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## Weekly Parsha

# Emor

RABBI BERNIE FOX

“And Hashem said to Moshe, saying, Speak to Aharon and to his sons and to all Bnai Yisrael say to them: Any man whatsoever from the house of Yisrael, or from

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## Perfection

# God Doesn't Want Our Mitzvahs

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

That title sounds odd...but it's true. God says so in Haftoras Tzav: **“For I did not speak to your forefathers and I did not command them on the day I took them out of Egypt on the matters of sacrifice”**. (Jeremiah; 7:22)

But we know God did in fact dedicate many Torah words addressing the commands of sacrifice. How do we understand this quote? Radak says the next verse offers the answer:

**“For it is rather this matter that I commanded you saying: ‘listen to My voice and I will be for you a God and you will be to Me a nation’...”**

The message is clear: God does not desire us to merely go through the ‘motions’ of the mitzvahs. That is what He means that He did not command us on sacrifice: on sacrifice per se, we are not commanded. Radak says mitzvahs have an objective, and are not a goal

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## Weekly Parsha

# JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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the converts among Yisrael, who offers up his sacrifice for any of their vows (or for any of their donations that they may offer up to Hashem as an Olah offering) to be favorable for you, [it shall be] an unblemished male – from cattle, from sheep, or from goats. Any [animal] that has a blemish, you shall not offer up, for it will not be favorable for you. And if a man offers up a Shelamim offering to Hashem for declaring a vow or as a donation from cattle or from the flock to be accepted, it shall be unblemished. It shall not have any blemish in it.” (VaYikra 22:17-21)

The above pesukim explain one of the qualifications required of an animal that is offered as a sacrifice. The passages explain that the animal must be free of any blemish. These disqualifying blemishes are various deformities and injuries. The passages discuss four types or variants of sacrifices. The passages explain that the requirement that the animal be unblemished applies to an Olah and to a Shelamim sacrifice. The passages also explain that the requirement applies to offerings brought as a vow or as a donation. What are these four variants?

An Olah offering is a sacrifice that is burned in its entirety on the altar. No portion is consumed by the person bringing the offering or by the kohen – the priest. In contrast, a portion of the Shelamim sacrifice is burned on the altar. However, the remainder of the animal is given for consumption to the person who brings it and to the kohen. Our passages explain that any animal offered as either a Shelamim or an Olah offering must be free of any blemish.

The Olah and Shelamim offerings may be brought by an individual either as a vow or as a donation. What is the difference between a vow and a donation? First, it is important to note that these terms are misleading. Both an offering brought and a “vow” and an offering brought as a “donation” are bought in response to a vow. However, it is the specific wording of the vow that determines whether the sacrifice is regarded as a “vow” or a “donation.” If a person pronounces that he will bring a sacrifice – an Olah or Shelamim, then the sacrifice he will bring is a “vow” – a neder. But if the person specifies the animal by saying, “this animal is an Olah”, then the sacrifice will be regarded as a

donation – a nedavah.[1] So, both a neder and nedavah involve a vow. Both are sacrifices brought in response to a vow. They only differ in the manner in which the vow is formulated. If the person merely declares that he will bring an Olah, then the sacrifice is a neder. If he specifies the animal, then the sacrifice is a nedavah.

An Olah and a Shelamim can be brought as a neder or as a nedavah. So, in total, four types of sacrifices are included in the above passages: an Olah brought as a neder, an Olah brought as a nedavah, a Shelamim brought as a neder, and a Shelamim brought as a nedavah.

It is clear that the Torah finds it necessary to explain in detail the extent of the prohibition against offering a blemished sacrifice. The Torah does not limit itself to a general statement of the prohibition, “Do not offer a blemished animal as a sacrifice.” Instead, the Torah specifically applies the prohibition to the Olah and Shelamim offerings and to the neder and nedavah. Why are these detailed instructions required?



Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno explains that the Torah must specifically inform us that a blemished animal is disqualified for use as a Shelamim. If the Torah had not specifically mentioned that the animal is disqualified, we would assume that it could be used as a Shelamim. Why would we make this assumption? Sforno notes that the Shelamim sacrifice does not have the same level of sanctity as the Olah sacrifice.

This results in an important difference between an Olah and a Shelamim. Only a male animal may be used as an Olah sacrifice. For a Shelamim sacrifice, an animal of either gender is acceptable. Because there is no gender requirement for a Shelamim, one would assume that a blemished animal is also acceptable. Therefore, it is necessary for the Torah to explain that, despite the absence of a gender requirement, the animal brought as a Shelamim must be unblemished.[2]

The Sforno's comments are difficult to understand, yet, one aspect of his analysis is clear. The Shelamim sacrifice does not have the level of sanctity as the Olah offering. It is reasonable that one might erroneously assume that because the Shelamim has a lesser degree of sanctity, a blemished animal can be used. However, Sforno adds a troubling element to his explanation. He adds that an animal of any gender can

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(Emor continued from page 2)

Weekly Parsha

be used for a Shelamim sacrifice. Because there is no gender requirement, one might assume that a blemished animal is acceptable! What is the connection between the two issues of gender and blemishes? Why would one assume that if gender is not specified, then blemishes are acceptable?

It seems that according to Sforno, the Torah regards gender as an element of perfection in a sacrifice. In other words, the Olah is more sacred than the Shelamim. The Olah must be a male animal. The Shelamim sacrifice does not have a gender requirement. This implies that gender is a perfection required in the Olah that is not required in the Shelamim – a sacrifice of lesser sanctity.[3]

Now, Sforno's reasoning is begins to emerge. Sforno explains that a person might conclude that because a Shelamim offering does not have gender requirement, a blemished animal is also acceptable for this sacrifice. Why would one make this error? Now, we can answer this question. One might reasonably conclude that the Olah cannot be blemished because the animal must have all forms of perfection – even gender. But the Shelamim sacrifice is not required to be perfect; it has no gender requirement. Therefore, a blemished animal is acceptable. In other words, perfection of the animal

used for the sacrifice is either required or not required. If there is a gender requirement, then perfection is required and a blemished animal in unacceptable. But one might conclude that if there is not a gender requirement, then perfection is not required. If perfection is not required, then a blemished animal should be acceptable!

We have explained Sforno's comments. But there is one issue that Sforno does not discuss. Why does the Torah disqualify a blemished animal from use as a Shelamim sacrifice? Why is any gender acceptable but a blemished animal unacceptable?

In order to understand the Torah's position, it will be helpful to begin with an analogy. A gentleman walks into a men's clothing store to purchase a suit. The store sells designer suits and off-brand suits. A salesperson approaches the customer and asks whether he is interested in a designer suit or the store's off-brand products. The customer responds that an off-brand suit will be adequate for his needs. It is a slow day at the store; so, the salesperson continues to service the customer. The salesperson explains that the store also carries seconds – suits that have small defects. The salesperson asks the customer whether he is interested in purchasing a second. The customer declines.

The salesperson is somewhat surprised. He cannot understand why the customer is interested in purchasing an off-brand item but will not consider a second. Is there any explanation for the customer's behavior and attitudes?

The customer is making a simple distinction. He does not care about designer labels. He recognizes that the designer suit is a better product. He knows that the workmanship is of higher quality and that the pattern and cut of the suit are more contemporary. But these "perfections" are not relevant to him. The off-brand suit does not have these "perfections" but neither is there anything wrong with the product. However, the second is not merely lacking an element of "perfection." The customer regards the second as damaged. Damaged is unacceptable.

Now let us return to our question. There is no gender requirement for a Shelamim sacrifice. Sforno explains that gender is regarded by the Torah as a form of perfection. However, this does not imply that absence of the preferred gender is a blemish. We return to the analogy: The customer regards the designer label as an element of perfection but does not regard the off-brand suit – a product lacking this element of perfection – as damaged. A blemish is not merely the absence of an element of perfection. A blemish is the presence of damage and defect. We can now understand the Torah's position. The Torah does not require that the Shelamim sacrifice have the elements of perfection required in an Olah. However, the Torah prohibits the blemished animal. The blemished animal is not merely lacking an element of perfection – it is damaged or defective. It is this damage or defect – not lack of perfection – that disqualifies it for use. ■

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[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 22:18.

[2] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer VaYikra, 22:21.

[3] I have no doubt that some readers will stop reading at this point. They will conclude that Sforno – at least as here explained – is a male chauvinist and his comments do not deserve further attention. However, I ask those readers who are considering abandoning this analysis to give Sforno the benefit of the doubt. His conclusion is likely the result of halachic considerations rather than a personality flaw. A discussion of these considerations extends beyond the perimeters of this analysis.

in themselves. The objective is that through mitzvah, man accepts God, His authority and infinite knowledge, and follows Him...as the second verse states above. Mitzvahs are to redirect man from his egotistical and instinctual focus, towards God. Mere, technical actions (mitzvahs) cannot perfect man, since we possess intellect as our primary feature. Similarly, an automobile cannot be perfected as transportation, regardless of the perfected paint job, if we do not attend to the engine. Thus, mitzvahs address our values, and if only performed by rote, the goal is missed.

We must move past the performances and respect His authority, accept our lowly status as created entities, and live by His word, as any intelligent person would do. If however one performs mitzvahs without understanding them, or with the notion that the very act of the mitzvah is all God desires, then that person misses the objective.

Parshas Kedoshim teaches this lesson. One might think our "Book of Laws" is just that: a life where the action is all which God desires, and where the internal world is irrelevant. "I did the mitzvah"...people say to themselves with a false sense of total satisfaction. But the fact that the Torah must include a separate Parsha to teach this, i.e., Parshas Kedoshim...teaches many lessons.

### Perfection is not Legislated

Without Parshas Kedoshim, a false message would be communicated. Man might think he is to gain perfection through rote activities. But Kedoshim teaches a great fundamental.

Man typically seeks instinctual gratification. But his conscience weighs on him. He figures a solution: "I'll keep the Torah, but then when I am done praying and studying my token 10 minutes today, I will immerse myself in many permitted foods, sexual activity, and drink. I'll do the bare minimum to satisfy the commands, and with the rest of my time I will satisfy my instinctual, and I'll feel justified as living in line with Torah." These are the unspoken but undeniable sentiments that pervade the thoughts of so many Jews. But why does the Torah allow so many Parshas and commands to go by, offering man this false assumption? Why doesn't each mitzvah have right next to it in the Torah, the underlying, moral and intellectual perfection? Perhaps by doing so, another error would be made, as people would say, "Oh...THAT's why we have that mitzvah? Well, I already possess that perfected trait, and therefore, I am exempt from this law". With such responses, the Torah would not be upheld, and would quickly vanish from our people.



Therefore, the Torah laws must be written without qualification. But the Torah must also correct the first error: man's assumption that the act per se is all God wants. Therefore, God includes Kedoshim. Kedoshim means "separate" or sanctified, as in separating ourselves from our instincts. For man can follow all of the laws, and still overindulge. God thereby teaches that the mitzvahs are only Step 1.

Additionally, as wise Rabbi mentioned, the Torah cannot legislate perfection. Similarly, the Torah cannot tell man what he believes. We can be told what to "do", but not what to believe. Thus, the Torah cannot tell a person to have the trait of kindness as a command. But it can guide man in actions that can engender this trait, and the Torah does underline this and many other traits in other areas.

No matter how much we want to carry a pristine, righteous self-image, the truth must be admitted: we are instinctual beings. No one is born perfected. No one is missing the ego drive, or any other instinct. And these drives make us feel good when satisfied. All this must be admitted, if we are to realize the lessons in Kedoshim – being sanctified.

### How Torah Perfects Man

The Written Torah teaches us the individual headings of each mitzvah. And depending on the mitzvah's primary focus, certain aspects are highlighted and some not addressed, in the Written Law. But these are merely the broad strokes. The Oral Law (Mishna and Talmud) then elucidate all details of the objects of mitzvah and the "who, how and when". And although many of the Prophets and Writings address the true, underlying perfection targeted by the mitzvahs, the Five

Books cannot be bereft of such a fundamental. Kedoshim is vital.

Kedoshim begins by subduing man's ego, as taught by Rabbi Reuven Mann. "Fear of God is the beginning of knowledge". (Proverbs; 1:7) Man is taught to fear his parents, and to accept God, through Sabbath. These two laws along with setting up courts were the first laws the Jews received in Mara, before arriving at Sinai. This is sensible, since God was progressively shedding the Egyptian authority and bringing us to accept Him. By drowning the Egyptians in the Red Sea, we finally had no Egypt to run back to, as the Jews desired so many times when confronted with trials. And to now redirect their need for authority towards God, God gave the commands that cause man to accept authority: honoring parents, following courts, and observing Sabbath. Of course the first two target the acceptance of God. These laws are a necessary backdrop for all others. Thus, Kedoshim commences with them.

Man has many emotions, so our deviations are many. Although we are already warned against idolatry, the next verse (Lev. 19:4) warns us not to "turn" towards alien gods. Ibn Ezra says this refers to the "turning" of the heart...i.e., emotional consideration. To be truly Kadosh – holy – we must go further than simply not bowing to idols in action: we must also not consider them a reality at all. So we must remove this from our hearts. Kedoshim is telling us that our inner corruptions are many, what those corruptions are, and how to refrain.

Specifically, Kedoshim is urging our actions and thoughts be exclusively dedicated to God. That is Kedoshim's key message.

Man constantly seeks instinctual gratification. By studying Kedoshim, we learn where our instinctual natures seek outlets. By restraining ourselves from the more subtle modes of gratification, we become Kadosh. We become the men and women God gave us the potential to be. God also told Abraham to be "tamim", perfect. Meaning, that God's will was that Abraham – and mankind – be exclusively dedicated to God in all our actions. One who seeks to perfect himself must dedicate all of his actions in service to God's will...which is truly the greatest benefit to the self. This doesn't mean he doesn't enjoy a meal, family, vacation or other pleasures God created. It means all he does targets the goal of acting as God deemed proper.

In this verse (ibid) we are also told not to create molten gods. Why are molten gods singled out here?

This verse has a theme: do not give in to your

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imaginations. Shema says the same, "Do not stray after your hearts and after your eyes..." How are molten gods different than bowing to the sun, moon, animals, trees, and rocks? How are they more imagined?

In all other cases, at least man is bowing to something real. But when man creates a molten image of a fish-god as did the Philistines, even the object itself is completely removed from reality, and man's deviation is greater. Man's imagination created the object of his worship, unlike sun worship where at least the sun is real, and even warrants some level of importance.

Kedoshim also discusses those who curse the deaf and cause the blind to stumble, also referring to offering poor counsel. In such cases, since the victim was unaware of the true, evil intent of the sinner, the sinner might feel innocent. This is because many people's barometers for sin, is whether they are caught. This subtlety too is mentioned in Kedoshim.

One also sins by retaining the property due other longer than necessary. In this case, one might justify himself by saying "I eventually paid him, so where's my sin?" But the sin is in not treating another, as he would want for himself. Even in this slight manner, the sinner expressed some aggression towards another human being.

Even man's intended "good will" is exposed. For some judges pity the poor, or don't want to defame those who are rich or popular, so they decide the case in their favor...against true justice. Here too man is warned to detect this emotion in himself, and to follow justice, not people.

And what if I didn't try to save a life...did I really kill the person? Rashi teaches this man is punished. There is so much more to discuss...

### Summary

Kedoshim is a great study into our nature as instinctually driven creatures. It teaches that the commands alone are not God's will, but He desires us to desire Him, as Jeremiah taught.

With God's lessons, we can identify our faults, and train ourselves in His truths. Man can even perform mitzvahs his entire life, and yet, harbor many corruptions. This is what the Torah and Rabbis teach: God does not want our mitzvahs – as an ends – but He desires our perfection. And only patient study under a trained teacher will bring us to understand God's true will. We cannot imagine it, or obtain it by simple reading. The Mesora – the transmission from Sinai – is essential for learning God's will, and for learning how to think. ■



# Not Following Others

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

*"Happy is the man that does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, and in the path of sinners he does not stand, and in the company of scorners he does not sit. But in God's Torah is his desire; and in his [own] Torah he habituates himself day and night". (Psalms 1:1,2)*

It is significant that King David does not say that the happy man walks in the ways of "righteous people". Rather, he follows God's Torah: i.e., ideas. Thereby, King David teaches that we are not to follow "people", as do the sinners. But we are to follow our minds. Social approval is not the path of our great, wise king. King David exposes the insecure nature we all possess, and which we must overcome, if we are to be truly righteous, and happy. Man and woman must be dedicated to themselves, and not live to make others happy by following what is popular. We must use God's Torah alone to determine what is true and false. If many Jews follow beliefs that violate Torah, we must suffer their scorn and not join them. Enjoy the fact that you follow truth. It is this thought that must guide our actions.

God will certainly hold us accountable for the self-imposed loss of following masses, even religious masses, in addition to the irrevocable, tragic loss of our perfection.

Be steadfast in God's Torah, and you will be happy. ■

## Perfection



# Pesach Ritual Blood & Nation

WRITTEN BY ARIEL LEVI

## Part 2 – The Covenant of Freedom

*“and it came to pass in the course of many days; that the king of Egypt died; and the children of Israel groaned from the work, and they cried out. And their cry went up to God because of the work....[1]”*

*“And God saw the Jewish people, and God knew.[2]”*

This perhaps is the beginning of the Exodus. For at the same time there is a shepherd Moses, who is tending the sheep for his father-in-law in a distant far away wilderness. He is leading his flock in the desert and he comes “to the mountain of God, to Choreb[3]”

Let us ask ourselves, what was it like in Egypt at that time. What was it like to be a Jew, what was it like to be a slave? You are part of a people oppressed and downtrodden, and suffering. Your taskmasters are controlled by a man, a pharaoh who may very well be a god. You know that the God of your forefathers has told Abraham that he will redeem you, a promise that seems impossible now. Your masters are strong, powerful and

domineering, they have the best army on the planet. They worship powerful gods which you might also worship. You have lived your entire life here, and so have your parents, and parent's parents. You may want to leave, or perhaps, you are one of those who has given up hope and will perish in the darkness.

At this very moment, at this same time, God tells Moses:

*“ I have surely seen the affliction of My people that are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their pains; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the Amorite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite.” [4]*

This is God's prophecy, presenting to Moses a glorious vision. And it was glorious, and brutal, perhaps almost as brutal as it was glorious. The Jews would not arrive in Israel, for a long time. Over forty years later a very small number of the original 600,000 men would arrive at the Promised Land. Almost adult men had perished by the hand of God for the sin of the spies. They would then fight many bitter battles and partially drive out the nations of the land; partially for some of these nations were not completely wiped out, they would remain for hundreds of years as a thorn in Israel's side. And of course, as we know, the deliverer of this prophecy, Moses would not arrive at the Promised Land.

The journey from Egypt to Israel was not merely traveling from one place to another on the map. Rather it was a change of another nature; a change in belief, a change in psyche, a change in being. The setting is not the only thing that changes, so to will the people. And a people transform only when the people transform; when the individuals that make up a nation change.

The people as a nation and the people as individuals do change. Both struggle mightily with the difficult task of leaving the old. It is not easy to change your entire way of life. It is not easy to change your way of relating God; the way of relating to yourself. One must make the leap from slavery to freedom, family to nation, from an idolatrous self-centered world, to an all-encompassing acknowledgment of reality. Make the leap, and maybe fall; and maybe fall many times.

The Torah tells us that the Jews would fall many times and many ways. They were tied

down to their slave mentality.

*“ they said to Moses... Is not this the word that we spoke unto thee in Egypt, saying: Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it were better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness”[5]*

and

*“the children of Israel also wept on their part, and said: 'Would that we were given flesh to eat! We remember the fish, which we were wont to eat in Egypt for nought; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic; but now our soul is dried away; there is nothing at all”[6]*

Servitude and lack of responsibility had become a primal part of the Jewish psyche. Freedom would come with much work and at a high cost. There are many hard and harsh steps that the Jewish people took as a people. Exodus was the first; the first step in the maturation process, in the growing up, in achieving a liberty that would only come to fruition much later. It began the Jewish People and it transformed our unique relationship with God. It gave us not only a different perspective on the world, but it evolved our self-definition. It was done in a very specific manner. It was done precisely to address these issues. Every detail will be crucial.

## Part 3

Imagine for a moment that you are one of the Jews on the night of the Exodus. You live in Egypt the large prosperous and fertile country. You work hard, long hours. The days are filled with torturous work under cruel and powerful masters. You help keep the land running yet you are unlike those around you. You are a part of a clan, a family, a different family. There is something unique about your people, survivors of an ancient legacy, keepers of an old faith. You have been a slave for over two hundred years. Much of your heritage has been lost, though you do wear the traditional garb and speak the language of your people. It seemed as though this exile would last forever. That is until recently, when he returned, a man who may possibly fulfill the ancient prophecy to Abraham; Moses, the boy who lived, the man who survived and has

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returned, out of the desert, to save his people.

In the time since he went to Pharaoh the first time, so much has happened. Our God has waged a war against Pharaoh and Egypt and their gods. Their land is in ruins, their spirit crushed, they seem on the verge of letting us leave. Many of us do not want to leave. Or perhaps, more accurately 'did' not want to leave. They died during the plague of darkness. We desire to leave, but the desire to stay in this comfortable place, the only place we know is very strong. And of course, there are the Egyptian Gods, that integral part of the culture we have been immersed within for last two centuries.

Now it is the night of Exodus. We have been given two very special commandments circumcision and the pesach sacrifice. Both are difficult, both are different, korban pesach is probably the last thing we will ever do; for the sheep is one of the Egyptian gods, gods of our neighbors and masters, those who wield over us the power of life and death. We have spent the past four days with this sheep tied to our bedpost; we know what we are getting into, the risks we are taking, and the sacrifice. It is a most stressful time, a most difficult time; as we eat our pesach in a hurry, we can hear the death screams of the Egyptian first born, and we wonder in dread, will we last the night.

As we, the reader, skim through the bible, often the intensity and the fright of the Exodus, escape us. We don't realize just how much was going on, and how traumatic it was. Our projection of freedom smothers the realization of how testing and jarring the actual freedom was.

This prompts two questions. The first being why was the actual freedom so difficult, why couldn't we just have left Egypt. Gotten up and left. The sacrifice here is great even in the depiction of the parable the girl is told "by your blood you shall live".

The second question is why are there elements told to the Jewish people during the Exodus that seem to have no relevance to their situation at all. For as a preparation for that night, Hashem commanded the Jewish people in many things that seemingly are only about future generations, and have no personal relevance. We keep Pesach because we are commemorating the Exodus; they weren't commemorating the Exodus, rather, they were living the Exodus. Why were they commanded to observe the Pesach holiday before there was a Pesach holiday? Why were the Jewish people commanded to eat matzos at the seder night. It was only the next morning when their dough did not have time to rise.

Other aspects also seem out of context. Why

are the Jewish people told here about Israel? Why are they told about pesach laws concerning future generations? This may be very important information, but why do they need to know this now. Isn't the impact of this redemption already enough, why must they shoulder an even greater burden?

To review some of our questions; what is happening in the redemption? Why is it so complicated and seemingly convoluted? Why are so many elements and mitzvos included here that seemingly belong elsewhere? Why are the Jewish people ritualizing their redemption rather than experiencing it? And finally why is the whole experience so traumatic.

Rashi addresses many of these questions one very potent note. He tells us that the Jews were steeped in idolatry and required the commandments of circumcision and the pascal lamb in order to be worthy of redemption. And not only did they require the pascal lamb, but it was done in this way to help the Jewish people break the yoke of idolatry.

Suddenly many points become clear. For at this point the Jewish people were in the process of becoming, the process of achieving independence, the process of freeing themselves from the filth of idolatry. The Exodus was traumatizing, and necessarily so. For only by making the difficult choices, could they become, could they mature into their full stature. Exodus was a catalyst; it was here that the Jews would be forced to draw the line. They would perform circumcision, thereby identifying themselves with the covenant, with their forefather Abraham, with the Jewish people. They would also denounce the "gods" by killing them. Choosing to kill the gods was a choice to grow up.

This choice took place in the proper time, for the girl had grown up. She was ready to take upon herself the mantle; she is ready to be clothed in splendor. The Jewish people make the break, and separate themselves from idols in such a way that it will be final. It will be dangerous, it will be scary, it will be traumatizing. It will be because it must be, for this is the only way to become. The girl will live by her choices, by her blood[7], by her love[8]. As the Jewish doorposts are marked by the slaughter[9], and the Egyptian firstborn are dying, the Jewish people are born.

It is here that the nation begins, and for this reason it is here that the first mitzvos are given. For a Jewish people is not merely a group of people, rather it is a eternal unit. The individuals leaving Egypt are not merely gaining a personal freedom, but rather they are partaking in the redemption of a people. This redemption that is

part of a larger context; it is a stage of development in the life of the girl and it will be an event that God will always remember us by[10]. The Jews leaving Egypt are not merely being redeemed, rather they the first to experience Pesach. The first Jews to keep this mitzvah, a mitzvah that would share the character of all mitzvos; it would be commanded to the entire Jewish people for all of time. And it had to be observed in the form that the eternal Jewish people would adopt. For this reason the first mitzvah of the paschal lamb was preceded by the establishing of the lunar calendar. For without a set date, the Egyptian Jews would not be adhering to the eternal Passover. They would be creating the holiday, but they would also they would also be observing it.

But they would also be observing it as the Jews who were experiencing redemption, as the Jews who were casting away their idols. And for this reason there are five aspects of Pesach that they were commanded that we do not keep. These "only for Egypt" Passover themes were necessary and crucial for them, but they are not a part of the undying Torah and Mitzvos. And it was important that this was realized even then. The Sons of Israel had to realize even then that they were a part of something bigger and greater than them. Their personal experience as every Jews takes part in the eternal.

Perhaps this is why in the parable, God washes the blood off of the girl. For the analogy of blood expresses the real trauma that the Jewish people went through and that would continue to haunt them[11]. Therefore when God lifted the people out of Egypt it was just as important for Him to deal with the trauma, for Him to wash off the blood. To bath them in water, to wash away their blood, to anoint them with all and to clothe them in splendor[12] ■

[1] Exodus 2:23

[2] Exodus 2:25

[3] Exodus 3:1 This mountain would become the site of the giving of the Torah (The Talmud tells us that the name Horeb connotes \_\_\_\_.)

[4] Exodus 3: 7,8

[5] Exodus 14:11, 12 (spoken at the splitting of the sea)

[6] Dueteronomy 11:4, 6

[7] Ezekiel 16:6

[8] Ezekiel 16:8

[9] Exodus 12:7

[10] See Rashi to Shemos 12:39 "vegam" and Ezekiel 16:60

[11] As we mentioned; the golden calf, the Jews desiring to return to Egypt...

[12] Ezekiel 16:9-14

## Letters



# Discussions

*with our*

# FRIENDS



## Miracles & Magic

**Mike:** Someone said Maimonides tries to rationalize everything, to give a reason for it. He engages the Greek's mode of reasoning.

**Mesora:** I don't see the problem. Reason is all man has to uncover truth. What difference does it make if Greeks employed a line of reasoning, and if Maimonides too used it...if that line of thought uncovers truth? I also disagree....Maimonides is not "rationalizing". That would be a childish. Maimonides is "reasoning".

**Mike:** Granted, it could be that the God doesn't want us following after falsehoods, like idols AND witchcraft, so He legislates the death penalty for doing so. But there is no IMPERATIVE to say that this MUST be the case, unless you approach the Torah from a sophisticated philosophical standpoint, one that was developed after the Torah was written.

**Mesora:** I don't know what you mean. Chazal say God does not want us to follow these areas. Where do you think they got that idea?

**Mike:** You could answer, of course, that the Greek view is correct, and God knew it of course, it's just that the people of the time didn't. Here's the problem with saying that - the Torah and Neviim clearly say, over and over, that there is no deity other than our God. Why then, does the Torah NEVER say that witchcraft, black magic, and divination are false?

**Mesora:** Good question, but your premise is incorrect.

Some Jews have the idea that the Torah prohibited magic because it is true. They believe 100% that magic and fortune telling works. Ibn Ezra (Leviticus, 19:31) says the following, "Those with empty brains say 'were it not that fortune tellers and magicians were true, the Torah would not prohibit them.' But I (Ibn Ezra) say just the opposite of their words, because the Torah doesn't prohibit that which is true, but it prohibits that which is false. And the proof is the prohibition on idols and statues...."

Ibn Ezra says the Torah DOES prohibit magic and fortune tellers...based on their respective prohibitions. You need not have a Torah verse literally specify the words "magic is false" according to Ibn Ezra. The very prohibition indicates the fallacy.

Yermiyahu 10:2 says not to follow the "signs of heaven". That's not referring to idolatry (which he next mentions), but it refers to omens and horoscopes.

I also feel that the every statement that there is only one God, addresses all other assumed deities and falsehoods, indicating that God alone is true, all other assumed forces (magic et al) are false.

Correct thinking is that the burden of proof is not on anyone to "disprove magic", but for someone to prove it.

Until something is proven...it is not a reality.

For someone to hold that magic is true, they need to substantiate a plausible theory of how it works. So the burden of proof is on one to prove magic...it's not a burden on others to disprove that which has yet not been proven.

Discussions of magic...in books, by mouth et al...are mere discussions...not proofs. They are to be viewed as common day UFO claims. Neither magic or UFOs have ever been substantiated, or explained rationally.

**Mike:** Yeah, that's a good point. I don't think most people I know would say it exists TODAY, so then there's a need to explain how it existed in the past. But the same could apply for miracles - meaning, if the Torah says there were miracles, and we believe it, then if it says there's magic we should believe it.

**Mesora:** Yes. If the litmus test of historical proof exists (mass witnesses of recognizable phenomena) for anything -- even magic -- we would accept it. The separate problem would exist as is true with miracles: how does magic work? But the fact remains that magic never existed. Therefore, God's reality - the universe - is proof of only One Power. All tricks must be explained as tricks.

**Mike:** In any event, the theory of how it COULD work is very simple - just like there's forces of nature, magic could be forces of nature that are harnessed through certain incantations, etc., but don't manifest themselves without that. Why can't God allow certain forces like magic to exist too? He allows other wondrous things to exist in nature and enables them to be harnessed by science. I don't think it's philosophically UNTENABLE, even if it can't be proven from sources outside the Torah. (Neither can the miracles in the Torah.)

**Mesora:** Again, the burden of proof is on that theory, that some system called magic exists. We don't suggest the possibility of flying purple elephants. The reality must show itself for an intelligent person to have basis for acceptance. Without any reality of magic, it is foolish to say it forms part of the universe...just like those elephants.

**Mike:** What is the distinction between miracles and magic? That the Torah says there's miracles? Perhaps it is also saying that there's magic.

**Mesora:** Here's the difference:

### Miracles

God always performs them...it's never by man.

### Magic

Reason doesn't accept it since natural law is consistent, and no "action at a distance" occurs. Physical laws must be at play in order for one object to affect another. But if there is no natural force that explains a trick, we must say there is a concealed natural cause. Thus, a mind-reader cannot truly read minds, since no natural law exists whereby one can think into another person's thoughts. So it's a trick. "Floating" animals must be suspended somehow. Sawing a woman in half is achieved by two midjet women in a single box, where only one is seen entering. The other was there from the outset. Disappearing objects go up sleeves...etc.

Presto! We've unveiled the lie of magic! ■