

We see why Rosh Hashanna focuses on the shofar as a central command. It is on Rosh Hashanna that we focus not on God’s miracles, salvation, or laws. Rather, we focus on God alone. This means, a true recognition of His

place in our minds, as King. He is our Creator, Who gave us existence, the greatest gift. Abraham's sacrifice is the ultimate expression of man apprehending the idea of God, and loving God. Not the idea of God Who saves, heals, or performs miracles, but more primary, as Creator.

SHOFAR AND THE JUBILEE

Another area requires shofar, the Jubilee year. This is the 50th year in the Hebrew calendar. After the shofar is blown, all slaves are set free, and all lands returns to their original inheritors apportioned by Joshua upon his initial conquest of Israel. What is the role of shofar here? Additionally, the shofar on Rosh Hashanna is derived from the Jubilee shofar. We are to use the same shofar on Rosh Hashanna as we use on the Jubilee. It would seem counter intuitive. Doesn't the day of Rosh Hashanna have more significance than a day, which occurs only once every 50 years? Why is the shofar of Rosh Hashanna derived from some area, which on the surface seems less significant? Maimonides states that once the shofar is blown, there is a pause: until ten days later, Yom Kippur, although free, slaves remain in the domain of their masters. Why do they not go free immediately upon the shofar blast?

The Jubilee year teaches us yet another facet in recognizing God as Creator: man's "ownership" (slaves and land) is a mere fabrication. In truth, God owns everything. He created everything. Our ownership during our stay here is not absolute. We learn from the release of slaves and land, that ownership follows God's guidelines. It is a means by which we again come to the realization of God's role as our Master.

Perhaps Rosh Hashanna is derived from the Jubilee for good reason. The Jubilee attests to a more primary concept: God as Creator. Rosh Hashanna teaches us that God judges man, but this is based on the primary concept that God is Creator. Our recognition of God's judgment must be preceded by our knowledge of His role as Creator. Therefore, Rosh Hashannah's shofar is derived from the Jubilee's shofar.

Why don't slaves go free immediately upon the shofar blast? If slaves would be freed, their freedom during the entire ten-day period would eclipse their repentance. The law is perfect: masters cannot work these slaves anymore for fear of their preoccupation with ownership, and slaves cannot leave their masters homes, for fear that they would be self-absorbed in their new found freedom. Both, master and slave must focus on God's role as King during these ten Days of Repentance.

Summary

In all our cases, we learn that shofar has one common theme: the recognition of God as our Creator. This recognition was essential for the Jews' acceptance of Torah, for our acceptance of God as the true Judge, and for us to view God as the absolute "Owner". Abraham expressed the zenith of man's love of God, so this event of the binding of Isaac is remembered, and reenacted via our shofar blasts. As a Rabbi once said, God created everything, so there must be great knowledge in all we see - I refer to our command of Shofar.

Question to Ponder

What is significant about the ram being caught in the thicket, "by its horns"? The Torah does not record superfluous information.

The Shofar II

In “The Shofar”, we were left with one unanswered question: What is significant about the ram being caught in the thicket, “by its horns”? The Torah does not record superfluous information. Why did God enact this? Let us review.

Abraham was instructed to sacrifice his son Isaac. Subsequently, he was commanded not to do so, and saw a ram caught in the bushes:

(Gen. 22:13) “And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and behold, he saw a ram, after it was caught in the thicket by its horns, and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up as a completely burned sacrifice in place of his son.”

Why did Abraham feel he was to offer the ram “in place” of Isaac? This was not requested of him. Sforno suggests that Abraham understood the presence of the ram as an indication that it was to be sacrificed - a replacement for Isaac. It appears from Sforno, that God wished Abraham to “replace” his initial sacrifice of Isaac. It also appears from Sforno that Abraham wished to fulfill the perfect act of sacrifice to God, although subsequently he had been instructed not to kill Isaac. Yet, Abraham wished to adhere to God. Therefore, God prepared this ram to enable Abraham’s desire to be actualized. Ethics of the Fathers 5:6 teaches that this ram was one of the ten miracles created at sunset on the sixth day of creation. This clearly teaches that God intended this ram to be offered. Why was it so essential that Abraham offer this ram?

ABRAHAM’S TWO PERFECTIONS

We mentioned the following, insightful answer offered by my friend: Abraham was not “relieved” when subsequently; he was commanded not to slaughter his precious Isaac. The sacrifice of the ram displays a subtle, yet important lesson about Abraham: Abraham did not remove his attention from God, once ‘he had his son back’. Only someone on a lesser level of perfection would suddenly be overcome with joy that his son will remain alive with him, and then indulge that emotion with no attention directed elsewhere. But Abraham’s perfection didn’t allow any diversion from the entire purpose of the binding of Isaac. Although commanded not to kill Isaac, Abraham’s attention was still completely bound up with God. This is where Abraham’s energies were before the sacrifice, and even afterwards, when his only son was spared. Offering the ram teaches us that Abraham never removed his thoughts from God, even at such a moment when others would certainly indulge in such joy. Abraham did not rejoice in Isaac’s life, more than he rejoiced in obeying God. The ram teaches this. Abraham remained steadfast with God. Abraham’s perfection was twofold; 1) he was not reluctant to obey God, even at the cost of losing his beloved, only Isaac, and 2) nothing surpassed Abraham’s attachment to God.

The very fact that Abraham was not commanded to sacrifice this ram, but did so of his own desire, demonstrates his perfection.

One might ask, “is there not the rabbinical dictum, ‘Greater is one who is commanded and performs, than one who is not commanded?’” Based on this principle, Abraham would be more perfected, had God commanded him to offer the ram!

A Rabbi once taught, one is more perfected when commanded and acts, as he overcomes the resistance to the “command”. Being commanded in a matter, man has a tendency to rebel. Overcoming the rebellious emotion displays one’s higher state. But what about our case, where a command did not apply, i.e., Abraham was not commanded to offer the ram? In such a case, we must compare what the actual possibilities were; either, Abraham

offers the ram of his own desire, or he does not. Clearly, Abraham's act of offering the ram is greater than inactivity. The Talmudic dictum applies only when a command is applicable. Now, let's return to the main issue, the significance of the ram.

In reviewing the verses, we note something quite interesting: After Abraham offered the ram, he was addressed a second time by the angel:

(Gen. 22:13-18) "And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and behold, he saw a ram, after it was caught in the thicket by its horns, and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up as a completely burned sacrifice in place of his son. And Abraham called the name of that place 'God Appears', as he said, 'on this day on the mountain, God appeared.' And the angel of God called to Abraham a second time from the heavens. And he said, 'by Me I swear, says God, on account that you have done this thing, and you have not withheld your son, your only. Behold I will certainly bless you and greatly multiply your seed as the stars of heaven and as the sand of the seashore and your seed will inherit the gates of your enemies. And all nations will bless your seed, on account that you listened to My voice.'"

But in Genesis 22:12, Abraham was already praised for not withholding Isaac! Why the repetition? Klay Yakar states that there were actually two acts of perfection, 1) "on account that you have done this thing", and 2) "and you have not withheld your son." Besides not withholding Isaac, Abraham did one other thing: I believe this refers to the ram offering. This is fully supported by the second, angelic address occurring immediately after Abraham offered the ram. Through the Torah's method of teaching that this second address occurred on the heels of the ram offering, the Torah calls our attention to this offering. It was an act of perfection. It warranted an additional blessing for Abraham. I feel this substantiates my friend's insight. Abraham's sacrifice of the ram was of great importance, as we said, God prepared this ram during the six days of creation. It was of utmost importance that Abraham had this opportunity, and that we witness Abraham's perfection in our Torah.

We also learn that Abraham's perfection was not simply his one time sacrifice of Isaac. The ram offering displays his sustained devotion to God. Both acts, Isaac and the ram, reveal his inner perfection. The Rabbis teach that Abraham would not have been subjected to this trial, had God known he would fail. This teaches that God helped Abraham actualize his perfection, which was already present.

THE RAM CAUGHT IN THE THICKET

What is significant about the ram being caught in the thicket, "by its horns"? Perhaps such a phenomenon is unlikely. A ram has its horns to the rear of its head. They are used solely for bucking, and are not engaged when eating the vegetation of a bush. There is virtually no way for the ram to get its horns caught, as they are behind its head, and its mouth is the only thing that comes close to the thicket. Animals are quite agile, and accurately sense their range of safety. Being caught by its horns would not happen. But here it did. Why? Answer: it was divinely intended. Again, why?

Two possible explanations come to mind: 1) Perhaps Abraham saw this oddity, and concluded there was divine intent for his sacrifice of this animal. 2) The Torah records this to underline for us - not Abraham, as he did not have a Torah - so we may understand that God intended this ram offering by Abraham. The Rabbis deduced such, that God created this ram during Creation. This teaching causes us to focus, not just on the attempted sacrifice of Abraham's son, but also on the steadfast and unceasing attachment Abraham had to God and His command. Abraham would not remove his attention from God, even though others would be tremendously relieved to have their child safe.

Shofar, the ram's horn, is taken from this ram sacrifice of Abraham, and incorporated into our Rosh Hashanna prayers. We are to be as devoted to God as was Abraham, even AFTER the return of Isaac. Shofar imbues us with a call for a double-edged perfection; 1) sacrifice in the face of adversity (binding of Isaac), and 2) devotion to God while in the best state (having Isaac returned).

SINAI AND THE MESSIANIC ERA

We must now recognize one more area, which deals with shofar. I refer to our most familiar blessing of our daily Tefilah (prayer) of "Tika b'Shofar Gadol", "Blow with a Great shofar". In this prayer, we anticipate the forecast made in Isaiah 27:13:

"And on that day, there will sound a great shofar, and there will come all those lost in the land of Ashure, and those cast away in the land of Egypt, and they will prostrate themselves to God in His holy mountain in Jerusalem."

What does shofar have to do with the ingathering? Metsudas Dovid mentions that "holy mountain" refers to Mount Moriah, where Abraham offered Isaac. Interesting.

In Otzar HaTefilos, on the phrase "Tikah B'Shofar Gadol" (weekday shacharis) the Iyun Tefilah says as follows:

"And the matter of 'great' (shofar) was explained by the Rabbis at the end of chapter 31 in the chapters of Rabbi Eliezer, 'There were two ram's horn shofars, with the left (one) God blew on Mount Sinai, and the right horn is greater than the left, and in the future, God will blow with it, in the ultimate future, to gather the exiles.'"

Why is the right horn greater? What is greater about ingathering the exiles, than Mount Sinai? This is apparently the lesson of the right horn being "greater", that the future ingathering is incomparable to Sinai, in some aspect. We also learn that there is some commonality between the two shofars, as both come from one ram - the "left and right" horns indicate this. What's the connection between Sinai and the Messianic era?

What does shofar have to do with the ingathering? Quoting Rabbi Reuven Mann, "Why is the event of the Messiah part of Maimonides' 13 Principles? These principles deal with our understanding of God. How is the Messiah equivalent to ideas such as the existence, unity, or non-physical nature of God, commencing the 13 Principles?" Rabbi Mann answered, "This event marks the fulfillment of God's promise - the ultimate state of perfection for mankind. Messiah is the culmination of God's system for man, coming to its pinnacle of perfection through the validation of God's word. God is absolute truth." (Paraphrased) This Messianic event is the last "piece of the puzzle." It displays God's perfection that His words do not 'fall to the ground'. We gain the ultimate appreciation for God via the Messiah and the ingathering of the exiles. Long since unfulfilled, man will comprehend the absolute and complete truth of God's word, when His ancient oath is actualized.

Sinai is eclipsed by the Messianic era. Although Sinai gave man indisputable proof of God, the Messiah's arrival and the ingathering, are the completion of the Torah system, only commenced at Sinai. Thus, the Rabbis teach that the horn, the shofar, blown in the future ingathering, is the "right" horn, the greater horn. It is a far greater event, in terms of our recognition of the truth of Torah, via the fulfillment of the Messianic promise.

This now explains what the common thread is between Sinai and the Messianic era: Sinai was the commencement of the system of Torah, and the Messianic era is its completion. Both partake of one theme - the formation

of Torah - and are therefore described by the Rabbis as two horns from the same ram. They are the two greatest elements in the formation of the Torah system; Sinai is the guidebook, and the Messianic era is the final circumstance required for man's perfect fulfillment of the guidebook's laws.

MOUNT MORIAH

Once messiah arrives, all will prostrate to God at His Holy Mountain, as stated by Isaiah. Why? Since Mt. Moriah's distinction is derived from the binding of Isaac, it embodies the perfection in man (Abraham) that all is rightfully sacrificed in the fulfillment of God's word. In the era of the Messiah, this will be clearly understood, and enacted by all peoples. Messiah will teach with lucid insight, why service of God is to be man's primary focus, where all else is inconsequential. Man will arrive at this knowledge, and will demonstrate this by prostrating at God's mountain.

Again we see that Rosh Hashanna incorporates the shofar in perfectly sound reason: it hearkens back to Abraham's perfection in service to God, and it anticipates our greatest state of recognizing God's perfection and ultimate reality and truth, via His fulfillment of His word.

Season for Change

A Rabbi once said that it's no coincidence that Rosh Hashannah falls out in the fall. With autumn's changing colors, our emotions are distracted and detached from normal behaviors. This distraction releases our emotions from repeated, unchecked actions, resulting in our intelligence gaining footing over our instincts. There is an added ease in managing our emotions. We may then improve our behavior, following instead, what our minds tell us, not what our emotions feel.

Rosh Hashannah & Shofar

Talmud Rosh Hashannah 16a commences with a Mishna, which states that the world is judged at four yearly intervals: on Passover for grain; on Shavuot for fruits; on Rosh Hashannah all members of mankind are judged; and on Succot, rain is judged. The Ran raises the obvious question that since man is judged on Rosh Hashannah, this judgment includes ‘all’ of man’s needs, such as fruits, grain and water. As such, separate judgments for each one of these three elements individually is redundant. The Ran answers that the fate of fruits, grains and water are in fact judged in their respective times. However, on Rosh Hashannah, God allots each human his ‘portion’ of these three.

But this still begs the question: is not the very fate of each of these forms of sustenance, for man? So if man’s needs include these three elements, and he is judged on Rosh Hashannah, what is left to be judged concerning these elements at these three yearly intervals? To be clear: man is judged for all his needs on Rosh Hashannah, including what he will enjoy of fruits, grain and rain. So what is God determining on the holidays, which He has not determined when judging every individual person on Rosh Hashannah?

The Ran answers that on the holidays, God decrees what the “world” will receive. Meaning, how many crops and rainfalls will be granted to the “world community”...not the individual. On these three holidays, God determines what the world will receive. While on Rosh Hashannah, God decides what each individual will enjoy of those crops and rainfalls.

But why not determine both the bounty of the world, and every individual’s portion, all in one day? What demands that individuals must be judged separate from crops and rain?

This Talmudic portion addresses God’s two forms of providence: 1) providence of individuals (hashgacha pratiyos) and, 2) providence over the masses (hashgacha klaliyos). We learn that God invites the sacrifices of the masses at three yearly intervals, for these are opportune times for requests, as we will discuss shortly. During these holidays mankind takes advantage of the seasonal needs with more devoted prayer. Such greater devotion results in God’s kinder response. And God’s determination for the nation is meted out not based on individuals, but the status of the majority. But Rosh Hashannah is a time where each individual passes before God, as sheep under the rod.

ADAM THE FIRST

The Ran teaches that Rosh Hashannah was the day when God passed judgment on Adam, and acquitted him. God then set this day of Rosh Hashannah for mankind to be evaluated and sentenced accordingly, just as Adam had experienced. But why must we follow the day of Adam’s judgment? What need does this satisfy? The Ran taught that God commenced the universe’s creation – Day 1 – on the 25th of Elul. This means that Day 6 of creation, when Adam was created, was the first of Tishrei, or Rosh Hashannah. On Day 6, the Ran says each hour had significance: Hour 1: God decided to create man. Hour 2: He consulted with the angels. Hour 3: He gathered together the Earth’s dust. Hour 4: He kneaded the Earth. Hour 5: He formed him. Hour 6: He was a lifeless entity. Hour 7: He threw into Adam a soul. Hour 8: He entered Adam into the Garden of Eden. Hour 9: He commanded him not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge. Hour 10: Adam sinned. Hour 11: Adam was judged. Hour 12: Adam was acquitted. But for some reason, this design that Adam the First was judged on Rosh Hashannah demands that we too be judged on this day. Perhaps we might answer this parallel as follows.

Man was not only judged and acquitted on Rosh Hashannah, but he was created on this day too. Why is this significant? This teaches us that immediately after he was created, Adam the First could not resist sinning against God, for even one hour. “For man is not righteous in the land, that he does good, and never sins”. (Eccl. 7:20) This means that man’s very design makes him – us – subject to sin “as soon as we are in existence!” Sin is always

“crouching at the door”. (Gen. 4:7) And since this is Adam’s design, it is our design too. But God acquitted Adam, and as King Solomon said, “no man is good, and without sin”. It is inevitable that man sins. This explains why we require Yom Kippur as a fixed and repeating Day of Atonement. We will always fall into sin at some point. Therefore, God aligned our day of judgment to duplicate Adam’s. This teaches us that just as Adam sinned and required judgment, but also a pardon...we too require judgment, for our sins are inevitable as well. We come to appreciate that it is by God’s very design of the human being, that these High Holidays are essential.

Now, as man is judged on Rosh Hashannah, it is vital to our happiness this coming year that we review our knowledge, actions, values, personality traits, and Torah adherence ‘before’ Rosh Hashannah. This is accomplished in part by our early rise to recite Selichos. For if God inscribes us all “on” Rosh Hashannah, this must be based on our level of perfection as we ‘enter’ this holiday. While it is true that we can use the Ten Days of Repentance to improve ourselves and alter our decree, it is wise to start our self-evaluation process before hand. Of course, one who is aware of Torah values and understands the great good and sensibility a Torah life offers, will evaluate and improve himself on a regular basis throughout the year.

Rabbi Ruben Gober once spoke on the idea that Rosh Hashannah is not a time of requests, but of contemplating God’s kingship: His role as man’s Governor. Rabbi Gober taught that it is this very realization of God as our Creator and Ruler that raises us to a higher level, and entitles us continued existence. For God sustains only that which conforms to His will...namely man. All of God’s Earthly creations aim to direct mankind to a greater appreciation for the Creator. Nothing in God’s creations serves another purpose, except man, when he sins. With this thought in mind, let us review another section of this Talmud.

In our Talmudic section, God says that we must bring three sacrifices of sorts, and each one will be effective in securing grain, fruits and water, respectively. But God says we are to bring these sacrifices on Passover, Shavuot and Succot. The question arises: what do the holidays have to do with securing grain, fruits and rain? If we understand the nature of the holidays, we will readily answer this question.

HOLIDAYS

The holidays are commemorations of God’s intervention: He saved us from Egypt through miracles; He gave us His Torah on Shavuot – again with miracles, and He protected us by His clouds, a miracle we duplicate by building Succot to mimic those clouds all around us, and above us. On each holiday, God demonstrated His intervention through miracles, so we might know beyond any doubt that it was in fact God who performed all we experienced. I believe too, that the twelve stones erected on both sides of the Jordan River which we just read about, and a third set in the river, were again to prove God’s providence: teaching future generations that we inherited Israel ‘only’ via God’s intervention, and not our own might. For how else could twelve stones be erected on the river floor, unless God split the Jordan, as he split the Red Sea? And placing two more sets of twelve stones – with the Torah inscribed on all – on both sides of the Jordan, those ancient Jews effectively created a route map of how they entered the land of Israel! The first set of stones recalls our point of departure from outside Israel; the set in Israel proper shows where we arrived; and the set in the Jordan River proves “how” we entered the Land – through a miracle of the river being split. Now we can answer our question.

We pray for grain, fruits and rain on each of these three holidays, since it is an opportune time to do so. As we celebrate the holidays, we are reminded of those astonishing miracles God enacted to do some great good for the Jewish nation. And precisely as we are in the throngs of that elation and appreciation for God’s age-old providence, we then pray for God’s current intervention, to secure our sustenance for this year. That conviction of God’s providence back then, now presently in our minds, fuels our prayers with a renewed realization and conviction that God intervenes. And that realization is what God desires we sense as He pours out His blessings. In other words, God gives His goodness to those who recognize that He is the source of all. Only that individual is

deserving of God's blessings, since it is he who lives, as God desires. These gifts God grants us, in turn, will be appreciated properly: as God's doing.

Additionally, we request each area of sustenance at its season: on Passover which is harvest season, we request a good harvest of grain; on Shavuot we pray for fruits, and in the rainy season commencing on Succot, we pray for rain. In the hour of need, we align our conviction in God's historical providence, with our current request. We do so, since man may assume that seasons dictate our bounty independent from the Creator. But, by sacrificing at the seasons of certain crops and rains, we deny the assumed "independent" functioning of nature, and realize all is in God's hands. As He intervened for us back then in Egypt, He continues this relationship with us, and it is this relationship that we maintain by observing Torah.

This is an important lesson: God answers us more readily...when we are convinced of His abilities. When we realize it is not "nature", but God's will that sustains us with food and water...we are now entitled. This is because we have raised ourselves to a higher level, as individuals who view life as solely dependent upon God. And since we are living as God desires, He desires us to live! He then grants us our requests for sustenance.

Our appreciation is doubled by the fact that it was God who decided that we should bring the three offerings on these three holidays. God planned it out this way to offer us a myriad of opportunities to elevate ourselves at each and every turn. But we must engage in studying His Torah system to realize these truths, the hows and whys of Torah law, and appreciate what God is doing. We can never answer "why" He created mankind. But we can seek reasons for all of His mitzvot. In last week's Parsha Netzavim, Ibn Ezra explains that the essence of each Mitzvah is what is "in the heart". (Deut. 30:14) Ibn Ezra means that the true purpose of each and every mitzvah is to arrive at greater knowledge: that which is in the "heart". Of course we must 'perform' mitzvot. But the performance is merely an expression of human conviction. If one does not perform what he claims is a value to him, his values are not real. Therefore, knowledge must result in action, i.e., Mitzvah, in order to be termed a "conviction". But action is only necessary because God wishes that man to see where he fails to act, so as to eliminate the ignorance, which prevents his fulfillment of God's words. The true objective in every mitzvah is the knowledge gained which brings us closer to God.

ROSH HASHANNAH

The Talmud continues with this theme of performing certain actions on certain holidays. We stated that the three holidays addressing God's providence, are an opportune time to capitalize on man's appreciation for God's intervention, or providence, concerning our sustenance. But Rosh Hashannah, although a holiday, is not about providence. Rather, it is all about God in His capacity as ruler, or rather, "King".

God created many laws: Tefilin teaches that we are philosophically incomplete without Torah close by. We must demonstrate that as a human being without Torah, we are severely crippled even with all our limbs intact. Torah is a required organ of the human being, and Tefilin displays this lesson. Conversely, and ironically, circumcision addresses our incomplete physical natures, if we remain physically whole. Our lives are not primarily physical, but metaphysical. By tempering our sexual sensation through circumcision (as Maimonides teaches), we render ourselves better suited for a life of wisdom. Charity and visiting the sick perfect our morality, and spread good feelings among society. Each command addresses another facet of the multifarious human personality.

Holidays serve to reiterate certain essential truths. The truth taught via Rosh Hashannah is that God is King. Shabbos is different, as it reminds us of God as the Creator. It would then follow that Shabbos is more vital, since we observe it every seven days. We cannot go for longer without Shabbos. We must be mindful that the very existence of the universe, and our very beings, is an act of God, and not ourselves. "He made us, and not ourselves." (Psalm 100) Although quite an obvious lesson, King David wrote this, as he knew man's egotistical nature can obscure God's responsibility from something this obvious. Shabbos is therefore indispensable each seven days.

Certainly after a year of struggling for financial success, and finding it, man will have steeped himself into a sense of independence, where he feels he is solely responsible for his successes. He will also embellish his fantasies of immortality over this past year. He needs to face his mortality, and Who really granted him success. “And you shall remember Hashem your God, for He [is the one] that gave you strength to create success...” (Deut. 8:18)

Now, just as on the three holidays whose purpose it is to recall God’s providence, we seek His providence over our food...on Rosh Hashannah, we continue this practice of “combining common themes”. That is, on the day we recall God in His capacity as our king, we blow the shofar. But how is shofar related to accepting God as our ruler and king?

MALCHIOS - KINGSHIP

The Talmud states that we first recite the prayers recalling many verses depicting God as king. We must truly accept God as our ruler. In doing so, we endorse God as king. His role as “king” – over mankind – is embellished when man accepts His rule. An amazing idea: on Rosh Hashannah we actually contribute to God’s role as king by our acceptance of His rule. This idea is actually the words of the Talmud, “Recite the prayers of Kingship so you shall make Me rule over you.”

ZICHRONOS - OMNISCIENCE

We continue our prayers with the Zichronos, the prayers of God’s all-knowing nature. The Talmud says, “God says, ‘Recite the Zichronos so that your remembrance shall rise before me for good [judgment].’”

Now, we must ask why our recitation of Zichronos causes us to be remembered before God for a good judgment, more than our first prayer. Is not the first prayer of God as king, a more primary truth than God’s omniscience? Is not the fact that God created the universe more primary, than His subsequent relationship to it? As this is so, we would assume that our recitation of that more primary prayer of kingship would entitle us to a good judgment, more than our recital of the Zichronos prayer. Think about it first...but the answer is as follows.

Why should God remember us and inscribe us for a good year? It is because we do something to deserve it. What God did when He commanded us in this Zichronos prayer, is that He offered us an opportunity to perfect ourselves, whereby, we will receive a better judgment. God desires the good for His creatures. He asked that we recite the prayer describing His all-knowing nature. Now, what happens when we do so? It is this: We reflect immediately on a certain area of His knowledge: His knowledge about “me”. Meaning, the intent in our recalling God’s omniscience, is to realize that this omniscience extends to man, primarily...to me. The result is that I now feel I must answer to God, since He sits in judgment on this day of Rosh Hashannah. This specific prayer where I recall God’s knowledge over all my thoughts and actions is a motivational prayer: it motivates me to seek His approval, so I must change. This regret is actually the first step in the process of repentance, and is viewed positively by God. God says, “Recite the Zichronos so that your remembrance shall rise before me for good [judgment].” He will improve our judgment because we now regret our actions, completely known to Him. Once a person realizes that God knows all, he views his sins as no longer hidden from Him, he sees his actions as evil, and this improves the person’s values, and his judgment from God. God need not punish man for actions that man will abandon independently.

We now understand that although Zichronos is not describing the more lofty capacity of God as King, it possesses the motivational aspect that drives man to regret and do Teshuva, repentance. This is why the Talmud singles out Zichronos as the catalyst for our improved judgment.

SHOFAROS - REVELATION

The Talmud then asks “how” shall we convey our recognition of God as King and as omniscient? The answer is “through shofar”. Rav Avahu said, “God said ‘Blow the ram’s horn before Me and I will recall the binding of Isaac son of Abraham, and I will consider you as though you were bound [on the altar] before Me.’” We must ask how our simple act of blowing this ram’s horn renders us on par with Isaac, who sacrificed his life, and how this relates to Rosh Hashannah.

What is the significance of the ram? Abraham offered it in place of Isaac. As my friend Shaya Mann stated, it demonstrated that although Abraham now had Isaac back in his life since God rescinded His command to slay him, Abraham nonetheless remained attached to God, and sought to sacrifice something in Isaac’s stead. But our Talmudic section focuses on Isaac’s sacrifice, not that of his father Abraham. Isaac was ready to sacrifice his life for God. He realized the lesson God planned to create for all time that God is to be our sole desire in life. And the ram is representative of Isaac. So when we blow the ram’s horn, we in other words state that we emphatically agree with Isaac’s yearning to sacrifice his very life to God. Therefore, as we agree with Isaac’s mission, to sacrifice his life, God views us on par with Isaac, and grants us equal merit: “I will consider it as though you sacrificed yourself on the altar”. But there is another idea in Shofar.

GOD REVEALED

Where was the original shofar? What are the commencing words in the shofar prayer? The siddur refers to God’s Revelation at Sinai, where there existed the sound of a shofar that “grew exceedingly loud”. The Rabbis teach that man’s shofar blasts become weaker as he nears the end of that exhale. But God’s shofar blast at Sinai became even stronger with ever passing second. Ibn Ezra says this (Exod. 19:13): “For the sound of the shofar was a great wonder – there was nothing at Revelation at Sinai that surpassed it. For lightning, thunder and thick cloud [at Sinai] were [already] seen in the world. But the sound of the shofar was not heard until the day of the Ten Commandments”. We wonder: what is so amazing about this sound, and what is its relevance to Rosh Hashannah?

Let us consider: how does a shofar blast differ from lightning or thunder? What did Ibn Ezra say? He said that the Jews never heard a shofar, but natural phenomena were matters already experienced, and not as impressive. It appears that shofar is not natural. What then is something “not natural”? It is manufactured. But this requires a “Manufacturer”. This is the answer: shofar reveals the existence of one who is causing its sound...a shofar cannot blast by itself. When the Jews heard the shofar at Sinai, they realized an Intelligence must be causing this sound, and intended it for them. And when the sound did not weaken, but grew in its intensity, the Jews were frightened at the very existence of God! For man’s breath weakens. God used shofar at Sinai to make His existence and divine nature apparent to all.

The primary message of the shofar is that God relates to mankind. The Shofaros prayer commences “You revealed Yourself in clouds of Your glory, unto Your sanctified people to speak with them.” The first element described is that God revealed Himself, the second; “to His people”. Shofaros is highlighting a relationship between the Creator, and His people. So we have three prayers: 1) Malchiyos, which describes God as King (omnipotent); 2) Zichronos, which speaks of God’s omniscience; and 3) Shofaros, which reflects on these first two concepts, teaching that this omnipotent King who is also omniscient, has a relationship with mankind. We therefore commence our Shofaros prayers with a lengthy description of God’s revelation at Sinai. It was at Sinai that the shofar’s significance was born. Revelation is the primary proof that God relates to man, the proof used to validate Judaism, and that which disarms all other religions of any similar claim. Revelation commences the Shofaros prayer, as Sinai was the event par excellence that embodies God’s relationship with mankind – a relationship forged on a basis of wisdom.

These three prayers and their concepts highlight the nature of Rosh Hashannah. They remind man of the true reality in which we live, although obscured each year by life's distractions.

End Notes

Reflecting on Isaac's perfection, we too must realize how significant must be God's place in our lives: a primary lesson of Rosh Hashannah. We must accept His role as King, as this is reality. We must move past our yearly agendas, our subjective desires, and our petty emotions.

It is truly an amazing realization, that God created us. And He did so with a purpose for us. We live such temporal existences, but we have the potential for an eternal life. God created for us our beings, our souls, and a prospect of an eternal and blissful existence. That must stop each of us in our tracks, and make us yearn for it.

This Rosh Hashannah may be a turning point where we focus on what we are saying, and find a renewed interest in the many lessons Torah seeks to teach us. Patiently praying, we might contemplate our words, see new ideas, and reengage in rigorous Torah study, so we might discover a life where we "minimize our work, and maximize our studies", as Ethics 4:12 suggests. If we are patient and think into what we are saying this holiday, we can make profound changes in our values for the remainder of our lives.

May each one of us be inscribed and sealed for a healthy, prosperous, tranquil, and enlightening year where Torah study and adherence becomes our priority!

The Evolution of Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur usually carries a dread – not “only” of a potentially fatal judgment – but the more commonly dreaded 25-hour period where we suffer from prohibitions against simple comforts: we cannot eat or bathe, and we stand many hours in prayer without shoes. These laws create an unfortunate and incorrect, negative association, to a day, which should be most celebrated: we are forgiven! Sadly, many of us focus on the lack of food, more than on how God will pronounce His justice over our life, health, success, and happiness. Our attachment to this Earthly existence is to blame for granting more value to immediate needs, than for our souls. Tell a person sentenced to death that 25 hours of fasting and prayer will give him another year of life, and he will kiss you. We should feel the same way. If we can accept this brief period of fasting and discomfort, and get past the anxiety, we can discover some interesting ideas, which God has covertly conveyed to us in His Torah about this day. And with these new realizations, I feel we will welcome this day with an appreciation for God’s intent, and minimal concern over the discomforts...that do have their place.

THE ORIGIN OF YOM KIPPUR

Where did Yom Kippur come from: is it a day God planned from the outset during Creation, or something that evolved, responding to man’s flaws?

All of creation typifies one of these two possibilities; for there is no other. Either something was part of God’s original plan, or it was added later. For example, man was first created quite tall, with a life span of 1000 years. The Medrash says that man used to traverse the Earth in a few steps, uprooting cedars, and fierce beasts such as lions were as fleas to him: an exaggerated truism. But after man’s ego directed him to sin (primarily due to these gifts of stature and longevity), God reduced his stature and minimized his years to address the very cause of his sin. Thus, man had an original design, which was later changed due to his sinful nature. Due to his sin, man was then to share the same food as his donkey, but God rescinded this decree and allowed him to have some ego satisfaction, in the act of working the ground for his food. Again, there was an original plan regarding man’s food, and then a concession to man’s nature.

However, in the Garden of Eden, there was not yet a Yom Kippur, only a Rosh Hashanah. This means that a day of judgment and a final verdict occurred simultaneously. But today, we experience a day of judgment (Rosh Hashanah) and a separate Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). Why was there a change? The Ran says as does Maimonides, “The wholly righteous [even now] are written and sealed for life immediately on Rosh Hashanah.” They need no Yom Kippur. This makes sense, as a righteous person is always reviewing his thoughts and actions. He probably does not even need a Rosh Hashanah. The Ran continues, “But average people like us (baynoni) are granted a stay of execution for 10 more days, so we might investigate our deeds and repent”. We now understand that Adam did not require the 10-day reflection period. As Ibn Ezra teaches, “Adam was a great intellect”. But as man slid in his perfection, the 10 Days of Repentance and Yom Kippur became a need.

The Ran states (Ran on Rosh Hashanah; 3a, “BiRosh”): “God desires to grant merit in the Jews’ judgment, and He desires to judge His creations in a time established for atonement and forgiveness”. Here, Ran refers to the fact that Moses obtained atonement for the Jews’ sin of the Gold Calf on this 10th of Tishrei, on Yom Kippur. Therefore, God judges us on the day in which He forgave Israel back then. But we wonder what this means, that God “desired to judge us in a time established for forgiveness”. It was God who initially forgave man! So what does God forgiving “when” He forgave mean? Whenever He wants to forgive, will also be a day when “He forgave”! In essence, our question is, “Why does God wish to copy Himself?” Sounds strange? But as always, the Rabbis are teaching profound insights.

My understanding of this phenomenon of God copying Himself means this: God's forgiveness is based on "Himself", i.e., His forgiveness is not based on "our claims", for we have no claim against God. "Copying Himself" (His forgiveness of the Gold Calf sin, and then following through for all Yom Kippurs) means that it is God's mercy alone that demands man to be forgiven. Without God's mercy, when man sins, he breaks his Torah treaty with God. And as is the case with all agreements, one who breaks his agreement must pay. But in connection with God, we have the good fortune of an additional aspect of "God's mercy", as we recited all week in Selichos, "For on Your abundant mercy do we trust" for forgiveness. Therefore, man has no rights once he sins, but God is merciful, and "this" is why we are forgiven. This is what the Ran means by God using His initial day of forgiveness, as a model for future forgiveness: His forgiveness is based on His nature.

Now let us turn our attention to the sin of the Gold Calf to better grasp its significance as the forerunner of Yom Kippur.

THE GOLD CALF & YOM KIPPUR

We now understand why God repeats His forgiveness, for this is His merciful nature, and His nature never changes. Therefore, man will always be forgiven...if he seeks God's mercy. Additionally, later generations who did not sin with the Gold Calf also require a Yom Kippur since we all share the same design as humans who sin.

Why was Moses' intercession necessary to obtain forgiveness for the people? Perhaps it was Moses' potential to educate the Jews back to a proper lifestyle that earned the Jews forgiveness. It was also Moses who had the greatest level of wisdom, enabling him to learn from God how to obtain pardon. But this area requires more study. What I wish to focus on in this section is the sin of the Gold Calf. How was this event so significant for all time? Furthermore, Rashi states (Exod. 32:34): "When God punishes the Jews in the future for other sins, He will also requite some punishment for the Gold Calf. For no punishment comes upon Israel, that doesn't contain some of the punishment for the Gold Calf". But why should the Gold Calf sin be requited, when the Jews sin in other matters? What was this sin?

The Jews miscounted the day of Moses' descent from Sinai. They said to Aaron after seeing Moses delayed, "Rise, make for as elohim (governor) that shall go before us. For this Moses, 'the man' who took us out of Egypt, we know not what has become of him". The "man"? That's an odd statement.

The Jews thought Moses might have died. They created the Gold Calf – not as a representation of God – but of the "powers" they witnessed. (Ramban) The Jews displayed the inability to detach from the "man" Moses. So deep was this need for physical, religious life, that they created a gold, physical expression. And so deep was this need, that God allowed a concession for it. Sforno teaches that God only commanded Moses and the Jews in the Temple and in all its vessels, so the Jews might have the expression they sought: a physical means of religious expression. Without the sin of the Gold Calf, Temple would not be part of the Torah, and human life. Of course the allowed human expression in Temple service is highly regulated to insure no idolatrous venting.

Therefore, the Gold Calf sin, in essence, is the inability for man to approach God abstractly. In other words, all of man's approaches to God are severely compromised due to our feeble natures, and our over attachment to the physical. Thus, when we sin in the future, we are in fact expressing this same flaw, which that ancient generation expressed in building the Calf. Sin means that we cannot live 100% in line with God, we must deviate from Him. So the statement in Rashi that "all sins receive some punishment of the Gold Calf", means that all sins share the same crime, at their every root, as the Gold Calf. A wise Rabbi recently mentioned that the first Tablets were created during the Six Days of Creation. (Avos, 5:6) The idea, if I recall well, is similar to what we are saying: God initially desired the Jews to possess the first Tablets, i.e., He desired we live a more abstract and thus, more perfected existence, realizing Him from creation, indicated by those first stones being part of Creation. But after the Gold Calf sin, we received Moses' hewn tablets.

Rashi on Exodus 33:11 says that God forgave the Jews for the Golden Calf with a full heart and with gladness, and this occurred on the tenth of Tishrei, Yom Kippur. The sin of the Gold Calf epitomized mankind's central, religious flaw. But this is not all that occurs on Yom Kippur. We have so many unique services. From where or what are they derived?

FATAL, ULTRA-RELIGIOUS EMOTIONS

The Torah outlines the Yom Kippur sacrifices and highly unique services at the very beginning of Parshas Acharay Mos. Sin offerings and Olah offerings are brought; the priests and Jews bring separate offerings; the High Priest clouded the Holy of Holies in the Temple with a incense; and the Scapegoat is hurled off a rocky peak from Azazel. Together, these acts form amazingly unparalleled and curious acts of worship, to say the least. But we also read that these services come on the heels of the death of Aaron's two sons. What is the connection? Let's first understand their sin for which God killed them, and then, why their story must be the intro to the Yom Kippur worship. At this point, the Gold Calf, Aaron's sons' deaths, these strange forms of worship, and the afflictions...all seem quite disjointed.

Acharay Mos commences as follows (Lev. 16:1,2):

“And God spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they drew close before God, and they were killed. And God said to Moses, ‘Speak unto Aaron your brother, that he does not draw close at all time towards the Holy of Holies, behind the Paroches [curtain] facing the Cherubim that is on the Ark, that he not be killed. For in cloud do I appear on the Cherubim’.”

The Torah then describes all of the Yom Kippur sacrifices and services. When we read of the sin of Aaron's sons Nadav and Avihu (Lev. 10:1) the Torah says that they brought a “strange” fire that they “were not commanded” to bring. In other words, they sought to serve God with their own type of worship. God teaches us their sin above with the words “when they drew close to God”. God is teaching us that our approach to Him must be exactly as He outlines in His Torah. Nadav and Avihu did seek to “draw close to God”, but they allowed their instincts to run free in the religious sphere. They imagined they could worship God with unguided actions...actions God never prescribed. But this is impossible, and a fatal error. The correct formula is this: our approach to God cannot be by any means that God disagrees with. “Do not add to the Torah” is a command addressing this very ultra-religious emotion, and teaches exactly what God denounces: “all that is omitted from Torah is prohibited”. The Talmud teaches that the religious sphere is where man's instincts are greatest. We see this today with jihads and Temple mount claims. And the Talmud metaphorically depicted the instincts as a fiery lion exiting the Holy of Holies. This teaches our very point, as a wise Rabbi taught, “the instincts are strongest in religious matters”...the Holy of Holies is where human instincts are as powerful (fiery) as a lion.

But why observe all of these services, on Yom Kippur? How do Nadav and Avihu tie into this Day of Atone-ment? It would appear, that as Temple is a response to the Gold Calf sin, and Nadav and Avihu erred in Temple worship, the tie is apparent. The very vehicle God compromised on – Temple – contains dangers, and explains why it was not a preferred institution! Even our very approach to God in Temple will be flawed, since man is flawed.

Therefore, the sacrifices on Yom Kippur actually come to atone for “sinful worship”, as ironic as it sounds. Rashi teaches that the Yom Kippur sacrifices atone for the Jews and the Priests' errors in worship. Of course the Scapegoat atones for other sins, but a primary focus is on atonement for flawed, Temple worship. This explains

why the Yom Kippur services outlined in the Torah come on the heels of Aaron's sons' sin. Just as they erred in approaching God in Temple, we do as well. In our very approach to God, our instincts do not let up. Amazing. How honest is our Torah! But again, be mindful that Temple is a 'concession', explaining why flawed worship is no surprise.

My friend Jeremy Koppel suggested this following idea many years ago: the reason there are sin offerings and Olah offerings, is to teach that atonement (sin offering) is not the final objective, but approaching God without the need to repent is: love of God is greater than fear of God. Another two ideas tie in now.

Why does the High Priest cloud the Holy of Holies? He does so as God says, "For in cloud do I appear on the Cherubim". This quote was God's response to Aaron's sons' sin. This means that God is imperceptible via human senses. In all of God's revelations and communications, cloud is present: cloud hovered over the Temple; at Revelation at Sinai there were clouds and fog; and the Temple has the incense altar that creates cloud. Why do we need cloud? This is to teach that a "veil" exists between God and mankind. "For man cannot know Me while alive" was said by God to Moses. And it was this truth that Aaron's two sons did not grasp, and assumed they could imagine how to approach God. However, not only is God unknowable, but also, so is man's approach to Him, unless we are taught how.

We also learn in Acharay Mos that the priests offer separate sacrifices from the Jews. This can be explained as a result of the priests' role. They worship in the temple daily, and have a greater danger of falling prey to religious emotions. Therefore, their atonement for Temple infractions is of a greater nature than the Jews', explaining why their animal sacrifice is a greater animal, a bull, while the Jews' sin offering is a goat.

Summary

We learn that Yom Kippur is God's merciful response to man's flaws, and that this day evolved due to the Jews' sin of the Gold Calf, and to Aaron's son's flawed worship. The Gold Calf sin demanded a day be devoted to addressing man's Earthbound, sinful nature; our inability to live 100% without sin. But the sacrifices brought on Yom Kippur were not based on this Gold Calf event. They were a response to Nadav and Avihu's sin. Yet, these sins are a direct result of Temple, which itself is a result of the Gold Calf. Due to our need to employ physical expression in our worship of God, God conceded with a Temple. And due to this concession, man inevitably sinned in his expression, embodied in Nadav and Avihu's sin.

Reflecting on these ideas, we come to realize our natures as humans: creations that are imperfect; creatures with dependent existences, and who rely on the Creator for our lives. But during our brief existence, we are so fortunate that God extends to man this Day of Atonement; where He wipes our slate clean. He encourages our renewed existence in the pursuit of learning more about Him and living properly. He gave us His Torah for us, not for Him, as God has no needs.

So as we enter and exit this holy day, we must feel fortunate, not hungry or tired. We should truly search out from our Torah leaders what God truly wants of us, for our own good.

Yom Kippur equips us with a fresh beginning; and abandonment of old sinful ways, as a new "me" emerges revitalized with vigor. May we harness this new strength to grow ever stronger in our Torah lifestyles, remaining firm to what God teaches, without deviation.

The Yom Kippur Sacrifices

Many people live by the principles of “modernity”, the feeling that “anything that preceded me must be outdated”. Some espouse the opinion of “animal cruelty” in connection with Temple sacrifice. Additional rejection of the sacrifices of Yom Kippur may arise due to their association with a long day of fasting, standing, and many uncomfortable restrictions. Are the Temple’s “ancient” sacrifices just that – archaic, inapplicable, and even brutal acts, deserving our abandonment? Must our religiosity comply with our subjective feelings, or must “we” comply with these practices and ideas, regardless of our opinion of their inapplicability?

As Torah Jews who respect that all in our Torah is God’s word, applicable for all time [1], we take a different road: we seek to discover the eternal truths contained in each of our precious Mitzvahs and ideals, instead of projecting our wishes on them. As Torah Jews, we know all that God commanded does not expire, as man’s nature does not expire. As Adam was created, and as the Jews existed at Sinai when they received these commands, so are we today: possessing those identical faculties and desires. As such, we are no less in need of the Torah’s sacrifices and their lessons. The sacrifices address our human nature today, and it is only due to our sins, that the Temple is non-existent, and our levels are degraded by its absence. But we may still perfect ourselves to a great degree by understanding the underlying ideas of the Yom Kippur sacrifices; we must study the characteristics and requirements of the sacrifices. We must review the Torah, Talmud, and our sages, such as Maimonides, Ramban, Rashi and Ibn Ezra.

TWO GOATS

I will address just two of the Yom Kippur sacrifices: the two goats upon which a lottery was cast. Two goats – preferably with similar visual features, height, and cost – were presented in the Temple. The priest would blindly draw a lot, which contained both God’s name and that of Azazel. Each goat was designated for the lot placed on it. The scapegoat – the one sent to its death off Mount Azazel – is described as “carrying all the sins of the Jews”[2]. This goat atoned for all sins, provided one repented. The other goat dedicated as a sin offering in the Temple atoned only for the sins of the Jews in their defiled entry to the Temple sanctuary.

What is the reason for the goat’s similarity? Why was their designation for either a sin offering in the Temple, or Mount Azazel, decided by a lottery? Why do we require two goats: cannot a single goat atone for all sins? What was significant about Mount Azazel? And why was there a service of clouding the Holy of Holies where the Ark resided, included in the process of sacrificing these two goats?

Furthermore, we are struck by the Torah’s placement of the Yom Kippur sacrifices in Parshas Achrei Mos [3] immediately subsequent to the death of Aaron’s two sons who offered a “strange fire”: an offering not commanded by God. What was the gravity of their sin, that God killed them? And what is the connection between Aaron’s sons’ sin and the Yom Kippur sacrifices, that the Torah joins the two in one section? We also wonder what God means by His critique of Aaron’s two sons, “And you shall not come at all times to the Holy of Holies behind the Paroches [curtain] before the Kapores [4] which is on the Ark, so none shall die...for in cloud do I [God] appear on the Kapores”. [5] What is the stress of “for in cloud do I appear on the Kapores”? What is the significance again of “cloud”? And finally, why, after concluding the section on Yom Kippur sacrifices, does the Torah continue with the restriction of sacrificing outside the Temple, with the punishment of one’s soul being cut off? In that section [6] God warns the Jews about sacrificing to demons [imaginary beings] and also warns about eating blood, which also meets with the loss of one’s soul. Maimonides teaches that the practice of eating blood was imagined by those sinners to provide them camaraderie with assumed spirits, and that those sinners would benefit by such a union. Although the questions are many, I believe one idea will answer the all.

THE SCAPEGOAT

What is the significance of Yom Kippur? It is the day when we are forgiven. What does “forgiveness” imply? It implies that we sin. And in what does man sin? This is where I believe we can answer all our questions.

We readily answer that we sin by deviating from God’s commands. The worst sin, of course, is idolatry, where we assume the greatest error: other powers exist, besides God. If one assumes this fatal error, his concept of God is false, and his soul cannot enjoy the afterlife, which is a greater connection with the one, true God. This explains why those sinners who sacrificed to imaginary beings – demons – and those who eat blood, lose their eternal life. And even if these exact practices are not performed, but one harbors the thought that there exists powers other than God, be they powers assumed to exist in physical objects, or even in the Torah’s words...such individuals also cross that line of idolatry.

The Scapegoat – the one goat sent to its death off Mount Azazel – was to atone for all our sins. Sin emanates from a disregard of God and His word, but in its most grave form, idolatry. The Rabbis say that the Scapegoat is not sacrificed, but hurled from a peak downwards, to prevent us from assuming it is a ‘sacrifice’ to those demons, normally associated with the wilderness where Mount Azazel is located. By destroying the Scapegoat and not sacrificing it, we actively deny any claim of those desert-based demons, or truths about camaraderie with spirits by eating blood from sacrifices to demons. We wish to deny any and all claims of assumed powers, other than God. Our atonement is effectuated through the Scapegoat, by admitting the fallacy of idolatry, and the rejection of any intelligent existence besides God, His angels, or man. Nothing else exists that is self-aware; nothing else besides God, His angels, and man, possess any intelligence, or capabilities other than natural laws. The Scapegoat thereby undermines and utterly rejects man’s path where he deviates from Torah practice. But there is another area of sin.

THE OTHER SIN

“And they brought before God a strange fire, which He had not commanded them [7]”. Aaron’s sons Nadav and Avihu expressed the other area of sin: man-made, religious practice. Although we assume sin to be solely identified as deviation from the Torah as seen in idolatry, sin also exists when we attempt to approach God, but with our own devices, as the verse states, “And they brought before God a strange fire...”. “Before God” is the operative phrase. Nadav and Avihu intended to approach God, not in accord with His ways, but with their own. The Rabbis stated, “The Jews desired to contain the Evil Instinct. It exited as a fiery lion from the Holy of Holies. They attempted to retrain the lion by seizing its mane, but it let out a loud roar.” Regarding this Talmudic metaphor, a Rabbi once asked what was most significant. He answered, “the fact that the instincts were exiting the Temple’s Holy of Holies”. What does this mean? It means that man’s instincts are most powerful – like a fiery lion – in connection with the most religious of activities and locations: the Holy of Holies. We need not look far to realize this truth, as demonstrated in Jihads and other holy wars. Religion is a great target for man’s instincts, as in this area he is greatly motivated. In unguided religious expression, man’s emotions will take over, as seen in Aaron’s two sons who wished religious expression of their own creation. The existence of so many divergent man-made religions proves this point that man wishes subjective religious expression.

It is this sin, I believe, that the second Yom Kippur goat addresses. This second, goat sin offering was brought in the Temple, and not sent to the wilderness as the other, for it is this goat that addresses man’s sin in the Temple. Man requires recognizing his sin in both deviating from God, and in approaching God. God too addresses these two deviances with His commands not to add to, or subtract from the Torah. Subtracting from the Torah parallels the Scapegoat, where man abandons Torah and God in place of demons; and adding to the Torah parallels the sin of Nadav and Avihu who expressed an addition to the Torah’s prescribed commands, corrected by this second goat brought in the Temple to atone for the Jews’ sins in Temple.

GOD'S ARRANGEMENT OF TORAH SECTIONS

We can now readily understand why God placed the Yom Kippur sacrifices in His Torah, between the sin of Nadav and Avihu and the prohibition to sacrifice to demons. It is because Yom Kippur sacrifice intends to address man's two areas of sin: the over religious sin seen in Nadav and Avihu, and the lack of religiosity seen in demon sacrifice, where one does not approach God, but runs from Him towards imagined imposters. Yom Kippur atones for us by directing our attention to the two areas of human sin: non-religious, and over religious. We are alerted to apply this lesson to our own deviances. The non-religious person assumes more knowledge than God, as he feels he understands better how the world operates. He therefore creates his own demons, and worships them. He is lacking an understanding of the One Creator, as he assumes multiple forces. The over religious person feels otherwise: he feels safe, as he "approaches God" as did Aaron's sons. He feels with his intent to serve God, anything goes. He feels he can create new modes of religious practice, and that he will find favor in God's eyes. But the Torah's response for both is death of some kind. Thus, God construes "any" deviation as sinful – even when our intent is to serve God.

Perhaps the need for two goats is derived from our two areas of deviance. And perhaps, as one goat addresses the abandoning of God in idolatry, that same goat is unfit to address our faulted approach to God: idolatry is a far greater crime: idolatry errs about God Himself, while over religiosity errs about His will. But both goats are preferably identical, to teach that either goat satisfies one or the other requirement, since there is nothing in the goat per se that atones, but it is our understanding and conviction in their respective 'lessons', that truly atones for us. The lottery also contributes to removing any significance to either goat, as each was picked by "chance".

CLOUD

Why was there a service of "clouding" the Holy of Holies where the Ark resided, included in the service of Yom Kippur? And why was God's response to Nadav and Avihu, "for in cloud do I [God] appear on the Kapores"? Cloud was also present at God's Revelation at Sinai. What is the commonality?

Nadav and Avihu violated the principle that God is unknowable, by assuming they knew how to approach God. Thus, God responds that He appears in cloud. What is cloud? It represents man's blindness. Man is blind about God's nature, and also about how to approach Him, without Torah. Nadav and Avihu's sin was in their denial of their ignorance concerning God. God therefore reiterated to Moses and Aaron the concept of man's blind ignorance, by describing how He appears in cloud. And again in our yearly Yom Kippur service, we must reiterate our agreement with our ignorant natures, by clouding the holiest of all places, the Holy of Holies. Our religious practice must contain a service that demonstrates our ignorance. Our atonement relies on a rejection of our instinctual, religious fabrication.

APPLICATION FOR TODAY

It is vital that in our approach to God, that we be so careful not to add to Torah commands, regardless of the popularity of new practices, even among religious Jews. Our barometer for what is God's intent is God's word alone. We must not fall prey to our need for human approval, that we blindly accept what the masses of religious Jews perpetrate as Torah. If we are truly careful, and seek out authentic, authoritative Torah sources, we will discover what is true Torah, and what violates God's words.

In a conversation with a dear friend recently, I was asked what I felt about certain Kabbalistic views. They included these: that cut fingernails are dangerous; that people might hurt us with evil eyes; that reciting the letters of God's name offers man power; and other nonsensical positions. My first response was that there is doubt as to the authenticity of the Zohar, and further, Zohar is not the Torah given by God at Sinai. But regardless, I told this friend that if an idea makes no sense, it matters none if a Rabbi wrote it, for even Moses, the most perfected

intellect erred. Therefore, no man alive today is infallible. So quoting the Zohar is meaningless, if the idea violates Torah and reason.

God gave each of us a Tzelem Elokim – intelligence – that we must engage, and not ignore. Regardless of the prevalence of practices in religious Jewish communities, we have intelligence with which we may discern what makes sense, and what is nonsense. It matters none if the practice is a sacrifice to demons, or a practice that includes a Torah object like a mezuzah, a challah, or if one cites an accepted book authored by a Rabbi. We have the Torah's authentic principles to guide us towards reasonable practices. Just as demons and their assumed powers are imagined, so are the powers assumed to exist in challas, red bendels, mezuzas, or reciting Torah verses with the intent to heal the sick.

Religious deviance seeks substantiation by including Torah articles in man made practice, and as we learn from Nadav and Avihu, any deviation from God's commands – even to approach Him – is a sin. If you are in doubt to the validity of a practice, study the Torah, read the Shulchan Aruch, or ask a Rabbi to show you a source. But if you find no source for a given practice, do not follow it. And many times with your mind alone, you can uncover the falsehood in popular claims.

This Yom Kippur, break free from what is popular, comfortable, or falsely promises success and health. "Teshuva, Tefila and Tzedaka", repentance, prayer and charity, are what God deems as our correct response:

Do Teshuva from false notions and actions, regardless of their popularity, for you exist to follow God, not to impress your neighbor by copying their errors.

Pray to God to direct you to new truths, to forgive and purify you, and to help you abandon fallacy. And if your Hebrew reading is not excellent, pray in English or your own language, for prayer is meaningless if you do not understand what you recite.

And give charity to recognize your own insignificance, to break loose of our attachment to wealth, and recognize that God alone grants wealth. Assist others, recognizing them as God's creation, and show them pity, as you wish God to show you.

Use God laws alone to secure your good life, and do not continue in the sins of abandoning God, or attempting to serve Him in way He did not command. The Scapegoat teaches that our imagination is destructive, and the goat sin offering curbs our over religious tendencies. We must learn where these lessons may apply to each one of us, for we all have false notions in connection with purely instinctual needs, and religious needs. Be guided by reason, by God's precisely worded Torah. And may we all forgive, be forgiven, and enjoy a new year of life, health, wealth and happiness that can only come from careful Torah adherence.

[1] See Maimonides' 13 Principles

[2] Lev. 16:22

[3] Lev. 16:1-34

[4] The Kaporets was the Ark's lid formed of solid gold, with the figurines of two cherubim – childlike creatures with wings.

[5] Lev. 16:2

[6] Lev. 17:1-16

[7] Lev. 10:1

Thoughts on Yom Kippur

As we learn, two goats were presented before God, and a lot was cast which pronounced the fate of each: one was sacrificed, and the other was led by an appointed individual to its certain death: it was led through the desert and ultimately hurled off Mount Azazel, the jagged cliff which dismembered the descending goat before it hit ground.

Aaron explained the Rabbis words, “God gave Azazel its portion”. What does this mean? As Aaron explained, during bondage, the Jews absorbed the Egyptian worship of animals. One idolatrous attachment was addressed by the slaughter of the famous Paschal Lamb, which we kill in refutation of Egypt’s proclaimed deity. To benefit from God’s Egyptian Exodus, the Jews must have killed that lamb. Otherwise, they could not accept God, and Torah, as their view of God would include some harbored reverence of that lamb. Such reverence cannot coexist with the true concept of God, who is ‘alone’ in His role as Creator. Rashi states four fifths of the Jews in Egypt perished. They could not extricate themselves from idolatry. However, many others who successfully abandoned lamb worship, nonetheless, held steadfast to another deified animal: the goat. The destruction of the goat dedicated to Azazel is tied to Egyptian goat worship. “And you shall no longer sacrifice to the goats.” (Lev. 17:7) As Aaron mentioned, goats are always chewing: a base human instinct is the appetitive drive. In specific, goats over other animals become obsessed with a single partner in copulation. Man too gravitates to the appetitive and sexual drives, so perhaps, the goat attracts man on an unconscious level, as it too enjoys and displays unrestrained lust. Perhaps, it is man’s very instincts that chose the goat over all other animals, as an expression and satisfaction of his own makeup. Egypt selected the goat, not by accident, but because it “appealed” to those lustful and unrestrained oppressors, the Egyptians. Jews too are made of the same cloth, and absorbed this instinctual magnetism. They too accepted the practice of sacrificing to the goats.

How does God address this problem of the Jews’ attachment to the goat? “God gave Azazel its portion”. Aaron explained this to mean that although Egypt and those Jews felt there was some “force” out there, the powerful goat-god, God’s “giving its portion” means that God controls all, and no other forces exist outside of Him. God “giving” a portion to the goat (Azazel), means that God is solely responsible for this imagined “force” embodied in the goat’s traits. In other words, “Do not think as did Egypt, that the goat and imagined desert demons (one and the same) are some independent force that reign outside of God’s control. No, all is under God’s hand, and He also created what you only perceive as a “force”, but is in fact, man’s instincts. However, these are all man’s projections. No forces exist outside of God, and He demonstrates this by commanding a tragic end to the goat, to that presumed desert god. We should react, “How can we kill a real god?” From the planned and unimpeded death of the goat, we learn that it cannot protect itself. It is not a god! Egypt assumed otherwise. All of those imagined desert demons and forces could not protect this goat, what other cultures assumed to be a god. Hence, the idea that the goat is a supernatural being is dismissed. Simultaneously, God is viewed as superior, since nothing opposed His command to kill this “god”.

But why allow such a practice to begin with? After all, the Rabbis admit that this scapegoat sent to Azazel is one of three Torah commands, regarding which; the idolatrous nations of the world, and our own instincts accuse the Torah. They say about Azazel, we are sacrificing outside the Holy Temple, “just as they do” to their gods! How can this be that the Torah allows such a practice? Cannot such a practice mislead us, and encourage idolatrous sacrifice in the desert, just as before?

Let us understand: these goat-gods, demons or shadim, are all imagined. The Talmud teaches that they are “seen” in only four locations: in pits or caves, mountaintops, at night...and in the desert. Why this limited travel? Can’t they move freely? The answer would be yes, if they were real beings. But the Talmud is pointing to something: these four instances where demons are seen, share a common bond: they are places where man is isolated. And when man is alone, his powerful social need is awakened, and yearns for at least one other person to be with, to talk to...to “see”. So, he does, he sees things. His imagination, coupled with his strong social need, creates daydreams of people, or animals that embody some human quality. This affords the solitary individual some sense of company, or it caters to his fears. And as we said, goats embody man’s two base instincts. So when man is alone, as he used to be in the old days as he traveled across plains and deserts by foot, his loneliness would create visions. The Talmud teaches us that we should not “greet” these demons, for by doing so; we elevate what is imaginary, to the status of “reality”. Thereby, the Torah aptly guards man against falling prey to all dangers, and psychological dangers are at the forefront of the battle. Goat gods and demons are not real, and we must not treat them as real.

The command not to sacrifice in the desert is the response to this behavior. It puts a lid on any expression of desert god sacrifices. But would not Azazel actually encourage desert sacrifice? The answer is no. This is because God, and not man, initiates Azazel [1]. And if man does not initiate this practice, it is not an expression of his imagination: it is not idolatry. It is also a controlled activity, once a year. The opening of the parsha Acharay Mos highlights this. This Parsha almost immediately describes the Azazel scapegoat. But before doing so, God tells Moses to speak to his brother Aaron, that he may not enter the Temple at his discretion. And the reason God says this must be observed is because “I appear in cloud”. What type of explanation is this? How does God’s appearance in cloud reasonably demand that Aaron not enter the Temple to sacrifice at any time? And why mention this prohibition here? The reasoning is sound: Aaron’s two sons were just killed by God, precisely because they sacrificed, without being commanded. Such an act is prohibited, as it reveals man’s feeling that he knows better than God how to sacrifice. This religious emotion can kill us. What is God’s response? “Do not sacrifice at all times...for I appear in cloud.” “Cloud” means to say, “I am hidden. You cannot know Me, nor have you any right to decide when or how to sacrifice to Me.” God is teaching us that Aaron’s sons were killed for acting on their feeling that they knew better than God when to sacrifice. God condemned them for bringing a “strange fire” which was not commanded.

Although well intended, our intentions must follow truth, and cannot dictate truth. The religions of the world express the latter sentiment; “Our feelings justify and validate our actions as God’s will.” But this too, God reprimands, “For in the thoughts of my heart I will go.” (Deut. 29:18) This is cited in the Torah as man’s justification for deviating from God’s words, but God does not accept such a justification and other religions borne of man’s feelings, for man cannot know better than God. God says this man will not be forgiven. Our actions must follow He who knows better. Thus, Judaism is a religion of accepting objective reality, where other religions manufacture a subjective “reality”, assuming man’s feelings dictate reality. Thus, they forever strive to force the external world to comply with their fantasies, only to be confronted at every turn with frustration: for the real world does not function according to their infantile fantasies carried throughout adulthood.

Now, if the Rabbis stated that the Azazel scapegoat appears to the nations as idolatry, why did God see fit to allow it? I suggest that God desired the Jews to witness this part of our makeup, as expressed in “God gave a portion” to the Azazel. God is placing this idolatrous act on a pedestal, on this one day of Yom Kippur. In other words, God is saying, “See this Azazel? This is what your instincts are prone to do; you sacrificed a goat to

demons in the desert. Recognize your instinctual nature, that it can lead you to falsehoods (defenseless goat-gods), and its tragic end.” Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, requires man’s acceptance of his instinctual nature. Apprehending this reality of our instinctual nature must precede our address of these instinctual drives.

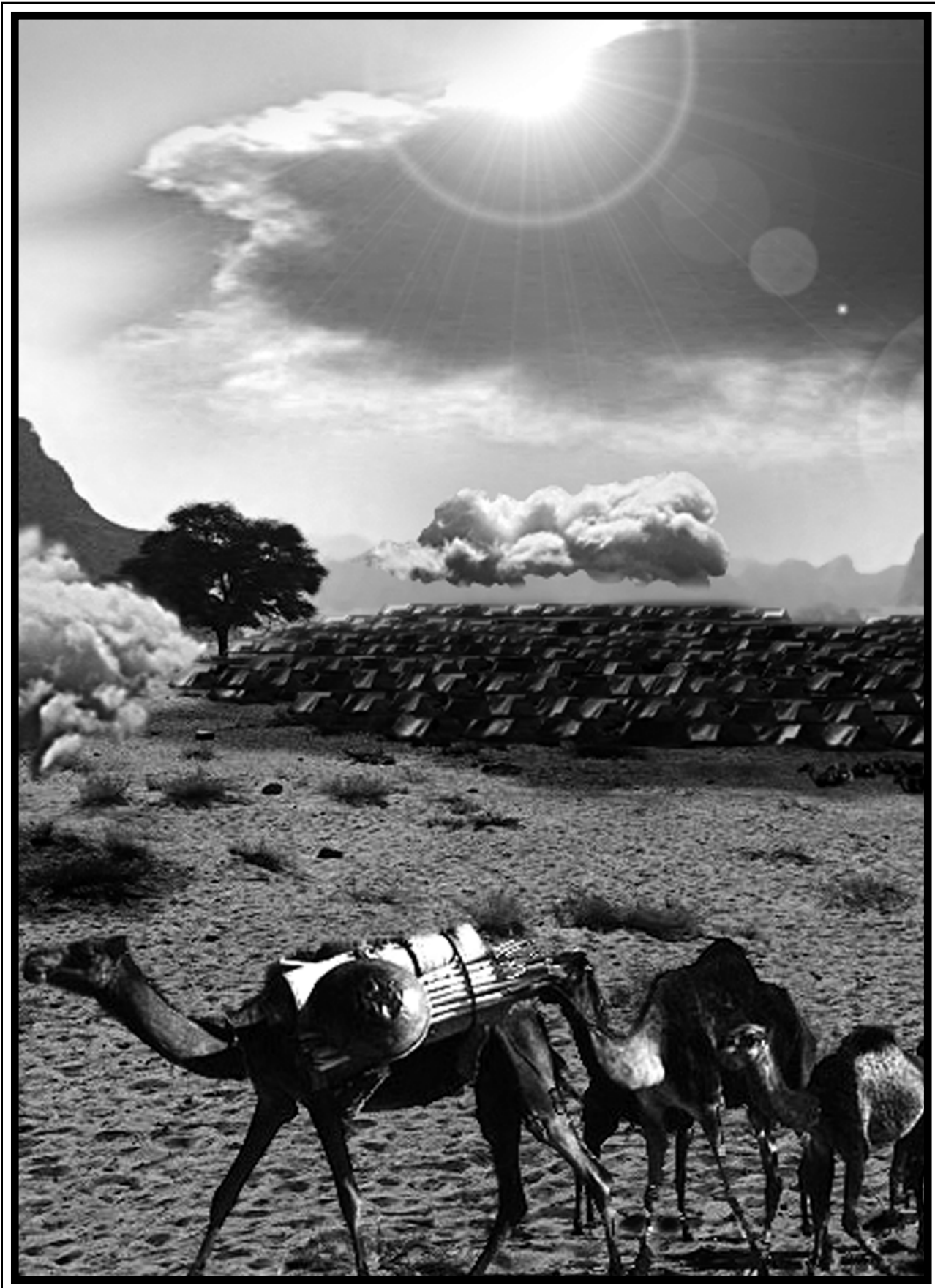
The Rabbis also quote “Samael” (translated as “the blinding agent [2]”) or Satan. Samael normally conveys our sins to God. But on Yom Kippur, all it has are praises for this Jewish nation, who appear as angels; not eating, not sitting, not wearing shoes, who are at peace with one another, and are free of sin. God hears the prosecutor’s (Samael’s) praise of the Jews, and then He atones them for the sins of the Temple and the nation. What does this metaphor mean? The Rabbis mean to teach the second half of Yom Kippur’s lesson: why God atones us. We are atoned due to our demonstration that we can in fact control the instincts, as we display with our abstention from pleasure in these areas. The very fact that we can overcome our drives demonstrates our level, as individuals who can see the truth, and master our appetites. This level renders us worthy of life. We can be atoned. Our yearly overindulgence is the cause of our attachment to these desires. As we abstain from them this day of Yom Kippur, we recognize our desires as we ache for them. This must awaken us to just how involved we are in pursuing these pleasures. Knowledge of the sin is the first step towards dealing with it. Through abstention in these areas, we can study ourselves, and gauge our activities, thereby moving from a life of temporal pleasures, to a life of eternal wisdom.

Yom Kippur straddles both issues: through the Azazel scapegoat we recognize the instinctual and idolatrous emotions which exist in us all, and as a Rabbi once taught, how that life leads to a tragic end. And through fasting and abstention from other pleasures, we demonstrate our ability to control those desires, and merit atonement. Since this day is all about atonement, we focus on the cause for our need for atonement: the instinctual nature of man. The book of Jonah is therefore read, as it reminds us of the inhabitants of Nineveh, who heeded God’s warning, and whose lives were spared as they repented from their sins. Man can overcome his emotions.

May we all benefit from this day, and be sealed for life. Chasima Tovah.

[1] Simultaneously, we cannot bring animals anywhere except in God’s Temple. In the end, this Azazel scapegoat is to heighten our awareness of our idolatrous natures, while adhering to God’s command. This scapegoat mission to the desert, is following God’s prescribed laws, and is no longer an expression of man’s idolatrous practices, as God initiated this one-time yearly demonstration.

[2] Samael “blinds” man from the truth, and leads us astray after instinctual gratification.





Part II

SUCCOT

Succah & Lulav

In his book entitled Horeb [1], Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explained a close relationship between the Succah and Lulav. I will mention his ideas, followed by my thoughts - stimulated by Rabbi Hirsch.

The Succah, a minimalist structure, is to focus man on a minimizing his material lifestyle. This teaches man that pursuit of the physical world is not the goal of our temporary, Earthly existence. The lulav too embodies the correct attitude towards the source of all physical good. We demonstrate our thanks to God for His bountiful harvest. We realize God alone has complete dominion over the world.

The Talmud states, (Succah 37b) “Why do we wave the Lulav? R. Yochanan said, we wave out and back (horizontally) to the One who owns all four directions on Earth, and we wave the Lulav up and down to the One Who owns heaven and Earth”. Rabbi Yochanan - in my opinion - separated the two acts of waving “in/out” from “up/down” to teach us that there are two areas of God’s dominion which we need to realize: God owning all four directions refers to something other than heaven and Earth. We see this clearly, i.e. that He is the Creator of all. This is why we wave up/down. But if up and down waving covers heaven and Earth, i.e., all creation, what is left to recognize about God’s greatness? I believe it is to emphasize His dominion over man’s actions - that God has complete knowledge of our travels on Earth (our actions) as alluded to by the “four directions”, which is limited to Earthly activity. This subtle difference points us to the realization that there are two distinct areas in which we must attest to God’s greatness: 1) God is omnipotent, He can do all, as He created heaven and Earth, 2) God is omniscient, He knows all, as He is aware of all our travels and actions.

Interestingly, these are the two main themes of the High Holiday prayers, “Malchios” (omnipotence), and “Zichronos” (omniscience). Rabbi Yochanan’s view is that our waving of the four species on Succos must demonstrate God’s dominion in all areas; in His creation, and in His government of man.

Why must the Succah be temporal and frail by design? Succah breaks man away from his insecurities regarding his wealth. Man continuously and falsely attempts to compensate for physical insecurity by striving for riches. Man must strive to focus on God as his Sole Benefactor, instead of relying on the work of his hands. The drive towards the physical as an ends, removes God from man’s life. Lulav contrasts Succah by emphasizing the use of the physical for the right reasons. We thank God - the Source of our bounty - replacing our faulted view of the physical, with this proper thanks to God for providing vegetation. All physical objects that we are fortunate to receive should be used in recognition of the ‘Supplier’ of these fruits, and not to reaffirm our own physical strength.

It also makes sense that Succah - not Lulav - is used to demonstrate man’s required break from the physical. Man’s home is the one object which embodies Earthy permanence,...not so man’s food. Therefore, I believe a frail home - a Succah - is used as opposed to fruits - which are consumed objects, and do not afford man the satisfaction of permanence. Since man does not attach himself to fruits as he does his home, the home is from where man must make his break.

Perhaps this is why we also read Koheles (Ecclesiastes) on Succos. In this philosophical masterpiece, King Solomon presents the correct philosophy for man, in relation to work, wealth, happiness, sadness, and primarily, in accomplishments. King Solomon states numerous times, “what extra is there for man in all is toil that he toils under the sun?” He even commences his work with his summary, “All is futility of futility...”. The Rabbis questioned King Solomon’s statement, “How can King Solomon say all is futile, when God said in Genesis that the world is very good?” The answer is that Solomon was referring only to the physical as an end in itself as futile.

When God said it was good, He meant that as long as it serves only as a 'means' to man's pursuit of wisdom. There is no contradiction between King Solomon and God.

In summary, Succah breaks down man's weighty attachment to the physical. Lulav redirects that attachment towards God, the source of all our sustenance.

Fulfill the obligations of this Succos holiday. Adhere to the commands of eating, drinking, and certainly sleeping in the succah, even light naps. Make the schach (Succah covering) from detached plant life such as reeds, wood, or bamboo, so you may gaze through the gaps at the stars as you lay on your bed - recognizing your Creator, the Creator of the universe. Wave the lulav and esrog in all four horizontal directions demonstrating God's exclusive dominion over all man's affairs. Wave the lulav upwards and downwards, demonstrating God's exclusive creation of that which is up and down - heaven and Earth. By living in these frail huts, may we strip ourselves of our own false security, and may our waving of the lulav and esrog redirect our security towards the One who provides a bountiful life - realizing that our ultimate protection and security comes from God.

1 Soncino Press, 6th English Edition 1997, pp 132

Seeing Stars

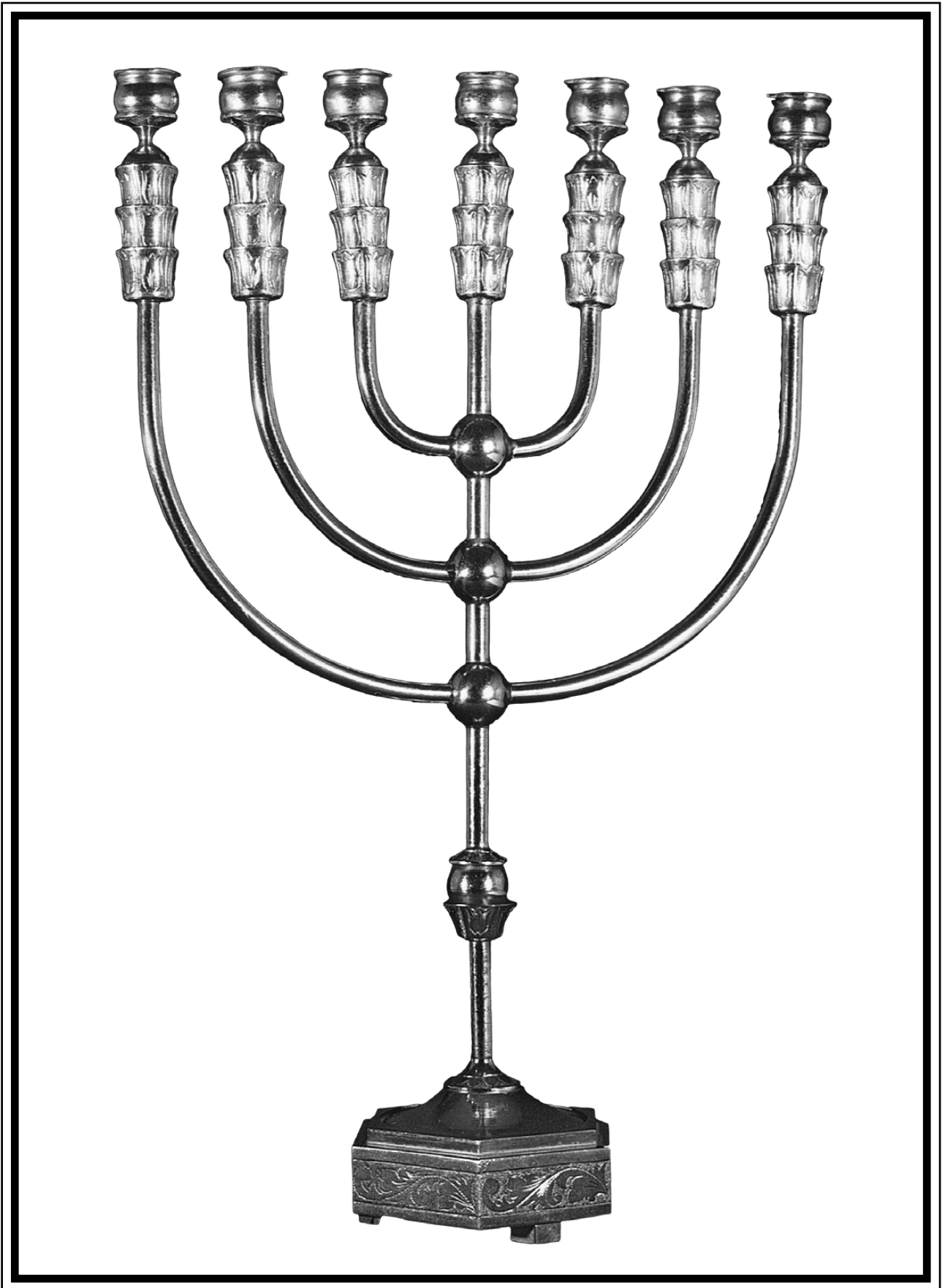
My friend Rabbi Roth asked a very basic, yet perplexing question: "We learn that the schach (the roof of the Succah) must allow gaps so we might view the stars through it's covering. This is to assist us in witnessing God's stellar creations suspended in the heavens, and recall His majesty. We are to realize that God is essential to our shelter. Why then must a succah's covering exist at all? Would we not see the stars all that much clearer, had no roof existed? What is the philosophy behind the succah's partial covering, if in fact, any covering obscures what we might envision?"

Rabbi Roth went on to elaborate on the purpose of Succah: we are to leave our permanent homes, and dwell in the Succah – a minimal dwelling – so as to demonstrate our true dependency is on God, and not the physical protection provided by a sturdy roof. Doing so: gazing through the sparse schach helps us achieve this objective.

Why then have schach at all?

Rabbi Roth explained: God does not want man to live where he rejects God's natural world and its laws, and simply sits back waiting for miracles; that God should do everything for him. No. God designed the natural world for a reason: that man use his mind and harness it, as God says in Genesis 1:28, "...fill the Earth and subdue it". Man must act in accordance with its reality. Reality teaches us that we do need shelter, and that there are methods by which to procure that, and all our needs. We are to engage in these methods, be it natural science, engineering, math, etc. But we cannot depend on physical shelter alone, without God. Schach is a fundamental lesson: it combines man's attempt at sheltering himself with the realization that man's efforts always require God assistance. Schach – a structure which man creates but allows gaps to see God's stars – demonstrates the combination of man's obligatory attempts of physical shelter, with God's providence (the gaps). Thereby, man reflects on God's heavenly bodies, and reminds himself that just as his brick home is equally dependent on God, so too, all else is not exclusively in our hands.

The true lesson of Succos is that man abandons the fallacy that he can address all his needs – without God.





Part III

CHANUKA

Chanuka

When studying the sources dealing with Chanuka, there are many questions which surface. I will first outline those questions, and then offer possible answers.

1) The Al HaNissim prayer of thanks included in our daily prayers and Birchat HaMazone primarily discuss the war. And at the end it makes mention of our kindling the lights, but does not mention the miracle of the oil. Does this mean that war is the essence of the day? What was the essential element in Chanuka the Rabbis deemed worthy of being instituted as a holiday? Was it the miracle that a few Jews overtook the myriads of Greeks in battle, the duration of the oil, both, or some other factor?

2) What was the purpose in the miracle of oil lasting 8 days? The principle of “ohness rachmana patreh” - one forced by situation is exempt - rendered the priests innocent for not being able to light the menorah. Since they were exempt from the obligation to light the menorah until they pressed new oil and were cleansed from the casualties, why did God create this miracle of the oil’s duration?

Can we suggest that the miracle of the oil is to reflect upon the war, that it was won via miracles? If so, why then does Rambam state that we won due to God’s salvation, even before discussing the oil? It would seem that Rambam held that the Rabbis understood our military victory to be caused by God. In such a case, the oil would be superfluous for teaching this. Unless we suggest that the military victory - although executed by God - was not an overt miracle, and itself would be no cause for a holiday. It would be no different than wars won by Joshua for example, when conquering Jericho. A day around which, the Rabbis did not create holiday. What then was so different about the battle of the Macabees or that entire event in general, that God decided to underline that event by the miracle of the oil, showing thereby such significance? There were many battles in which God made us victors. Yet in those many wars, God did not create an overt miracle after the fact, as is the case with Chanuka.

Additionally, in his Mishneh Torah, Rambam indicates that until the miracle of the oil, the Rabbis would not have instituted the holiday based on military success alone. According to Rambam, what is it about the oil - or the war upon which it reflects - which demanded that Chanuka be established as a holiday?

3) The Megilla - the letter - is read on Purim as our halachik observance. The reasoning is that this specific element was the catalyst for the Jew’s salvation, as the Talmud in Megilla 12b states, “had it not been for the first letter, not one remnant or escapee of Jews would have survived”. Meaning, since the Persians disqualified King Achashverosh’s credibility based on a previous letter, which was foolish in their eyes, they showed little respect for the Kings subsequent decree to destroy the Jews. Following this template for establishing a holiday, if the Rabbis established Chanuka based on the success of the war, why is there no mention of the Chanuka battle as part of our halachik performance? Lighting oil or candles is divorced from the battle. Why are these lights selected by the Rabbis as the performance of the Halacha, and not something germane to the war, like carrying a sword or the like? Purim’s laws were organized around elements, which caused our salvation. Why are Chanuka laws centered on a miracle subsequent to our salvation?

4) What is the concept of having “mehadrin” - the concept that there are multiple levels of fulfilling the obligation of Chanuka flames, each more preferred than the previous? We do not see this concept in connection with the Megilla. Additionally, why focus on the 8-day element, to the point that 8 days became an essential aspect of our halachik performance, as we light for 8 days, but only read the Megilla on one day? Additionally, why does a

single Chanuka menorah satisfy an entire household's halachik obligations, whereas this does not work in the case of Lulav? Here, each member must have his own four species?

Although possible to enact a miracle in the war itself, God chose to enact a miracle in the lights to emphasize our adherence to the Torah commands as the essence of that event, not mere bodily rescue. Life alone is not the goal for man. It must be a life of understanding and adherence to God's Torah. Without Torah, our lives are meaningless. Perhaps for this reason the Rabbis understood the oil miracle in this light, and sought to build the laws of Chanuka around this reuniting of the Jews to their laws, illustrating thereby that the initial act of Torah adherence - lighting the menorah - was the goal of the victory.

This follows well with Purim, as we state therein, "kimu v'kiblu mah shekiblu kvar", "they (the Jews) rose up and accepted that which they previously accepted", i.e., the Torah. Purim was an event where the Jews saw that a life permeated with wisdom proved to be the source of their salvation, as Mordechai's and Esther's cunning saved the Jews. The statement of "kimu v'kiblu mah shekiblu kvar" displays again that mere victory is not the goal, but rather, the highlight of that military success was the reacceptance of Torah. Chanuka is therefore celebrated via lights (the goal of the victory) that was the reestablishment of the Temple.

The Talmud in Shabbat asks, "What was Chanuka established upon?" Meaning according to Rashi, "upon which miracle?" This Talmudic question addresses our question: answering, that without a miracle, military success would not qualify as a holiday. Only through the event of the miracle of the oil did the Rabbis deem Chanuka worthy of institution as a holiday, and did so via lights, as this was the 'goal' of the victory. The essential miracle was the war, as it was the catalyst for our Torah adherence. So when offering thanks, we thank God for the success of the war, but not the lights. The lights are not that for which we are thankful. The lights are the reestablishment of our Torah. It was the war, which demands thanks. The lights are used to recall the goal of the day through observance generation after generation. We make recourse to lights to pronounce the goal. However, it is the war alone for which we are thankful.

What was present in Chanuka, which surpassed the battle at Jericho for example? Or when God stopped the Sun and Moon in Gibeon and Amek Ayalon respectively? All had miracles! Why then was Chanuka established as a holiday, but not Jericho or other events, which included miracles? The answer could be the following: The miracle of the oil was subsequent to the war when we were already victors. All other wars, which contained miracles, had miracles for the sake of winning the war. The Rabbis may have perceived the fact that God enacted a miracle unnecessary for salvation as a Divine indication that Chanuka was different, and worthy of institution as a holiday. (A Rabbi once discussed another difference, that during Chanuka, the Greeks sought to strip us of our Judaism, not so in other wars, where the enemy simply was fighting for land.)

The elements of a subsequent miracle (not necessary for salvation) compounded with our salvation from religious oppression (not mere military victory) were recognized by the Rabbis as grounds for instituting Chanuka as a holiday. That special quality of God's salvation from oppression, enabling us to follow the Torah also existed during Purim. Therefore we have only two holidays subsequent to the giving of the Torah; Purim recalls our bodily salvation, whereas Chanuka recalls our religious salvation.

While discussing this further with Rabbi Mann, we came to the observation that "holiday" means that which is instituted for generations to observe. This needs explanation, as it would have sufficed to celebrate Chanuka just

that one year. The concept of a perpetual celebration must be adding another point. That is that the future celebrants have what to celebrate, somewhat on par with those who actually experienced the salvation so long ago. What do we - the future celebrants - have in common with the Jews alive at that event? It is that our existence and ability to practice our laws is a direct result from the miracles of Chanuka. As we are direct beneficiaries, we must also show thanks to God for these acts of kindness. This also explains why Passover has two models: “Passover of Egypt”, and “Passover for Generations”. We see this idea is consistently part of our laws.

The concept of mehadrin – beautification – teaches us that there are levels of fulfilling the obligation of Chanuka. The reason mehadrin exists for few commands is as follows: When a Torah obligation deals with qualitative act, such as donning tefillin, one either dons them or does not. There is nothing more to be added after one has put on tefillin - you cannot wear tefillin more, once they are on. A quantitative increase is impossible, you either wear them or you don't. The same applies to kosher, either one eats kosher or he doesn't. But an act, which is of a quantitative measure, is different. Such acts as discussing the Exodus, Chanuka lights, and purchasing a finer esrog, all lend themselves to quantitative increase. One may discuss the Exodus until morning, or buy a better esrog, or light multiple candles. But there still must be sound reasoning behind such increase.

There is one goal with the lighting of the candles: to publicize the miracle to others. There are two ways in which we can increase this publicity: 1) more individuals spreading the story through multiple menorahs, and 2) increasing the content of the story publicized, which is achieved by increasing the number of lights each night. This teaches a passerby that there were a number of days, which the miracle lasted, thus, teaching a new element. By lighting only one candle each night, all one knows when he sees a menorah, is that there was a miracle of Chanuka. But if he sees five candles on the fifth night, he now learns something new: there were many days to the miracle. This increases the content of the story taught through the lights.

Light & Wisdom

Talmud Sabbath 23b, Rav Huna makes an enigmatic statement:

“One who is zealous with lights will have sons who are wise students.”

Rashi comments: “lights” refers to the two commands of Sabbath and Chanuka lights. Rashi quotes King Solomon’s “Proverbs” (6:23) “For a command is a flame, and Torah is light...” Rashi’s meaning is that the former generates the latter: the act of igniting a flame on Sabbath and Chanuka results in wise sons who possess Torah wisdom. Rashi may have found a supporting verse for Rav Huna, but what is the sense of this verse, and Rav Huna’s statement? How does the simple act of lighting Sabbath and Chanuka lights create sons who are wise? What is the relationship between lights and wise sons?

Let us examine the context of the quote (Proverbs, 6:20-23):

“[20] My son, guard the commands of your father and do not forsake the Torah of your mother. [21] Tie them to your heart often; bind them on your neck. [22] When you walk, it will guide you, when you repose, it will

guard you, and when you awake, it will converse with you. [23] For a command is a flame, and Torah is light, and reproofs in moral instruction are the way of life.”

We note many ideas, even within a single verse. For example, verse 20 compares “guarding father’s commands” to “not forsaking mother’s Torah”. We learn that Torah as a complete system straddles both: 1) commands and 2) Torah, or moral instruction. It is insufficient that God give a system of commands, without also offering us a moral code. This necessity of a dual approach, or borne out of man’s dual nature: he is intellectual and emotional. Both aspects of man’s nature are molded through, 1) following commands, which enlighten our minds to new, intelligent insights, and 2) moral restrictions, necessary for transforming our raw, emotional natures into individuals with refined, moral codes. The term “guard” applies to commands, as we must adhere meticulously to Torah performances. “Guarding” is applicable to that which must be carefully performed. We must not deviate, as God knows which commands will benefit our human nature, which He too created. Knowing both as the Creator, it is foolish for man not to cleave to and guard the 613 Commands. The term “do not forsake” is applicable to moral instruction. For it is here that man feels emotionally restricted, thereby wishing to abandon and forsake these stressful restrictions. As such, man is warned by King Solomon not to “forsake”, since his natural, yet infantile emotional make up yearns for instinctual gratification. He will desire to run from imposed, Torah morality, as it stifles his current drive towards instinctual satisfaction...at every turn.

Verse 21. “Tie them to your heart often; bind them on your neck.” King Solomon advises us to tie the Torah’s principles to our “heart: and “neck”. What is the metaphor of these two locations? The heart is our very life source, more than all other organs. King Solomon advises man to tie the Torah’s principles to our very being. These ideas must penetrate our soul, until they become our very values. Only when man values something, can it be truly said that he has changed himself. Simple utterances are meaningless, if we do not truly believe what we enunciate. Additionally, as my close friend Rabbi Roth taught me, Maimonides teaches in his Commentary on the Mishna, (last Mishna in Talmud Maccos) that when man performs a Mitzvah for no other reason than his love of that command, only then does he entitle himself to the Next World. Again we see that Torah demands honesty, and that one truly values his performances. But performance alone is insufficient. King Solomon states that we must also “bind them on our necks.” The neck is the seat of what activity? Speech. Meaning, we must not only confirm with our hearts the truths of Torah, but our “speech”, or primary mode of expression and activity, must be engaged in Torah discussion. Only when man reaches this level, do we say he truly values Torah, to the point that he engages regularly in Torah discussions. Man’s activity is the barometer of his convictions.

Verse 22. “When you walk, it will guide you, when you lie down, it will guard you, and when you awake, it will converse with you.” How do we define these three states? “Walking” refers to our conscious, daily life. In this state, Torah “guides” us. This is easily understood. When we “lie down” to sleep, we now enter the stage where we lose our control; we are vulnerable. The Rabbis teach on the first page of Talmud Brachos, that we must recite the Shema prayer before going to sleep. We must ponder the Torah fundamentals, which the Shema contains at the time that our consciousness state slips away. At this critical moment, our emotions gain the upper hand. Sleep and falling into it, are emotional states. And at such a time, we must strengthen our bond to the Torah principles, lest we allow our emotions to destroy us. Thus, King Solomon chooses the expression of “guard”. At this time, we are in desperate need of a guard against our emotional impulses. And the opposite state of falling to sleep is our waking up. If we earnestly study, delving into God’s wisdom, applying His absolute, Torah truths during our daily lives, these ideals make their mark so indelibly, that they are the first thing on our minds when we awake. We are caught up with brilliant insights that we cannot wait to reengage in further study. This concept that the

Torah is personified, as “speaking to us”, teaches that one who is devoted to his studies, has an additional ally: his studies take on a ‘life of their own’. Their appeal is so great, that his mind, unconsciously, initiates him back into Torah thought - even upon his waking. Just as one is impatient about an upcoming trip - waking on the day of his journey with great anticipation - so too the Torah student. Upon his waking up, he is immediately drawn back by the appeal of Torah, as if it “speaks to him”. King Solomon sums up the three states of our existence: consciousness, losing consciousness, and regaining it. In all three, the King advises us to insure we never abandon Torah thought.

This may seem insurmountable to many of us, but think about how King Solomon referred to Torah as a “play-thing” of God (Proverbs, 8:30). Just as a child with a new toy is engulfed with an exhilarated exuberance, so too were the Rabbis and our prophets. This must teach us that although we misdirect our childlike, excitement towards mundane activities and values, it is quite achievable that we too may reach an attachment to wisdom with this very same emotional draw. Do not be misguided by the fact that you do not see many adults – if any at all – with a youthful excitement about life. Children possess this excitement, and we are but older children in this respect. We have not lost this capacity for zest and abandon. What we have lost is our accurate selection of what object truly fuels the fire of our passions. King Solomon refers to wisdom as “playing” before God. It is something God created, containing unlimited enjoyment. Let us heed his words, and not the misguided masses.

Verse 23. “For a command is a flame, and Torah is light, and reproofs in moral instruction are the way of life.” A command offers illumination. Yet...it is but a single flame. It possesses the characteristic of illumination, but falls short in terms of giving us a full picture. However, Torah as a complete system is “light”. Only when one embraces the complete system, is he afforded with sufficient light for his life’s journey. Life has many twists and turns. Our nature as human beings is very complex. Knowledge is not readily available without due study of many hours. To live life properly, making correct decisions in all areas, to guard against destructive emotions, and to take a course that ensures success for our families and us...we require a charted map. One command is beneficial, but it cannot imbue us with the complete knowledge necessary for a full life span. The Torah is a complete system, addressing each and every aspect of our existence. Following a few, or even most of God’s law, we will fail. No, we cannot do it in a day. But our mind’s eye must be focused on this essential idea: everything in the Torah is absolutely necessary. Unlike the boors who ridicule “all those restrictions”, God’s opinion is different. He knows our nature, and created the Torah as a remedy. Just as a doctor would be listened to when he warns us that we will avoid death from disease by taking 10 pills daily, and we do, certainly, we must have greater conviction in what our Creator advises...not just for physical life, but the life of our soul.

“For a command is a flame, and Torah is light, and reproofs in moral instruction are the way of life.” Notice that this verse commences with “For”, meaning, it comes to explain the King’s previous statements. He is explaining exactly why Torah will guide, guard and engage us: it is that which “illuminates”. Without knowledge of reality, what use is our life? The world operates by a design, and only through understanding this design, adhering meticulously to a system, which follows this design, will we find happiness, avoiding the conflicts experienced by those devoid of understanding. And as we said, intelligence is but one half of the equation...we also require moral instruction to restrain our instinctual impulses. Thus, the King concludes this verse with, “and reproofs in moral instruction are the way of life.” Following our emotions can remove us from life, both here and in the next world.

We may now return to our very first question: What does Rav Huna mean by “One who is zealous with lights will have sons who are wise students”? We mentioned that Rashi comments: “lights” refers to the two commands

of Sabbath and Chanuka lights. Rashi quotes King Solomon, “For a command is a flame, and Torah is light...” Thus, if one is careful with these two commands (flame), he will beget wise sons (light).

What is specific to Sabbath and Chanuka lights, that these two commands were designated as essential to begetting wise sons? I believe by defining the nature of both Sabbath and Chanuka, we will arrive at one possible answer.

Sabbath celebrates God as the ‘Creator’. Chanuka celebrates God as the ‘Worker of miracles’. We must appreciate that God does both: He created the universe, and by definition, controls it, at times, creating a suspension in the very universal laws: what we refer to as miracles. On a deeper level, God’s act of creation teaches us that the universe operates by set laws, by wisdom. Our lives must be led by this truth, and by our relentless search for new knowledge. Whether we are walking, lying down, or rising up, we must never lose sight of this, our essential goal in life. But not only is God the Creator of all, including knowledge, He is also very much involved in our lives. He performs miracles. Thus, our knowledge of God is twofold: 1) He is Creator and 2) He is our God, readily available to intervene with miracles for those who follow Him.

If we possess an accurate knowledge of God as Creator, and the One who intervened at Sinai with His gift of the Torah, and guarding all of His followers with miracles, we then gain a true appreciation and knowledge of Judaism’s fundamentals. We then will pass this on to our children, and they too will be come wise.

One who is careful with the Sabbath and Chanuka lights is one who understands Judaism’s fundamentals concerning the most essential of all ideas.

What is God? He is the Creator of all: “Sabbath celebrates Creation”. He is the Controller of all: “Chanuka celebrates Miracles.”

Temple & Chanuka: One Theme

There are a few instances in Jewish history concerning the building and rededication of the Temple. They include David’s desire to build the first Temple; Zerubabel’s rebuilding of the second Temple; and the rededication of the Temple during Chanuka. There is an underlying theme, which permeates all three cases. Let us review a previous lesson concerning the first Temple.

Samuel II, 7:1-17

[1] And it was as the king dwelled in his house, and God gave him respite from all around, from all of his enemies. [2] And the king said to Nathan the prophet, “See how I dwell and a house of cedar and the ark of God dwells inside of curtains.” [3] And Nathan said to the king, “All that is in your heart do, for God is with you.” [4] And it was on that night, and it was that the word of God was to Nathan saying: [5] “Go and say to David saying, ‘So says God; Will you indeed build me a house that I will dwell? [6] For I have not dwelled in a house since the day I took the Children of Israel up from Egypt, and until this day, and I traveled in a tent and a Tabernacle. [7] In all that I traveled, in all the Children of Israel, was the matter ever spoken by Me to even one of the tribes of

Israel, of whom I commanded (judges) to herd My people Israel, saying, ‘Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?’

[8] And now, so shall you say to my servant David, ‘So says the Lord of Hosts, I have take you from the shepherds’ huts, from following after sheep, to become a ruler over my people Israel. [9] And I was with you with all that you went and I cut off all your enemies from before you and I made for you a great name like the name of the great ones that are in the land. [10] And I shall yet establish a place for My people, for Israel, I shall plant it there and it shall dwell in its place so that it shall be disturbed no more; crooked people shall no longer afflict it as in earlier times. [11] And also from the day that I appointed judges over My people Israel, and I shall give you respite from all your enemies; and God informs you that God will make for you a house. [12] When your days will be complete and you will lie with your fathers and I will establish your seed after you that come from your loins and I shall make his kingdom firm. [13] He shall build a house to My name and I will establish his seat of kingdom eternally. [14] I will be to him a father, and he will be to Me a son so when he sins I will chastise him with the rod of men and with afflictions of human beings. [15] But my kindness will not be removed from him as I removed it from Saul, whom I removed before you. [16] Your dynasty and your kingdom will remain steadfast before for all time; your throne will remain firm forever.” [17] In accordance with these words and in accord with this vision, so spoke Nathan to David.

The first thing that strikes me is God’s use of a rhetorical question, “Will you indeed build me a house that I will dwell? And again in the next verse, “was the matter ever spoken by Me...why have you not built Me a house of cedar?” This is to say that God denounces David’s sentiment. God says that He never requested a house of cedar to replace the Tabernacle, making David’s sentiment to build a house to God, somehow a wrong idea. When God uses a rhetorical question, He means to indicate that He never requested this Temple, i.e., it is clearly man’s wish “and not Mine”. However, God says David’s son Solomon will build that house. So which is it, wrong or right to build a house? One may simply answer that it was David who could not build the house – the Temple – but Solomon could. So the idea of Temple per se is acceptable, but it is with the ‘builder’ that God takes issue. We must understand why.

But God goes on in verses 8 and 9, describing how He made David king, and how He made his name great like those famous in the land. Why does God mention this here? What does God’s elevation of David have to do with His disagreement that David builds a Temple? We also must understand why David must die, and only then his son will build a Temple. Additionally, what purpose is there in the relationship God describes that He will be a “father” to Solomon, and Solomon will be as His “son”? Was this relationship absent with regards to David? If so, why?

God clearly states that He never requested a house. Simultaneously, He says Solomon will build it. Therefore, the house, or Temple, is not an evil...but simply something God “never requested.” Therefore, we cannot understand God to be rebuking David, that Temple is an evil. What then is the rebuke, and I do not mean rebuke in the sense that David sinned, as the Talmud states, David did not sin. I mean rebuke, in the sense that David’s proposed building cannot take place for good reason, but not that the reason implies sin. So what is this reason that David cannot build the Temple, but Solomon can? Where do we look for the answer? We look right here...God continued with His response to David through Nathan, describing how He made David a king, and made his name great. Think for a moment...what may this have to do with David building the Temple?

THE TEMPLE’S PURPOSE

There is a most primary question, which must be asked before answering our other questions: What is the purpose of the Temple? What did David say? He was bothered that God’s ark was housed in simple curtains

while he dwelled in a strong, cedar wood home. What was his sentiment? His words are, “See how I dwell and a house of cedar and the ark of God dwells inside of curtains.” David equates his dwelling with God’s dwelling. Here is another clue.

David meant to say that greater honor was due to God, over himself. He wished to give God’s ark greater honor than the simple curtain in which is currently dwelled. But for some reason, God did not approve, at least not that ‘David’ build this Temple. God says, “Will you indeed build me a house that I will dwell? For I have not dwelled in a house since the day I took the Children of Israel up from Egypt...” God’s response focuses on the concept of “dwelling”. With His rhetorical words, “Will you indeed build me a house that I will dwell?” I believe God is indicating that David’s offer exemplified two errors.

The first error (not sin) is David’s attempt to beautify the ark’s dwelling. God said, “Was the matter ever spoken by Me to even one of the tribes of Israel...why have you not built Me a house of cedar?” Meaning, God never asked for something, so man should not attempt any enhancement. God goes on, reminding David of the real truth, “God does good for man” as he cites how He made David so great. Now, just as God bestowed good on David making him so great, this Temple too is “for man”, not for God. This is precisely why God reminds David of all the good He bestowed on David; to call to David’s mind the real relationship is that God benefits man, and not the reverse. This is the central idea.

While in other areas, the Torah’s injunction “Zeh Aylee v’Anvayhu” (“This is my God and I will adorn Him”) allows man to beautify the commands, God’s message here is that one who attempts “enhancement” in relation to Temple alone, is overstepping the line: he misinterprets Temple.

Temple is the one area in Torah where God must initiate change. Perhaps the reason being, that regarding Temple, man may err, feeling he is “offering to God” somehow. Sacrifice, incense and the like are subject to misinterpretation of this kind. However, the opposite is true: Temple is God’s gift to man, not man’s glorification of God. When we glorify God in Temple, it is for our own good that we concentrate on the proper ideals, and we offer God absolutely nothing. However, David’s sentiment was that he should not “dwell” in beautiful cedar wood, while the ark dwells in curtains. He felt that he would be improving the idea of Tabernacle with a Temple, when Temple is in fact for man, and not for God. God reiterates this theme by reminding David that He made David who he is today. It is God who benefited David in the past making him great, and it is God who benefits man in Temple. Perhaps David erred in this matter. We also note that at the very beginning David says to Nathan, “See how I dwell and a house of cedar and the ark of God dwells inside of curtains.” It appears David is unsure about building a Temple, and seeks Nathan’s counsel. This may teach that David was not certain of his idea at the very outset.

ALLOWING ERROR TO SURFACE

Perhaps we may go one step further and suggest that this was the precise sentiment God desired to draw out from David into the open, for David to recognize, and come to terms with. Surely Temple is a good, provided God initiates its activities and enhancements, but God refrained from requesting it of man, until after David had this opportunity to express his thought, and God could respond. Now that David was corrected, Temple may be built, but by David’s son. Why his son? Perhaps, since David had the correct idea that Temple should exist, he would impart this to his son who could build it with the proper ideas. And, there was no longer any need to delay its building.

“STRUCTURE FOR GOD”: AN OXYMORON

But there is a more profound error and lesson here. Improving the Tabernacle into a Temple acceptable to God does not occur structurally alone. Rather, the Temple’s very definition as a ‘good’ depends on it being initiated by

God, and not man. What is lacking in Temple when man initiates it, or what is added to Temple when God requests it of man?

It is impossible that man should suggest a structure, without casting the frailties of humans onto that structure. Meaning, once David suggested making a Temple from a more 'durable' cedar and not curtains, for God's "dwelling", he was using "human terms" for a building that is exclusively identified with God. This may very well explain why the original Tabernacle had no ceiling, as it is not a "dwelling", but a location on which to focus on God. This being the case, such a structure would be marred, had it any semblance of a shelter, which a roof indicates by its very definition. God needs no shelter, He needs no roof, and a structure man envisions, even dedicated to God is inherently flawed. Thus, the original Tabernacle could not possibly have a roof; only curtains covered it. Now, David suggests creating a more permanent "building" of cedar? This violated the very concept of the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle was to remind man of ideas about God. Had the Tabernacle a roof, it would convey an incorrect and heretical idea, that God shares the frail, human need for protection from the elements. Thus, Tabernacle can have no roof. Additionally, if man initiates the idea to create a structure to God, this is equal to suggesting a roof be placed on the Tabernacle. For what difference is there, if I place a roof on the Tabernacle, or create a new structure to God with a roof, now replacing the Tabernacle? There is no difference. Therefore, God refused David's offer to create the Temple. In such a Temple, there would be no way to remove the identity that man conceived it. Thereby, it would eternally reflect man's concept of a "shelter", not true ideas.

It is contrary to the true ideas of God that a building is made to Him, as "building" carries with it the notion that it is for man's purposes; a building is a human structure. However, if God initiates such a structure, as he did with the Tabernacle, then it is no longer "man's" idea of building. In that case, it may look like a shelter, but it is more akin to a museum, which contains prized objects, and does not function to provide a haven for inner dwellers. And when God initiates such a structure, man is then building the structure due to a command, and not any other source in him, traceable to the human frailty requiring shelters. Therefore, Solomon was able to build the Temple, as it was now God's wish, and not David's.

How does this relate to Chanuka and Zerubabel's construction of the Temple, which we read on Shabbos/Chanuka?

DAVID, ZERUBABEL AND CHANUKA

The prophet Zechariah, the Haftorah of Shabbos/Chanuka, concludes with the words "Not by army, and not by strength, but with My spirit..." This refers to Zerubabel's Temple construction that it would be accomplished, but not through succeeding over the enemies or by human might. Its construction would be achieved by God creating peace under Darius' reign, and this Divine backdrop would enable Zerubabel's successful and easy construction.

On Chanuka as well, God created the miracle of the oil again as a lesson that God orchestrated those entire events. That rededication was not accomplished by Macabees, but by God's intervention on behalf of those five sons of Mattisyahu; "and the many [God handed] into the hands of the few..." the wicked into the hands of the righteous..."

Rededication and building of the Temple require God's involvement, in order that man's fame does not overshadow the true purpose of Temple: "knowledge of God". God's fame must be the exclusive identity of Temple, and in all three cases, God insured this to be so. God did not allow David to be credited with temple; He did not allow Zerubabel to be credited with it; and God insured that Chanuka's rededication was accomplished only through His miraculous intervention.

We should come away with a deeper appreciation for the amazing style and the height of Torah precision. In all three cases, the Torah discloses precise wording that uncovers the underlying messages: messages, which lead to truly happy lives, and truly make sense. If we are discerning, and patient in our studies, “the words will speak to us”, as a wise Rabbi once taught.

This is truly the design of the Torah: its messages and lessons run deep, but are available if we approach each area with the appreciation that the words are Divinely written. With careful study under wise Rabbis, we too will see these lessons.

God’s Torah “words” must be our focus in Torah study...in contrast to many classes, which seek to startle ignorant Jews with mystical fabrications. God did not seek to teach mankind using mystical, and inexplicable stories. Too many Jews miss out on learning “how” to learn Torah, because too many classes seek large audiences, which they lure with eye-stopping lecture titles, and with fantastic stories which the educators themselves cannot explain. What good is it to render Judaism into a religion like the others, where metaphors are taught as literal fact, and where incomprehensible mysticism overrules sensible thought? The Rabbis spoke against this type of an approach, since such classes teach nothing that engenders any appreciation for God’s wisdom. All these classes do is dupe the attendees into believing that the lecturer is superior to them, since he can quote matters they cannot comprehend. But should not a class leave its attendees with “greater” knowledge? If you attend such classes, cease from doing so, for it is a grave waste of your time. It matters none if such a teacher is called “Rabbi”. It is the path of reason that we are to follow, not reputations, since this is the only distinction we possess over animals. Believing magical and fantastic stories, is akin to a dog believing his master will feed him...no intelligence is required. But God gave us each the Tzelem Elokim, “intellect”. Failing to engage your intellect, you fail in what you owe your Creator, and are judged for this, as Rabbi Bachya states in his intro to “Duties of the Heart”.

God did not formulate His Torah to astound people with inexplicable and grand stories. God taught us a system that makes sense. His system opens our eyes and minds to matters that resonate truth within us. And the Talmudic Sages clearly warned in numerous cases not to understand metaphor as literal, and not to even approach such areas, until one has mastered the basics. Can you open a Talmud and explain Tosfos and Rashi? Can you make sense of Talmudic argumentation? Can you explain a series of verses in any area of the Five Books, Prophets, or Writings? If not, then seek a teacher who can train you in the basics. And decades later once you have reached a level of proficiency, again, seek a Rabbi who can explain a metaphor like King David, King Solomon, Maimonides, and others who held fast to the true path of Torah...the path that makes sense to human minds.

All other religions are based on belief and blind faith, for they have no proofs to their lies. Judaism offers the indisputable proof of Sinai. Judaism is supposed to be different, where we do not simply accept anything that anyone teaches. But where our commands are viewed by the other nations as “righteous statutes” as God said in Deuteronomy.

Why is the Torah written so cryptically? Well, if it were not, then our knowledge would end with the final chapters of each work. But since God’s wisdom is infinite, and He desires our lives to be led from birth through death by wisdom, He designed the Torah to yield new insights throughout our lives. Weaving the Torah’s words with His wisdom, in a cryptic but rational manner, God did not only give us words, but also the “keys” to unlock far greater wisdom. As we learn truths and uncover the methods of God’s instruction, our minds become sharper, and we become more independent in our studies. The appreciation of God’s unlimited knowledge is essential, if we are to be fueled to seek further insights. And the acquired, Torah thinking patterns and Talmudic reasoning are essential, if we are to understand the truths God embedded in His Torah.

Chanuka celebrates God’s salvation and the reestablishment of a Torah culture. This culture is one of intelligence. This should be your path, and these reasons alone should be the basis of your Chanuka celebration.

Chanuka - A Talmudic Analysis

Talmud Shabbos 21a:

“The Rabbis learned: the command of Chanuka is “a single light for a man and his household” (i.e., one light each night - regardless of the number of household members). A greater beautification of the command is each house member lights one light each night. And a beautification of even greater quantity; Bais Shammai says; the first day one lights eight lights, and then progressively decreases one light each day. And Bais Hillel says; on the first day one light is lit, and from here forward, one progressively increases one light each day. (Note: This is our custom, that all household members light one candle on day one, two candles on day two, etc.)

Ulah said, two Amoraim (Rabbis) in the West argued on this dispute between Bais Shammai and Bais Hillel. They were Rabbi Yosef son of Avin, and Rabbi Yosef son of Zveyda. One Rabbi said, Bais Shammai’s reasoning is to correspond to the number of days of Chanuka yet to come about, and a reason for Bais Hillel, corresponding to the number of days that have passed. The other Rabbi gave a reason for Bais Shammai, that we correspond to the number of sacrifices (there commenced 8 oxen, and they decreased one ox each day) and a reason for Bais Hillel, that we ascend in sanctity, and do not descend.”

A number of questions must be addressed:

1) What is it that demands that one person, the house head, may achieve the fulfillment of Chanuka lights for the entire household? Tefillin, prayers, and other commands are obligated equally upon each Jew. And generally speaking, one does not satisfy his obligation by another person’s performance. Why then is the command of Chanuka lights different, that it was formulated that one person’s lighting satisfies the entire household? Is this merely another example of the principle, “Shomayah K’Oneh”, that is, “One who hears is equivalent to one who answers” (i.e., “performs”)? For example, all must recite the Sabbath Kiddush (sanctification over wine). However, one person may recite it on behalf of all present, and everyone thereby equally fulfills their obligation. The principle of “One who hears is equivalent to one who answers” renders all present as if they in fact recited Kiddush. Is this how the Chanuka lights by the one house head renders all as if they performed? Or, perhaps, this principle is inapplicable with regards to Chanuka. Is Chanuka formulated - by its very design - as a ‘group’ performance? If so, what demands such a formulation?

2) What is the definition of the command of Chanuka lights, that more lights creates a “greater beautification” of the command?

3) What is the dispute between Bais Shammai and Bais Hillel, whether we count down, or up?

4) Bais Shammai and Bais Hillel appear to agree on one point; that one may not light eight candles each night. (Or any identical number each night.) There must be a difference in the number of lights each night. What is their one theory of mutual agreement, which demands this to be so?

To answer these questions, we must first understand the basic command and purpose of lighting Chanuka lights: The Rabbis teach that our goal is to proclaim the miracles of God's salvation during the Greek empire. The Greeks defiled the Temple, intent on forcing the Jews to abandon Judaism, and accept their Greek religion. The five sons of Mattisyahu did not tolerate this possibility and immediately commenced a revolt to salvage Judaism and the Jews. They were successful. Upon their triumph, they entered the Temple to sanctify it, and found but one canister of pure olive oil, bearing the High Priest's seal. This meant it was not defiled. However, this canister would not last the eight day duration required to press new oil - it contained a quantity of oil for just one day's burning. Miraculously, this one day's supply endured for the entire eight days. This was significant not only of God's providence over the oil, but of the military victory. The Chanuka holiday was thereby declared. The purpose in our lights during this holiday is to proclaim God's miraculous salvation, throughout all generations. The original miracle was through lights, so we commemorate God's miracle with lights.

We now understand the basic reason for lights. But why is there a dispute as to whether we ascend or descend in the number of lights each night? And why must there be eight days of lights? Well, we can say that 'eight' days signifies the number of days, which the miracle lasted. But why not light eight candles on 'one' day, as the entire fulfillment? We must keep the purpose of the law in mind; to proclaim the miracle. What was the miracle? It was that the oil lasted a duration of eight days. Each day included a new miracle - it was not simply one miracle for eight days. Evidently, we must display this miracle's duration through the medium of "days". So Chanuka was defined by the Rabbis to be a celebration lasting eight days. But if this is so, where is there room for the Rabbis to say that we may 'add' to the basic law, and allow an increase or decrease of lights each night? Understanding that the basic law is to 'proclaim the miracle', we may answer as follows.

Since the miracle was not a one day affair, the Rabbis decreed that by lighting a "different number of lights" each day, those who see our lights realize a new concept each day: that there was a new miracle each day. The same number of lights each day does not impart the next day's miracle. But when we see a different number of lights each day, the lights thereby imbue the onlooker with the realization of a new element of miracle, which did in fact take place each day. Seeing a new number of lights each day, the onlooker learns of a new miracle, unseen in the previous day's lights. Bais Shammai and Bais Hillel agree that an additional proclamation of the original miracle may be gained by differentiating each night's number of lights.

Why does Bais Shammai light eight lights on day one, and decrease one light each day? The Talmud said it was done so as to count the days yet to enter. Bais Hillel said we start at one light and ascend to eight on the eighth day. He counts the days of Chanuka that have passed. What is the theory of each side? Again, we keep in mind that the lights are to remind us of God's providence and salvation. Using this information, think about each Rabbi's view before reading further. The purpose of learning is to delve into an analysis of theories, so do so before continuing.

It appears that Bais Shammai's theory is that we are to count the days of God's providence, yet to occur. The lights are to make us mindful of God's "continual" providence, which is the providence yet to happen. This is why, I believe, Bais Shammai says we count the days yet to come. On day 3, we light six lights, as we have this day, plus five more yet to come, which is six total. We count down, and become mindful of God's providence yet to come. Conversely, Bais Hillel says we count the days of providence that God has already enacted for us. This he feels is what we are to be mindful of through the Chanuka lights. God "has" performed miracles for us, and we are to be thankful for His already enacted kindness. The dispute between these two Rabbis is whether we are

to focus on God's "continual providence", or on His "performed providence". My friend Howard suggested that the number of eight lights is to demarcate the day when the temple was back in order, to the degree that the oil's miracle was no longer required. The Jew's perfection depends on the functioning Temple, which took place in part by the eighth day. This is the focus of the eighth day, and why we have eight lights. (It took eight days to press new oil.)

Let us address our first question - the formulation "a single light for a man and his household". We asked, "Is this yet another case where, 'One who hears is equivalent to one who performs', similar to the Sabbath Kiddush?" Is this how the Chanuka lights by the one house head renders all as if they performed? As I suggested in the question, I believe Chanuka is formulated - by its very design - as a 'group' performance. Let us consider: the Jews were spared through God's miracles. Thereby, they were enabled to retain, and sustain their Judaism, of which the Greeks wished to strip them. How is Judaism transmitted? Through each family, the father - the house head - one transmits his learning to his children. Perhaps for the purpose of focusing on this factor, the Rabbis ordained that Chanuka be celebrated by the household, i.e., via the unit through which Judaism is transmitted. Judaism was spared, and the Jews resumed to transmit our Torah system through new families, all due to God's miracles. The very unit through which Judaism was proliferated - the family - was defined as the vehicle through which God's miracles are to be conveyed. Judaism as a religion was threatened, so the holiday, which celebrates the salvaged, continuance of Judaism, is embodied in Jewish law, by this very unit - the household. We then conclude that Chanuka lights performed by one for the many is not a case of "One who hears is equivalent to one who performs". Truthfully, Chanuka's very design was formulated - from the outset - as a group (family) performance.

This reasoning also answers why there is a "beautification" of the miracle, when all household members are represented through additional lights. Not only is the "family" represented, but each individual's representative light proclaims a greater effect of the miracle: all these family members benefited from God's miracles. However, this is not the highest degree of miracle proclamation. The highest level is when there is an increase of one candle each night. Why is this most preferred? It is because in this manner, the number of days of God's miracle is now displayed. Lighting four candles each night, when there are four household members, only tells the onlooker that there were four people who benefited. But adding a candle each night displays a new element: God's degree of miraculous salvation, i.e., the miracles lasted eight days.

We learn that the greater fulfillment in these lights is the greater praise of God. When recounting - through additional lights - that God's miracles were so extensive, greater appreciation of God is thereby achieved. Praise of God's actions far outweighs the effect that more people were saved. This sounds like it degrades Jewish life. However, when studying Talmud, we are intent on defining the phenomenon at hand. We see a clear distinction between a medium level of fulfillment, and the highest level. Since the highest level depicts God's miracles more clearly, we understand that this element - praise of God's acts - outweighs how many were saved as a result. The Talmud is to impart ideas based on truths, and is not contingent on our subjective, moral estimations. We must learn the Talmud and change ourselves based on the Rabbis' teachings. Not the opposite. When our personal feelings conflict with our studies, we do not prioritize our subjective preferences. We change to be in line with the truths of the Talmud - the Torah's Oral Law.

This Chanuka, do not simply light the lights, but understand what they represent. Let us deepen our true appreciation for our lot, that we have the freedom and ability to study Torah, the most enjoyable and meaningful

pursuit. We must be appreciative, and thankful to God, enabling mankind to possess intellect, the only tool for understanding truths. In contrast to what many assume, we are not given intelligent life to immerse in physical pleasures. Our intellect is proof that man was gifted with a distinct and superior role over all Earthly creation. Time flies quickly. Do not forfeit your one opportunity here on Earth, to use your minds and arrive at the numerous, profound insights enclosed in God's creations, and His Torah. Dedicate the majority of your day to study, and minimize your work, as Rabbi Mayer said in Ethics, "Minimize your involvement in worldly pursuits, and indulge in Torah". (Ethics of the Fathers, 4:10) God has many messengers through which He can assist us financially. He desires that we pursue Torah study over all else, even over other commandments. (Talmud Moade Katan 9b) Therefore, He will surely give a satisfactory lot to those who truly "remove from their necks the yoke of monetary calculations which the masses follow", engaging in Torah study as their primary pursuit. (Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, Laws of Shmita and Yovale, 13:13)

Comprehend the majesty of God's creation displayed in the universe, composed of billions of galaxies. He can easily provide sustenance for us, on but one, small planet. God desires Torah as our life's choice, for our own good. We can arrive at this conviction with study. If however, our conviction lacks, then we must study until convinced of God's abilities. God controls all. Let these truths guide your beliefs and actions.

Chanuka & Purim: Two Spheres of Human Perfection

Why were Chanuka and Purim alone made into holidays? Joshua experienced a miraculous victory over Jericho when the walls sunk into the ground. God sent giant stones from the heavens (Joshua, 10:11) on behalf of Joshua as well. There were many instances of miraculously won wars. What is present in the Chanuka and Purim miracles that they alone deserved to be rendered into perpetual holidays of Pirsumey Nase — proclamations of God's miracles? And what is the objective of Pirsumey Nase?

Examining these two holidays more closely, we find additional features that increase our questions...

During that Macabean war upon which Chanuka was created, we note an oddity. Chanuka's famous miracle of oil occurred "after" the war had already ended. For what need was this miracle, being that the Jews were victorious?

We also note that it was the Hasmonian Cohanim — the priests — who fought that war. We understand this was a fact, but why was this necessary for Maimonides to state in his Laws of Chanuka? And why does he mention that lighting the Chanuka light is a "Mitzvah Chaviva" — a beloved mitzvah? In what manner does this mitzvah surpass all others?

Turning to Purim, Mordechai omitted God's name from the Megilla. For what reason did he do so? While we appreciate the fact that there were no overt miracles, nonetheless, it was God who orchestrated the timing of many events to deliver the Jews from their enemies. God orchestrated Mordechai's hearing of Bigsan ad Seresh's

plot to murder the king. God orchestrated King Achashverosh's reading of Mordechai's unpaid act of saving the king to coincide Haman's midnight appearance to request Mordechai's death. He orchestrated the king's return to the wine feast, to coincide Haman's collapse onto the Queen's bed, angering the king and priming him to convict Haman to death. Other events were orchestrated as well. However, after Mordechai and Esther realized that it was God's hand that saved them, why was God's name omitted?

CHANUKA

During Chanuka, God used oil — Temple — for the miracle. For it was the Cohanim who demonstrated their adherence to God by taking on such outnumbered odds. Cohanim represent those dedicated to God's service. They fought to preserve the Torah system prohibited by the Greeks. But there was no necessity for the oil in terms of salvation. This "unnecessary" miracle taught the Rabbis that this miracle was of a different nature, and not as Joshua's wars, where the miracles were performed to save the Jews. Of course we understand that God caused our military victory. But the subsequent nature of this miracle of oil was indicative. Thereby, the Rabbis understood that this victory deserved greater significance than other wars. That significance is that the Cohanim fought for the "system of Torah", unlike other wars that were for land, defense or justice. The oil represents the Jews' reestablishment of the Torah system, and was therefore what God used to indicate His providence. The Rabbis grasped this message, and instituted our remembrance of God's salvation, by creating the law around those lights.

This mitzvah alone of Chanuka lights refers to upholding the "system of mitzvah". All other mitzvahs have as their goal some idea extraneous to the 'total' Torah system. Succah is to recall God's ability to shelter us. Mezuzah reminds man of God's unity. But Chanuka highlights our ability to perform the Torah system. This would explain why Maimonides calls this a "Mitzvah Chaviva" — a beloved mitzvah, as it embodies Torah as a whole and not individual objectives, as is the case with regards to other mitzvahs.

PURIM

Perhaps Mordechai omitted God's name from the Megilla for two reasons. First, to display how exactly God intervened — in a covert manner. Second, this embodies the concept that God's providence works with man when he utilizes intelligence, as expressed by Mordechai and Esther's intelligent plan. Through the omission of God's name, man is thereby highlighted in Megilla to stress this point. Mordechai and Esther interacted with the world and society — nature and psychology — using much wisdom. This is the path of life — the *derech hachaim* — which God desires man to engage in all areas, not only when observing His commands. We thereby observe a new idea derived from Chanuka and Purim...

PIRSUMEY NASE — PROCLAMATION OF GOD'S MIRACLES

This is to give praise to God for His unnatural providence in cases where He saved our nation, but it is applied to the two spheres in which man operates:

- 1) interaction with the world and society: nature and psychology (Purim)
- 2) adherence to God: Halachik performances (Chanuka)

Man lives in two worlds: worldly performances and halachik performances (mitzvah). God intervenes to save us when we deserve it. He intervened — covertly — with Mordechai and Esther to emphasize their cunning and insight when interacting with the world. And God intervened with the Hasmonian priests when they sought to preserve our Torah system. The Rabbis deemed it proper to highlight God's intervention in these two areas of human activity when performed according to God's will. Pirsumey Nase is our obligation of praising God for His salvation. We publicize how God interacts with man, even to create unnatural occurrences when we live according to wisdom, and Halacha.

A Rabbi once taught that Chanuka and Purim were elevated over other wars, since it was in these two events alone that annihilation of Jewish nation was threatened: religious annihilation during Chanuka, and physical annihilation during Purim. Therefore, greater thanks are due to God in these two events. We proclaim His wonders to praise His salvation.

Aside from praise, we are also required to give “thanks” to God. However, Al Hannissim omits any mention of the miracle of oil. Why? This is because the oil is not something for which we thank, but it was used by God to indicate a number of ideas. Thanks is therefore inapplicable. Thanks is used when man benefits, and our benefit on Chanuka was salvation. Therefore, the Al Hannissim does not mention the miracle of the oil. It focuses on our military victory, and that God caused this salvation of our lives and Judaism.

Megilas Antiochos

Upon hearing the threat of destruction of the Jewish nation, the five sons of Mattisyahu displayed much courage, although greatly outnumbered. They were inspired to battle against those who wished to strip them of their Jewish identity. The Greeks were intent on preventing Torah observance, and coercing idolatrous practice. However, Mattisyahu’s sons displayed unwavering devotion to what their minds held as true. We read in verse 39, “we remember that which God commanded us on Mount Sinai.” They were convinced of the reality of God’s revelation, His existence, and His commanding us in His Torah at Mount Sinai. No enemy could erase God’s revelation, or the truths contained in His Torah. Without Torah observance, one’s life is meaningless. Mattisyahu’s sons took it upon themselves to fight to preserve Torah at all costs.

We must take this lesson to heart, as this is the sole reason for our celebration of Chanuka: to proclaim God’s performance of miracles and intervention when we adhere to His word. Conversely, our current leaders omit God from all political considerations, as if our history is false. Venomous Arabs attack us daily, but our leaders abandon Torah as a guide for their reactions. To them, world opinion and foreign dollars outweigh human life and Torah truths. These leaders possess no regard for God’s word, nor the courage befitting a true leader, as displayed by Mattisyahu’s sons. This devotion to God’s word earned the Jews of Chanuka their salvation. But our leaders do not learn from history, and keep Israel under the sword. As long as God’s word is not the essential consideration for all of their actions, God will not assist them. Their stubbornness is disturbing, and the silence of world Jewry compounds this crime.

Our leaders’ reality is dichotomized; they celebrate Chanuka, a publication of God’s intervention when Torah is upheld, yet, they do not uphold the Torah. By our very act of lighting the menorah with our families, we testify to God’s intervention, saving those Jews who followed Him by risking their lives. Those of us today cowering from following God’s Torah due to political pressure, violate God’s will. It is clear from the Chanuka story recorded below, that God would have let die, those with no devotion. It was not until the five sons of Mattisyahu risked death for Torah that God stepped in. The abandonment of God and His laws makes life worthless. Until the Jews demonstrated their devotion, there was no divine intervention. Once these five, brave souls declared the essentiality of Torah adherence through action, God protected them, and gave “the many into the hands of the few, the wicked, into the hands of the righteous.”

Today we are slaughtered a great slaughter at the hands of those like Antiochos. Children of Israel, soldiers of the IDF, and leaders of the Israeli people must wake up. Our history and our very celebration of Chanuka attest to God’s ability to enable five brothers to defeat the armies of our enemies. God is not sleeping. God is not weak.

He sees our travail at this time too. God's word and history attest to the fact that He saves those who follow him. Until you follow His Torah, until you see with clear conviction that not based on military tactics alone will we be saved, but with Torah as our guide, we will continue to suffer.

Our nation must no longer deny God's ability to save us. See your contradiction, as you light the menorah, while you abandon so many historical events instructing us how we must now act. Have you forgotten Abraham defeating tremendous forces with just a few men? Or Jacob's salvation from his twin Esav? Recall the Ten Plagues, the Manna in the desert, and the splitting of the Red Sea, where every Egyptian soldier perished. And recall this: our claim to Israel is from no other source than God's Torah - His promise to Abraham. Yet you refuse His Torah, but desire His land?

We do not rely on miracles; this is against Judaism, and not what I suggest. Living by Torah ideals is the best life, and we do not uphold Torah simply to remove our current pain. But as the Torah is absolute truth, we must be frightened by God's promise to abandon us if we abandon Him. But God also promises His protection when we live according to His word. In line with this promise, we may seek His assistance. We live by God's word, as it is absolute truth, which enables our best existence. When living in line with God's word, He has many vehicles to protect us. But as the Shema says, He certainly will not shield us when we abandon His word. Of course it is preferred that we attach ourselves to the truth of Torah when prompted by its perfect and pleasing laws, not because we need salvation. But many times God removes His protection to instruct us to return to Him. Now may be such a time.

Remember Chanuka. Remember and proclaim it not just with your menorah, but with your daily actions. As someone wishing salvation for yourself and your fellow Jews, act now in accordance with God's law. As Mattisyahu's sons lived, and were saved by the Torah, with God's help we too can triumph over our enemies. But any leader wishing to lead based solely on political considerations, denying these truths, history, and God's abilities, is destined for failure. Follow His laws, and even the few will be victorious over the many.

Megillas Antiochos was found in an old edition of a siddur printed in Solonika, Greece. Otzar HaTfilos refers to it as a "precious letter".

MEGILLAS ANTIOCHOS

Translation by Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim.

(Arbitrary paragraph breaks have been added every 10 verses for ease of reading. These breaks do not exist in the original.)

1. And it was in the days of Antiochos, king of Greece, a great, mighty king was he, and he was strong in his reign and all kings listened to him. 2. And he conquered many cities and mighty kings, and he destroyed their palaces and their temples he burned with fire, and their men he imprisoned in jails. 3. From the days of Alexander the king, there arose no king like him on all sides of the river. 4. And he built a great city on the seashore to be his house of kingdom, and Antiochos called the city by his name. 5. And also his second in command Bagris built another city next to it and Bagris called it by his name, and so is its name until this day. 6. In the twenty third year of his reign, it was the two hundred and thirteenth year of the building of the Temple; he gave face to ascend to Jerusalem. 7. And he answered and he said to his officers, "Do you not know that there is the Jewish people in Jerusalem amongst us? 8. To our god they do not sacrifice, and our religion they do not practice and the king's decrees they forsake, to do their religion. 9. And they also hope for the day of the dethroning of the kings and rulers and they say, "When will our King rule the seas and dry land, and the entire world will be given to our hand?" 10. It is not honorable to the kingdom to leave them be on the face of the earth.

11. And now let us come and we will ascend on them and nullify their treaty that was cut with them concerning Sabbath, the new Month and circumcision. And the matter was good in the eyes of his officers and in the eyes of his entire army. 12. At that time, Antiochos the king arose and he sent Nikanor his second with a great army and many people and they came to the city of Judah, to Jerusalem. 13. And they slaughtered a great slaughter and built an altar in the Temple in the place where the God of Israel said to His servants, His prophets "Where I will cause to dwell My manifested presence eternally", in that place, they slaughtered the pig and they brought its blood to the sanctified courtyard. 14. And as this occurred, when Yochanan son of Mattisyahu the High Priest heard these doings occurred, he was filled with anger and rage, and the countenance of his face changed, and he counseled in his heart what should be done on this. 15. And then Yochanan son of Mattisyahu made himself a sword two spans long, one span wide, covered under his clothing. 16. And he came to Jerusalem and stood in the gate of the king, and he called to the gatekeepers and he told them "I am Yochanan son of Mattisyahu, I have

come to come before Nikanor.” 17. And then the gatekeepers and watchers came and told him the High priest of the Jews stands in the opening, and Nikanor answered and said to them, “Let him surely enter.” 18. And then Yochanan was brought in before Nikanor and Nikanor answered and said to Yochanan, “Are you one of the rebels that rebels against the king and desires not the peace of his kingdom?” 19. And Yochanan answered before Nikanor and said, “I am he, now I come before you, that which you wish I will do.” 20. And Nikanor answered and said to Yochanan, “If as my will you will do, take a pig and slaughter it on the altar and robe in the king’s clothing and ride of the king’s horses, and as one of the kings beloved you will be.”

21. And as Yochanan listened, he responded a thing, “My master, I fear from the children of Israel, perhaps they will hear I have done so and they will stone me with rocks. 22. Now let all men leave from before you, perhaps they will make the matter known.” Then, Nikanor caused all men to leave from before him. 23. At that moment, Yochanan son of Mattisyahu lifted his eyes to the heavens and assembled his prayer before his God and he said, “My God and the God of my fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, please do not give me into the hand of this uncircumcised, because if he will kill me, he will go and praise in the house of Dagon his god, and say “My god has given him to my hand.” 24. At that moment, he stepped towards him three steps and plunged the sword into his heart, and he threw that corpse into the sanctified courtyard. 25. Before the God of heaven, Yochanan answered and he said, “My God, do not place on me sin that I have killed in the sanctified (area), now, so also give all the people that come with him to pain Judah and Jerusalem.” 26. Then went out Yochanan son of Mattisyahu on that day and warred with the people and slaughtered in them a great slaughter. 27. The number of the slain that he slayed on that day was seventy two thousand seven hundred that were killed these to these. 28. On his return they built a pillar on his name and called it “Macabee Killed the Mighty”. 29. And it was that king Antiochos heard that his second in command Nikanor was killed, it grieved him much, and he sent to bring Bagris the wicked that mislead his people. 30. And Antiochos answered and said to Bagris, “Do you not know, have you not heard what the children of Israel have done? They killed my army and looted my camp and my officers?”

31. Now, on their money you are trusted or their houses are yours. Come, and ascend upon them and nullify the treaty which was cut with them (by) their God, Sabbath, the New Month and circumcision. 32. Then Bagris the wicked and all his camp came to Jerusalem and slaughtered in them a great slaughter and decreed a complete decree on Sabbath, the New Month and circumcision. 33. When this occurred that the matter of the king was urgent, there was found a man who circumcised his son and they brought the man and his wife and they hung him in front of the child. 34. And also the woman who bore the son, after her husband died and circumcised him at eight days, she went up to the walls of Jerusalem and her circumcised son in her hands. 35. And she answered and said, “To you, Bagris the wicked, you intend to nullify from us the treaty that was cut with us, the treaty of our fathers will not be nullified from us, Sabbath, the New Moon and circumcision from our children’s children, it will not be removed.” 36. And she dropped her son to the ground, and she fell after him and they both died together. And many of the children of Israel that did similarly in those days, and they did not veer from the treaty of their fathers. 37. At that time, the children of Israel said, “These to these, let us go and rest in the cave, lest we desecrate the Sabbath day, and they slandered them before Bagris. 38. Then Bagris the wicked sent men girded for battle and they came to the opening of the cave and said to them, “Come out to us, eat of our bread and drink of our wine and our actions you shall do.” 39. And the children of Israel answered, “These to these, “we remember that which God commanded us on Mount Sinai, ‘Six days you shall work, and do all your labor, and on the seventh day rest’. Now it is better for us that we die in this cave than desecrating the Sabbath day.” 40. When this happened that the Jews did not come out to them, they brought wood and burnt it at the opening of the cave and there died like a thousand men and women.

41. Afterwards, there came out five sons of Mattisyahu, Yochanan and his four brothers and they warred with the people and slaughtered a great slaughter and drove them to the isles of the sea because they trusted in the God of heaven. 42. Then Bagris entered one ship and fled to king Antiochos and with him were men, escapees of the sword. 43. And Bagris answered and said to king Antiochos, “You the king, placed a command to nullify from the Jews Sabbath, the New Month and circumcision, a great deceit and rebellion in its midst. 44. That when there went all the people and nations and languages, they could not defeat the five sons of Mattisyahu. From lions they are stronger, and from eagles they are swifter, and from bears they are quicker. 45. Now king, I offer you good counsel, and do not war with few men, for if you war, you will be embarrassed in the eyes of all kings. 46. Therefore, write and send books in all cities of your kingdom, that there come officers of war and not leave one of them, and also elephants wearing armour with them.” 47. And the matter was good with king Antiochos, and he sent books to all cities of his reign, and there came officers of all the people and kingdoms, and also elephants wearing armour came

with them. 48. A second time Bagris the wicked arose and came to Jerusalem, he broke the wall, and he cut off the water supply, and he broke in the Temple thirteen breaches and also from the stones he broke until they were like dust and he thought in his heart and said, “This time I will not be overtaken because of the numbers of my army and might of my hand”. But the God of heaven did not think so. 49. And when the five sons of Mattisyahu heard, there arose and came to Mitzpeh Gilead, that were there the remnant of the house of Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet. 50. They decreed a fast, and sat on ashes to seek out mercy from before God of heaven.

51. Then there fell good counsel in their hearts, Judah the firstborn, Simon the second, the third Yochanan, the fourth Yonasan, the fifth Elazar. 52. And their father blessed them and so he said, “Judah my son, I liken you to Judah son of Jacob who was equated to a lion. 53. Simon my son, I liken you to Simon son of Jacob who killed the inhabitants of Shechem. 54. Yochanan my son, I liken you to Avner son of Ner, officer of the army of Israel. Yonasan my son, I liken you to Yonasan son of Saul, who killed the Philistine people. 55. Elazar my son, I liken you to Pinchas son of Elazar who was jealous for his God and saved the children of Israel. 56. On this, there went out the five sons of Mattisyahu on that day, and warred with the people, and slaughtered in them a great slaughter, and there was killed from them Judah. 57. At that moment when the sons of Mattisyahu saw that Judah was killed, they returned and they came to their father. 58. And he said to them, “Why have you returned?” And they answered and they said, “On account that our brother was killed who was equated to all of us.” 59. And Mattisyahu their father answered and said to them, “I will go out with you and I will fight with the people, lest the house of Israel perish, and you are frightened on your brother.” 60. And Mattisyahu went out on that day with his sons and fought with the people.

61. And God of heaven gave all the mighty of the nations into their hands. And they slaughtered a great slaughter, all who seized the sword, and all who drew the bow, officers of war and the seconds in command, there was not left one remnant, and there fled the rest of the people to the cities of the sea. 62. And Elazar was involved in killing the elephants and he was submerged by the chariots of the elephants, and when they returned, they looked for him among the living and among the dead, and they could not find him. And afterwards they found him that the chariots of the elephants submerged him. 63. And the children of Israel were gladdened that there was given to their hands their enemies. From them they burned with fire and from them they pierced with the sword, and from them they hung on trees. 64. And Bagris the wicked that misled his people, the children of Israel burned him with fire. 65. And then, Antiochos the king heard that Bagris the wicked was killed and all officers of war with him, he entered into a ship and fled to the cities of the sea, and it was that each place he came to there, they mocked him and called him “the runaway”. 66. Afterwards, the children of the Hasmoneans came to the temple, and they built the broken gates and they closed the breaches, and purified the courtyard from the casualties and from the impurities. 67. And they searched for pure olive oil to light the candelabrum, and they did not find but one canister that had the seal of the ring of the High Priest and they knew that it was pure, and it contained a measurement to light for one day. 68. And God of heaven Who causes to dwell His name there, gave a blessing and they lit from it eight days. 69. Therefore there established the children of the Hasmoneans a fulfillment, and they forged a law, and the children of Israel with them as one, to make these eight days of drinking and happiness as the appointed days written in the Torah, and to light on them lights to make known what was done to them (by) the eternal God of heaven. 70. And on them, one may not eulogize, nor to decree fast days, or have a fast, except if it was accepted on it prior to this and pray before their God.

71. But the Hasmoneans and their children and their brothers they did not decree on them to nullify service of work. And from that time, there was no name to the kingdom of Greece. 72. And there received the kingdom, the children of the Hasmoneans and their grandchildren from that time until the destruction of the Temple two hundred and six years. 73. Therefore, the children of Israel from that day in all their exiles guard these days and call them days of drinking and gladness from the twenty-fifth day of Kislev, eight days. 74. From that time and eternally, there should not be removed from them that were in their Temple, priests, Levites and their wise men who established upon them and upon their grandchildren eternally.

Other prayer books add these verses:

“And these days, they arose and accepted on themselves and on their children and on their grandchildren eternally, the priests, Levites and wise men that were in the temple, and they were not removed forever. The God that did with them a miracle and a wonder, He should do with us miracles and wonders and sustain with us the verse that was written as the days of your Exodus from the land of Egypt, I display wonders, Amen.”