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ESSENTIAL TO OUR SALVATION,  
AND WHO ORCHESTRATED THEM.



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## Education

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

For quite some time now, I wanted to address the topic of education for many reasons. My primary concern is that the student develops a healthy outlook for, and a magnetic attraction towards Torah study. I will address a few issues in this first article and hope to continue with a follow up.

### Metaphors

A friend's daughter repeated a medrash - a story - taught to her by her teacher. The teacher said that certain  
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## Purim

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"That was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar; and they gained relief on the fourteenth day, making it a day of feasting and gladness. But the Jews that were in Shushan assembled on thirteenth and fourteenth, and rested on the fifteenth, making it a day of feasting and gladness." (Megilat Esther 9:17-18)

The events of Purim culminated in the Jews defeating their enemies. In general, this battle took place on the thirteenth of Adar. However, in Shushan the battle continued an additional day. In Shushan the conflict ended on the fourteenth. This salvation is celebrated through the festival of Purim. Purim is celebrated on two days. Most cities observe Purim on the fourteenth of Adar. This was the date on which most Jews rested from their conflict with their enemies. However, some cities observe Purim on the fifteenth of Adar. These cities recall, through their celebration, the events in Shushan. In Shushan, the Jews fought on the fourteenth and did not rest until the fifteenth. Which cities observe Purim on the fourteenth and which celebrate the fifteenth? Shushan was a walled city. Therefore, those cities defined as walled celebrate on the fifteenth of Adar. Accordingly, the fifteenth of Adar is referred to as Shushan Purim. Cities that are defined as



open or cities without walls celebrate on the fourteenth of Adar.

How does halacha determine the status of a city as walled or open? The Talmud explains that any city that was walled at the time Yehoshua conquered the Land of Israel is regarded as walled. This criterion applies even to cities whose walls were destroyed by the time of the events commemorated by Purim. Cities that were not walled in Yehoshua's days are regarded as open cities. If the city was subsequently walled, its status remains unchanged. It is regarded as an open city. The only exception to this rule is Shushan, itself. Shushan was walled after the time of Yehoshua. Nonetheless, it is defined

as a walled city. The question regarding these criteria is obvious. Why is the determination based on the city's status at the time of Yehoshua? The purpose of distinguishing between walled and open cities is to recall the different days of celebration in Shushan and other cities. It seems that a city's designation should be established by its status at the time of the Purim miracle!

Maimonides responds to this question. He explains that at the time of the miracle of Purim the land of Israel was desolate. The walls of its cities had been destroyed. If the criteria were determined by a city's condition at that time, an unacceptable outcome would result.  
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# Purim

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The cities of Israel would be reminded of their fall and destitution. This would disgrace the Land of Israel. In order to preserve the honor of the Land of Israel, the determination of a city's status was based upon its condition prior to the desolation of the land. This raises two interesting questions. First, there seems to be a simpler solution to the problem of respecting the honor of the land of Israel. The creation of Shushan Purim is designed to commemorate the unique experience in Shushan. Why not limit observation of Shushan Purim to Shushan? This would avoid any slight to the land of Israel. Second, we can well appreciate the importance of honoring the land of Israel. However, we expect halacha to be governed by logical principles. Basing a city's status on its condition at the time of Yehoshua seems arbitrary and inappropriate. The fact that a city was walled centuries before the miracle of Purim is not a basis for comparing the city to Shushan!

These two questions lead to an important insight into the celebration of Purim. Purim is not merely a celebration of a past miracle and salvation. It is not solely an experience of thanking the Almighty for our salvation. Instead, it is a process of duplicating and reliving the events. For example, we fast on Ta'anit Esther and then enter the celebration of Purim in order to relive the transition from peril to salvation. The enactment of Shushan Purim serves this purpose of reenactment. It is designed to recall the various dates of salvation. Therefore, it is crucial that Shushan Purim receive prominent attention. Observing Shushan Purim in Shushan alone would be completely inadequate. This would not provide adequate recognition of the events. Instead, a set of cities was selected that assured that the two alternate days of salvation would be fully relived and recalled. We can now

understand the criterion chosen by the Sages. Our Sages did not establish Shushan Purim because a city's similarity to Shushan required this alternative date of celebration. Instead, they created the celebration in order to establish a vehicle for more fully recreating the events of Purim. This necessitated selecting some group of cities to preserve and demonstrate the events of Purim. Some similarity to Shushan was necessary to communicate the message. However, a strict resemblance to Shushan was not required. Therefore, the Sages had latitude in defining the criteria for walled cities. They had the option of respecting the honor of the land of Israel. This respect did not detract from fulfilling their purpose.

Mesechet Megilah 2a. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Megilah and Chanukah 1:5.

**"There are those that maintain that the reading of Parshat Zachor and Parshat Parah is a Torah obligation. Therefore, people living in an area in which there is not a congregation are obligated to come to a place that has a minyan for these Shabbatot. This is in order to hear these Torah readings that are Torah commandments."** (Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chaim 685:7)

The Shabbat prior to Purim, we read Parshat Zachor. This special reading is found at the end of Parshat Ki Tetze. It discusses two mitzvot. The first is the obligation to remember the evil of Amalek. The second is the obligation to destroy the very memory of this corrupt nation. Shulchan Aruch notes that, according to many authorities, the reading of Parshat Zachor is required in order to fulfill the mitzvah of remembering Amalek. Therefore, it is important for every person to hear this reading. Parshat Zachor is one of two sections in the Torah that discusses the wickedness of Amalek. The second section is at the end of Parshat Beshalach. These passages describe the unprovoked war that Amalek waged against Bnai Yisrael. This section also records Hashem's pledge to destroy Amalek. These

passages are the Torah reading for Purim. Magen Avraham raises an interesting question. Can one fulfill the obligation to recall the wickedness of Amalek through the Purim Torah reading? This reading also discusses the wickedness of Amalek.

Magen Avraham suggests that one can fulfill the obligation to remember Amalek with the Purim reading. He argues that there is no reason for specifically requiring one to read the passages at the end of Parshat Ki Tetze. Neither is there any obvious reason for requiring that one fulfill the mitzvah the week before Purim. Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik Ztl disagrees. He points out that there is a basic difference between these two sections. Parshat Zachor discusses the mitzvot regarding Amalek. These are the mitzvot to remember Amalek and to destroy the nation. The reading of Purim does not describe these commandments.

Rav Soloveitchik continues his analysis with a very simple question. What is the nature of this mitzvah to remember Amalek? In his Mishne Torah, Maimonides implies that this commandment to remember Amalek is closely linked to the mitzvah to destroy the nation. Maimonides explains that we are required to destroy Amalek. Then, he adds that we are required to regularly recall the evil of Amalek in order to evoke an abhorrence of this nation. Maimonides seems to imply that remembering Amalek is a precursor to waging war against the nation. We remember Amalek in order to motivate us to fulfill the commandment to destroy Amalek.[10] This implication is confirmed by Maimonides, formulation of the mitzvah to destroy Amalek in his Sefer HaMitzvot. There, Maimonides writes that we are obligated to recall the evil of Amalek in order to motivate the Bnai Yisrael to wage war with this wicked nation.[2]

Rav Soloveitchik suggests that Maimonides' formulation of the mitzvah to remember Amalek suggests that Parshat Zachor may be specifically required. It is possible that the Purim reading is not adequate. The mitzvah to remember Amalek is designed to provide

motivation for waging war. It is reasonable to assume that the mitzvah can only be fulfilled through a Torah reading that specifies the obligation to destroy Amalek. Through this reading, the recollection of Amalek's wickedness is linked to the commandment to destroy the nation. The Purim reading does not discuss the requirement to wage war against Amalek. This commandment is only mentioned in Parshat Zachor.[3]

**"One is obligated to read the Megilah at night and to repeat it during the day."** (Shulchan Aruch, Orech Chayyim 687:1)

Shulchan Aruch explains that the Megilah is read twice on Purim. It is read at night and during the day. This law is derived from the Talmud in Tractate Megilah.[4] Tosafot and many other commentaries explain that the two readings of the Megilah are not of equal importance. The more fundamental reading is during the day. There are numerous proofs for this assertion. One simple proof is that the fundamental mitzvot of Purim are observed during the day. For example, the Purim feast can only be held during the day. The Talmud equates these observances to the reading of the Megilah. The equation seems to imply that, just as other mitzvot performed of Purim must be performed during the day, so too the reading of the Megilah is related to the day of Purim and not the night. [5] This raises an interesting question. Why, then is the Megilah read at night? Secondly, the wording of Shulchan Aruch and the Talmud seem to imply that the nighttime reading is the more fundamental. Both refer to the daytime reading as a repetition of the nighttime reading. Referring to the second reading as a repetition indicates that it is secondary!

Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehudah Berlin (Netziv) Ztl answers this question through a brilliant explanation of the relationship between the two readings. In order to understand his explanation, we must more carefully study the text of the Talmud. The discussion in the Talmud begins by quoting Rebbe Yehoshua ben Levi. He explains that a person is required

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# Purim

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to read the Megilah at night and "le'shnotah" by day. The term leshnotah can be interpreted in two ways. It can mean "to learn" or it can be understood as "to repeat". At first, the Talmud understands the term to mean "to learn". According to this interpretation, we are required to read the Megilah at night and to study the laws during the day. The Talmud rejects this interpretation and concludes that lessnotah means "to repeat". Therefore, the requirement is to read the Megilah at night and repeat the reading during the day.

Netziv asks, "How could the Talmud initially assume that the Megilah is not read during the day?" Yet, this seems to be the Talmud's original understanding of Rebbe Yehoshua ben Levi's lesson. The Talmud interprets his statement to mean that the Megilah is read at night and the laws of Purim are studied during the day! Netziv responds that the Talmud never assumed that the laws of Purim should be learned to the exclusion of reading the Megilah. The Talmud always understood that the fundamental reading of the Megilah takes place during the daytime. Instead, the Talmud originally assumed that Rebbe Yehoshua ben Levi was establishing an additional requirement. Beyond the mere reading of the Megilah, one must study the laws. This enriches the reading of the Megilah. Through the study of the laws, the student acquires a more advanced comprehension of the Megilah's contents. Netziv further points out that this initial interpretation of Rebbe Yehoshua ben Levi's dictum reveals an essential premise of the Talmud. The Talmud assumes that Rebbe Yehoshua ben Levi is not describing the fundamental mitzvah of reading the Megilah. The fundamental mitzvah is to merely read the Megilah during the day! Rebbe Yehoshua ben Levi is establishing a requirement to enhance this performance.

Through identifying the Talmud's premise, Netziv answers our questions. The Talmud rejects its initial interpretation of Rebbe Yehoshua ben Levi's lesson. His intention is to require the reading of the Megilah at night and its repetition during the day. However, the Talmud never abandons its essential premise! Rebbe Yehoshua ben Levi is establishing a requirement to enhance the performance of the mitzvah. In order to enhance the reading during the day, it must be preceded by a reading during the night. The daytime reading will be a repetition of the nighttime reading. Like any material, the Megilah is understood more clearly with review! Because the daytime reading is a second review, it will be better understood and appreciated. Netziv explains that the nighttime reading is required to prepare us for the daytime reading. The daytime reading must be a repetition of the nighttime reading. True, the Talmud and Shulchan Aruch refer to the daytime reading as a repetition. However, this is not intended to diminish the importance of this second reading. The intention is to stress its fundamental nature. Through rendering this daytime reading into a repetition, it is enhanced with greater understanding and appreciation.[6] □

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Melachim 5:5.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh 189.

[3] Rav Michel Sherkin, Harrai Kedem, Chapter 195.

[4] Mesechet Megilah 4a.

[5] Tosefot, Mesechet Megilah 4a.

[6] Rav Naftali Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (Netziv), Meromai Sadeh, Commentary on Mesechet Megilah 4a.

## Haman's Intolerance

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

In the Megillas Esther read on Purim, (3:4), we learn that the other ministers had informed Haman that Mordechai was not following Haman's command to



bow to him. Why did these ministers in King Achashverosh's court need to inform Haman? Wouldn't Haman know this, seeing Mordechai perfectly erect?

Either Haman knew or didn't know about Mordechai's refusal. If Haman didn't know, then it makes sense in 3:5 that his anger flared upon hearing Mordechai's deviation. This is in line with Haman's nature. When he would first hear of something going against his egocentricity, Haman would be angered.

But perhaps Haman did in fact know that Mordechai didn't bow to him. This is more plausible, as why should Haman alone be ignorant of Mordechai's behavior? This being the case, we must ask, "Why didn't he get angered about Mordechai's refusal immediately upon his first encounter of Mordechai's disobedience?"

One possibility is that the very same ego which caused Haman to desire others to bow to him, would also cause him to avoid the reality of that one person disgracing him. This is intolerable to Haman, and perhaps why he didn't face it until it was brought

out in the open in 3:4 (suggested by Eva Tavlin). Only now did Haman have to deal with it as he could no longer act for his own motives alone, i.e., suppressing this disturbing fact. Similarly, Pharaoh forgot Joseph after Joseph's death. A Rabbi explained, Pharaoh could not tolerate the loss of Joseph. He was in great need of Joseph's insights in order that he, Pharaoh, could successfully rule Egypt. Therefore, upon Joseph's death, Pharaoh feigned complete ignorance of the entire era of Joseph as a means of saying, "I never needed him and I am a capable ruler independent of another person's assistance". Such a denial allows Pharaoh to feel capable once again.

Haman acted as Pharaoh, denying Mordechai's blatant opposition, but only to the point when the matter was no longer avoidable. The other ministers in the courtyard who brought this news to Haman did so as they did not want to see Mordechai escaping punishment. This is why the passage states "to see if Mordechai's position would stand". □

# Education

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"righteous" people have the ability to alter nature - an ability we must only ascribe to the Creator - Who created nature's laws. Taking such stories literally eliminates any chance for the student to think into the true ideas behind such metaphors. All knowledge encapsulated in these metaphors by the Sages' cryptic writings is lost. The Rabbis did not intend for us to believe that Og lifted Mount Sinai off the Earth, or to believe that we actually studied Torah inside our mothers' wombs.

Where did this teacher get the idea that unbelievable metaphors are to be taken literally? No Sage said these are literal stories. In fact, they teach us just the opposite, that such stories are metaphors. King Solomon says in his opening statement in Proverbs, (1:6) "To understand metaphor and poetic expression, the words of the wise and their riddles." King Solomon clearly states that Rabbis spoke in riddles and metaphors. If Og lifting Mount Sinai is not a metaphor, I don't know what is.

Metaphors are a means by which we may arrive at deep concepts, not readily accepted by the masses. If one cannot unravel the riddle, then the idea is safely transmitted to the next generation. The priceless, hidden ideas are not lost. If one can see through the metaphor, then he arrives at a true concept. But one should not believe things which make no sense to his or her mind. If as a teacher, you come across a story which you cannot explain, seek understanding from those greater than you. If your own superiors take it literally, you have no obligation to follow in their error. Skip it. Perhaps later in life you will merit to understand the Rabbis' true intent. But by all means, do not teach something just because Rashi said it. Teach only what makes sense to you. Teaching means you enlighten your students to a new idea, leading them to a true appreciation of God's wisdom. If you simply teach them Rashi's words, but they are left with no understanding, it is better not to

confuse them. They might even develop poor self esteem if they continue to be confused by incoherent statements, blaming themselves for their ignorance, and not the teacher.

Training children and students to accept fantastic stories has become the way of Jewish educators, who themselves were subject to this damaging practice. However, by reading what King Solomon taught, and what Maimonides' son Avraham discusses in his intro to Ein Yaakov, we realize that fantastic stories are not to be understood literally. We remove ourselves from fallacy and fantasy, and gain a chance at learning the true, underlying concepts that the Rabbis wish us to understand. Appreciation of God's Torah wisdom means it must register on our minds as sensible.

As a teacher, your goal is to help your students sharpen their minds. You must not feel that your job is to feed them every Rashi on the Chumash. Help them to move forward, starting at the stage of intellectual development they presently are at. Many teachers mistakenly teach Genesis to first graders, one of the more abstract and difficult parshas, just because it is at the beginning of the Chumash. Adults have a hard time grasping Genesis, let alone children. I understand that schools have a curriculum, but perhaps with your input, they too will understand that certain areas are better left for those of greater intellectual maturity. Don't just follow the masses when Torah education is at risk.

Children are tomorrow's leaders. Take responsibility. Teach them Torah as the Rabbis taught. Not only will the children benefit and enjoy their studies, but you pave the future with greater Torah appreciation.

## Responding to Questions

Say you don't know when you don't. No student expects a teacher to have all the answers. Be honest. If you have a possibility, say it's a possibility. You are not a teacher to impress upon your student's your absolute knowledge or control. If you feel this is true in yourself, stop teaching immediately. Your goal is to open up students to God's knowledge. When you admit error, the student will respect your honesty. Their trust in you will go very far. They too will feel comfortable

when they don't know something. It makes it OK for them to ask questions, and this furthers their learning to such a greater degree. Ethics of the fathers teaches us that one embarrassed will not learn. By saying "I don't know", you enable a student to accept themselves when they don't, and you encourage their curiosity. Contrast this great good to those destructive teachers who enter teaching just to satisfy their need for control. What a sin that is saying, "that's not a good question" when you are bereft of an answer. Dismissing the student's real questions encourages him to refrain from speaking up in the future. He learns to resent authority, and he learns to despise anything associated with learning.

Today, Torah education lacks teachers who actually learn the Foundations of Torah - the Yesodos of Yahadus. Many teachers merely parrot notions they have heard from fellow Jews, not principles they have read in the Sages' works.

For example, a widely accepted view today is that "all opinions are correct." People base this on the Rabbis' statement, "70 faces to the Torah." The one problem is as follows; why did Ramban argue on Maimonides, or Ramban on Rashi? If all views are correct, shouldn't Ramban accept Rashi's opinions? The Talmud in Chullin states, "had Yehoshua ben Nun said it, I would not follow it." What is this Talmud teaching? These cases are examples of how the Torah sages learned. They were not blinded by reputations, they followed their minds. I have heard responses to this argument, "well they are greater, but we don't have the right to argue." This sentiment is not found in the Torah. We see just the opposite, that we are to use our minds. See the introduction to "Duties of the Heart". The author teaches that we are not to simply follow the Rabbis blindly, but we are to think into all matters and commands so they are clear and rationally pleasing to our minds. As we recite in Alenu each day, "And you shall know it today, and you shall return it to your heart." Knowledge of the law is not the ends. It must be followed by a "returning to your heart." Understanding is where all studies must eventuate.

## Confidence, Praise and Independent Thought

In order to develop an independently thinking child who selects his own values, thinks for himself and is actually meritorious of 'his' views, a level of confidence must be developed. All actions as teachers or parents which may topple this delicate structure in its formation must be avoided. Most adults remain victim to public opinion. They value what others think, more than what their own mind tells them. They live for others, and rarely for themselves. A true waste of an individual mind.

Our Torah is designed for a person's well being, and for his or her own merit in following it. Merit, by definition, means that one acts for themselves. They do not act to impress others. To bring a student to such a level, we must help them with the most important of all challenges; developing independent thinking, based on a clear and accurate understanding of Torah values, ideas, morality. This goes back to our first point, that teaching facts bereft of any new rational idea is not teaching. This type of approach of spoon feeding incoherent facts spoils the minds. Instead of sharpening students' minds, you blur their thinking and cripple their lives.

## Tests

Who came up with this idea that all students in a class of 25 must be measured by the same barometer? What a harmful practice. How many adults today would love learning, were it not for the poor self image that they developed due to feelings of inadequacy produced by tests? And the tests themselves don't even measure what the Torah values. "The purpose of learning is svara" - reasoning. The Talmud does not say the purpose of learning is a memorization of facts. Ethics of the Fathers (2:8) compares memory to reasoning and the higher praise is for Rabbi Elazar ben Arach who is equated to an increasingly strong spring. The idea is that one who produces new insights like a spring outweighs even one with greater memory. Why is this quality of insight a greater trait than memory? Think about it, we will continue next week. Have an insightful shabbos. ■

# Parshas Vayikra

RABBI BERNARD FOX

**"Speak to Bnai Yisrael and say to them, "When a person from among you offers a sacrifice to Hashem, you should offer your sacrifice from cattle, sheep or goats". (VaYikra 1:2)**

This pasuk introduces the discussion of the Olah sacrifice. This sacrifice was completely consumed on the altar. Although many sacrifices are obligatory, the Olah could be brought as a freewill offering. In our pasuk Hashem addresses himself to Bnai Yisrael. This does not mean that non-Jews cannot offer sacrifices. The Talmud explains that non-Jews may offer sacrifices in the Bait HaMikdash. Maimonides explains that the non-Jew may offer a freewill Olah sacrifice. Maimonides adds that even a non-Jew who is an idolater can offer a sacrifice. Our Sages derive an important law from our passage. Only some Jews can offer a sacrifice. Any Jew who practices idolatry is excluded. This exclusion is extended to a Jew who profanes Shabbat publicly. This person's sacrifice is not accepted for offering in the Bait HaMikdash.

This presents an interesting problem. Why is the sacrifice of a non-Jewish idolater accepted but the sacrifice of a Jewish idolater rejected? It seems that the affiliation of the individual with idolatrous practices does not disqualify the sacrifice. Instead, we apparently assume that the sacrifice is intended for the Almighty regardless of the general affiliation of the idolater. If so, why is the Jew's offering unacceptable?

We can make one immediate deduction.

We assume that any sacrifice brought to the Temple is sincerely intended for Hashem. For this reason we accept the non-Jewish idolater's offering. This suggests a second conclusion. In order for a sacrifice to be accepted two conditions must be met. First, the sacrifice must be suitable. Second, the sacrifice must be brought by an appropriate individual. A sacrifice brought by an idolater is apparently suitable for the altar. However, acceptance or rejection of the offering is also based on appropriateness of the person bringing the offering. The non-Jew's idolatry does not disqualify the individual from bringing a sacrifice. These practices do disqualify the Jew. Why do the same practices disqualify the Jew but not the non-Jew? We must conclude that the Jew is not disqualified simply as a result of idolatrous practices. If this were the criterion, the non-Jewish idolater would also be disqualified. Instead, the rejection of Jew is a consequence of a defect in the individual's Kedushat Yisrael – sanctity as a Jew. Idolatry is a contradiction to this sanctity and taints it. It is this defect

in the Kedushat Yisrael of the individual that disqualifies the Jew from offering a sacrifice. The non-Jew is not endowed with Kedushat Yisrael. Therefore, idolatry – although sinful – cannot create a defect in the person's Kedushat Yisrael.

This approach can provide an answer to another difficult problem. Maimonides explains that heresy results in a forfeiture of one's portion in Olam HaBah. He defines heresy broadly. He basically includes rejection of any of the thirteen fundamental principles of the Torah. These principles include the concept of the Messianic era and the derivation of the Torah from Sinai. Maimonides maintains that a non-Jew can earn a portion in Olam HaBah. This is accomplished through observance of the seven laws given to the descendants of Noah. It is not necessary for the non-Jew to accept the thirteen fundamental principles of the Torah. How can we explain this double standard? The Jew who rejects any of the fundamental principles cannot participate in Olam HaBah. The non-Jew is not held to

this standard. Our approach resolves this issue. The non-Jew is not required to accept the Torah. Therefore, rejection of one of the Torah's fundamental principles does not disqualify the person from a portion in Olam HaBah. However, the Jew is required to accept these principles. They are the essence of Kedushat Yisrael. Rejection of any one of the fundamentals is a basic defect in the Jew's sanctity. It is this defect in the individual's sanctity that disqualifies the Jew from participating in Olam HaBah.



**"If his sacrifice is an Olah offered from the cattle, it should be an unblemished male. One must bring it of his own free will to the entrance of the Ohel Moed, before Hashem." (VaYikra 1:3)**

An Olah can be brought as a freewill offering. This is accomplished by the person making a vow to bring an Olah sacrifice. The pasuk seems to express two contradictory requirements. It tells us that once a person vows to bring an Olah, it must be offered. The passage then states that the offering must express the freewill of the person. In order to appreciate the contradiction in these requirements, consider a simple example. A person vows to bring an Olah. This individual then experiences a change of heart and no longer wishes to offer the sacrifice. The first requirement in the pasuk dictates that the offering must be brought. However the second requirement demands the freewill of the person. The person no longer wishes to bring the offering. If we force the person to comply with the requirement to offer the sacrifice, freewill will be absent.

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# Parshas Vayikra

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The Talmud discusses this issue in Tractate Erichin. The Sages explain that the person is indeed forced to bring the offering. However, the courts exert pressure on the individual to proclaim that he or she wishes to bring the sacrifice. In this manner both requirements of the passage are fulfilled. The sacrifice is brought. It also represents the freewill of the person. This concept seems bazaar. The person is forced to proclaim that the sacrifice represents an expression of freewill. How can any action resulting from force be construed as an expression of freewill?

Maimonides discusses this issue in his Mishne Torah. He explains that a person wishes to fulfill the commandments of the Torah. However, at times one may be overcome by powerful, evil impulses. These impulses interfere with the person's better judgment. The courts can pressure the person to fulfill the Torah's commandments. In such cases, the courts are merely weakening the influence of the evil impulse. Once this impulse is overcome, the individual can act according to his or her authentic will. The resulting performance of the Torah's mitzvah is an expression of the person's true desires.

These comments are difficult to understand. Maimonides argues that the person truly wishes to observe the commandments. Any refusal to fulfill the obligations of the Torah is an expression of an evil impulse. This impulse has overcome the person's true desires. Therefore, through applying force, the courts are merely allowing the underlying desires of the individual to gain expression. A skeptic could easily argue that the opposite is true. The skeptic would posit that the evil impulses represent the real desires of the person. The court, through its influence, has suppressed these true desires. The court has superimposed its own wishes upon the individual! Why does Maimonides feel that his view is more valid than the skeptic's perspective?

The first step in resolving this issue is to recognize that Maimonides is not offering a psychological analysis of human motivation. From a psychological perspective, the views of the skeptic are as plausible as Maimonides' assertion. It is likely that both are right. Some people are accurately described by Maimonides. Others fit the description provided by the skeptic. If Maimonides is not providing a psychological description of human nature, what is he describing?

It seems that Maimonides is positing that halacha provides a basic set of assumptions regarding human nature. Every human being has various motivations. Some are more basic to human nature. Other motivations are the result of passing desires. Halacha must determine which represent the basic nature of the individual. It is not possible for halacha to examine the inner life of each and every person. Instead, halacha establishes a legal definition of human nature. In this legal description the desire to perform commandments is regarded as more basic than the evil impulses. A simple example will help illustrate this concept. Assume an animal gores. The owner of the animal must pay for the damage. The first time the animal gores, the owner pays for half of the resultant damage. However, once the animal has established a pattern of destructive behavior, the owner becomes fully liable for the full damage caused. Now assume that an animal with an established pattern of destructive behavior gores. Do we know that this incident was a result of the animal's nature? Perhaps the animal was incited! Why do we assume that the animal was responding to a destructive impulse in its nature? The answer is that we do not make any assumption regarding the true psychological motivations of the beast. The psychology is irrelevant. The animal's nature has been determined in the

reality of halacha. Halacha relies on this determination in interpreting the future behavior of the animal.

In short, halacha deals with its own legal construction of the animal's behavior. It is not concerned with the actual psychology of the beast. Similarly, halacha makes assumptions about human motivation. These are legal assumptions. They are not assertions regarding psychology.

**"And he shall press his hands on the head of the Chatat. And He shall slaughter the Chatat in the place of the Olah." (VaYikra 4:29)**

This pasuk discusses the Chatat sacrifice. The Chatat is brought to atone for the violation of a negative command. The pasuk explains that the person bringing the sacrifice must press upon the head of the animal. This process is accompanied with a confession of the sin for which the sacrifice is to atone. What is the purpose of confessing over the sacrifice and pressing upon the animal's head? The commentaries offer a number of explanations. One of the most insightful is provided by Gershonides. He explains that every sin requires repentance. One of the objectives of repentance is to encourage the person to change and not repeat the wrongdoing. In order for this objective to be met, the sinner must know that atonement has occurred. Without atonement, the motivation for change is undermined. If the sinner feels that atonement and forgiveness are not achievable, this individual will conclude that nothing is gained from repentance. The confession and pressing upon the head of the animal communicate the concept of atonement. The sin is symbolically transferred to the sacrifice. The person bringing the offering is cleansed of the sin. Atonement has occurred. The person knows that now a new start, free from the taint of the sin is possible. □

Mesechet Menachot 73b. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Ma'aseh HaKorbanot 3:2. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Ma'aseh HaKorbanot 3:4. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Commentary on the Mishne, Mesechet Sanhedrin 10:1. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Melachim 8:11. Mesechet Erichin 21a. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Gerushin 2:20. Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer VaYikra, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1997), pp. 2-3.

**"Speak to Bnai Yisrael and say to them the following: When a person from among you offers a sacrifice to Hashem, if it is an animal sacrifice, it should be taken from the cattle or the flocks of sheep or goats." (VaYikra 1:2)**

This passage introduces the Torah's discussion of sacrifices. The midrash offers many important insights into the Torah's concept of Divine service and the commandments regarding the sacrifices. One of the most interesting insights is presented in connection with our passage. The midrash asks a question. Imagine a king served by two chefs. The first prepares a dish for the king. The king eats the delicacy and is pleased. The second chef also prepares a special dish for his master. The king partakes of this second offering and is also pleased. How can we determine which cuisine was most appreciated? The midrash responds that we merely need to observe the king's subsequent actions. The chef that is summoned to prepare the next meal has won the contest. The king's choice indicates his preference.

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The midrash explains that this simple story has an important parallel. When Noach left the ark, he offered sacrifices. The Torah tells us that the Almighty regarded these offerings as "an appeasing fragrance." [1] The sacrifices of Bnai Yisrael are also frequently referred to as "an appeasing fragrance." [2] How can we determine which sacrifice is preferable? The midrash responds that we must consider the Almighty's subsequent actions. He commanded Bnai Yisrael in the laws governing the burnt offering the Olah. The Torah states, "This is the law of the Olah." [3], [4] Through this command, Hashem indicated that the sacrifices of Bnai Yisrael are preferred. The discussion in the midrash continues. However, we will limit our analysis to this portion. The midrash asks a simple question. Which sacrifices are preferable, those of Noach or those of Bnai Yisrael? The midrash compares this question to the inquiry regarding the alternative dishes prepared by two chefs. It is important that we understand this analogy. The analogy allows us to accurately define the midrash's question concerning sacrifices. In the analogy, the king's preference is not determined by any bias towards one of his servants. The king makes his choice based on a comparison of the virtues of the two dishes. The question concerning sacrifices must be defined in the same manner. The midrash is asserting that the sacrifices are fundamentally different just as each cuisine presented to the king is distinct. They represent two interpretations of the concept of sacrifice. What are these two different types of sacrifice? In other words, in what fundamental characteristic are the sacrifices of Noach different from those legislated by the Torah? The most obvious difference is that Noach was not guided by a system of laws and regulations. His decision to offer sacrifices was spontaneous. He was not following any commandment from G-d. Also, his method of sacrifice was a personal expression. He was not directed by any system of instructions. In contrast, the Torah created a highly regulated system of sacrifices. Specific occasions require sacrifices. The sacrificial service is regulated down to the minute detail. True, a person can offer a free-will offering. Nonetheless, in regard to sacrifices, the Torah leaves little room for personal expression and spontaneity. We can now clearly define the midrash's question. Which type of sacrifice is preferable? Does Hashem prefer the spontaneous sacrifice that is a personal expression? Does the Almighty favor the highly regulated and structured offering? One might argue that the Almighty, Himself, replaced the informal sacrifices of Noach with the structured sacrifices of the Torah. This suggests that the Torah's concept of sacrifice represents an evolution from the more primitive sacrifices of Noach! This certainly is a reassuring argument. However, it is not sound. In order to understand the defect in this argument, we must consider the reason Hashem introduced regulation and structure into the sacrificial service. Sforno discusses the issue in his commentary on Sefer Shemot. He explains that the commandment to build a Mishkan was a consequence of the Golden Calf the Egel HaZahav. [5] Bnai Yisrael created and worshipped the Egel. This indicated that the nation had not shed its idolatrous attitudes. These tendencies could influence Divine worship. In order to preserve the integrity of the Divine service, regulation was introduced. In short, the introduction of intricate structure into the sacrificial service was a response to a failing in the nation. It cannot be defined as an evolutionary advance.

We have shown that the midrash's question cannot be easily dismissed. In fact, it seems that a powerful argument can be made in favor of Noach's sacrifices. Is not the heartfelt, spontaneous offering superior to

the structured, regulated sacrifices of the Torah? It seems that the Torah's sacrifices are only an artificial imitation of the personal and expressive sacrifices offered by Noach! There is a remarkable parallel to the development of sacrifices. Maimonides discusses the mitzvah of prayer in his Mishne Torah. He explains that, according to the Torah, we are required to pray every day. The Torah does not establish a set number of prayers for each day. Neither is there a specified text. Each person is free to pray once, or numerous times each day. Each individual's prayers are a personal expression of one's own feelings. Originally, the mitzvah was observed in the manner prescribed by the Torah. However, after the destruction of the first Temple and the subsequent exile, a problem arose. The majority of the nation was no longer fluent in Hebrew the sacred language. Hebrew was replaced by a variety of languages. Most were unable to effectively express themselves in appropriate prayers. Ezra and his court intervened. They ordained that we should pray three times each day. They also established a specific text for the prayers. [6] In short, prayer was transformed. Originally, it was a personal expression. Ezra created structure and regulation. It seems that the midrash's question can also be expressed in reference to prayer. Prayer and sacrifices both experienced identical transformations. A personal, creative activity was transformed into a highly structured and regulated expression. The midrash is dealing with a basic question. Which expression is superior, the personal or the structured? The midrash frames the question in reference to sacrifices. However, the same question is relevant to prayer. The midrash responds to the question. The structured form of worship is superior. The midrash quotes an interesting passage. In describing the process for offering an Olah sacrifice, the Torah states, "This is the law of the Olah." Why does the midrash quote this passage? It is because the passage refers to the laws of the Olah. The midrash is telling us the Torah's sacrifices are superior as a result of their structure and regulation of the laws of the Olah! However, the midrash does not provide an explanation for its conclusion. Why is the structured sacrifice superior to the spontaneous offerings? The midrash does not provide much information. This raises an important issue. Does the midrash's conclusion also apply to prayer? In order to answer this question, we must better understand the midrash's conclusion. Why is the structured sacrifice superior? Once we answer this question, we can determine if this midrash's conclusion also applies to prayer. We can answer this question through analyzing another pasuk from our parasha.

"And he shall split the bird apart by its wings. He should not completely separate it. And the Kohen should burn it on the altar on the wood that is on the fire. It is an Olah, a fire offering, an appeasing fragrance to Hashem." (VaYikra 1:17) Various creatures can be offered as an Olah. This includes types of cattle and even some fowls. Our passage discusses an Olah of a fowl. The pasuk explains that this Olah is an appeasing fragrance to Hashem. Rashi observes that the same phrase is used in describing the Olah brought from cattle. Rashi explains, based on the Midrash Sifra, that the passage intends to compare these two offerings. The Olah of the fowl is a modest offering. Typically, the fowl is offered by a poor person. The Olah brought from cattle is a more substantial sacrifice. Nonetheless, both are an appeasing fragrance to Hashem. The modest and the more substantial offering are equal to the Almighty. Both represent submission to His will. [7] This is implied by the phrase, "an appeasing fragrance to Hashem. According to Rashi, this phrase means

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that the person has fulfilled the will of Hashem.[8] Rashi is providing a basic insight into the concept of sacrifices. The object offered does not define the value or quality of a sacrifice. Instead, the element of submission is fundamental to the sacrifice. The modest sacrifice is not inferior to the more substantial offering. The important issue is that the person bringing the sacrifice surrenders to the will of the Almighty. How does the sacrifice represent this submission to the will of Hashem? This occurs through the adherence to the specific laws regulating the sacrifice. Conforming to these laws represents submission to Hashem's will. This surrender defines service to Hashem and worship. We can now more fully understand the midrash's comments. The sacrifices of Noah were not regulated by any system of law. They did demonstrate submission. However, this demonstration was only symbolic. Noah represented himself through the animal on the altar. He communicated that he, like the sacrificed animal, was completely devoted to Hashem.[9] However, these sacrifices did not involve an actual act of submission. They did not conform to any Divinely ordained structure or law. This structure and law did not exist. The Torah introduced an elaborate system of law governing sacrifices. With these laws, sacrifices acquired a new significance. The sacrificial service was transformed from a symbolic to an actual submission.

Now, our question regarding prayer is answered. Ezra's reformulation of prayer did not detract from the mitzvah. Instead, the mitzvah was enhanced. Ezra made prayer more accessible to the average person. He also added structure and regulation. This addition enhances the element of

devotion in prayer. The supplicant, through adhering to these laws, demonstrates submission to the Almighty's will. Through Ezra, prayer more closely models the concept of Divine service expressed in sacrificial service. ■

[1] Sefer Beresheit 8:20-21. [2] The midrash cites as an example Sefer BeMidbar 28:1. [3] Sefer VaYikra 6:2. [4] Midrash Rabba, Sefer VaYikra 7:4. [5] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Shemot 31:18. [6] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Tefillah 1:1-6. [7] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 1:17. [8] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 29:18. [9] See Rav Yitzchak Arama, Akeydat Yitzchak on Sefer Shemot, Parshat VaYikra.

## The Necessity of Prayer

RIVKA OLENICK

**"Thou hast stricken them, but they have not grieved." (Jeremiah 5:3)**

With regard to the above statement in Tanach, the Rambam, in *The Guide For the Perplexed* (pgs. 331/332) says: "For this reason God commanded us to pray to Him, to entreat Him, and to cry before Him in time of trouble." Repentance is a major part of prayer, the focal point; otherwise why does the Rambam tell us to entreat Him and cry before Him in time of trouble if not to return to God? Entreat means to beg, to ask earnestly and cry before Him with a full and sincere heart. In any time of trouble do we expect God to change our situation, to make it better just for the asking, without considering repentance? Foolishly, we do because most of the time we ourselves create our "time of trouble" and then conveniently blame it on God and say: "Why has God done this to me?" Shouldn't God quickly change my situation, and just "get me out of it?" Can't I just rattle off the prayers and expect results?

What is my obligation when I "entreat" God? Isn't it to ask God earnestly through prayer to assist me in my time of trouble? Shouldn't I first understand that I solicit God with the recognition of an important principle, which is that God takes notice of our ways, all of the time? The fact that God takes notice "all the time" is an idea we should be aware of "all the time." We should understand and internalize this idea, otherwise what is the point of our prayer? The Rambam says that a person can repent all year long, every day. Why wait only for the 10 days of repentance? Each of us have the opportunity to strengthen our own position, so to speak to gain more leverage with God, to find more "favor" with God, since He does take notice all of the time. Everything we say and do is "noticed." The purpose of honest prayer is to bind oneself metaphysically to the Creator, because it is only the Creator who knows and hears all. Prayer is essential in our life, we cannot live without it, although many people say they have "no time" for prayer. This is a poor excuse, especially since people find time for the most insignificant activities yet prayer is easily neglected. How can one live without utilizing this unique bond to our Creator?

A person's entire outlook and direction in life can change more positively if one involves oneself in understanding the purpose of prayer. Prayer is the phenomenon that exists between the Jew and the God of the Jewish people.(1) The Jew was given definite instructions for all prayer that should be taken much more seriously. There are many halachas, laws regarding prayer, so it is not some erroneous, rote commandment and it is not an optional commandment either. So if we are commanded in prayer isn't it also true that prayer was given to us for our benefit? Can we really live without it? I don't think so. At any time and in time of trouble prayer is a great necessity and makes it an obligation for every person who has the capability to do so. A person may wish to fast voluntarily in addition to prayer during a time of trouble. This can have a very beneficial effect as it

helps a person to be more introspective in the realm of repentance. Fasting and tshuvah, repentance through prayer can bring a person back to who they aspire to be with the recognition that there are philosophical ideals to reach. In turn this can help bring one to a better starting place with another opportunity to once again humbly return to God.

We don't just go through the motions of prayer, we use prayer as a genuine opportunity for growth. Through prayer, a person is hopefully brought back to reality and thinks: "This is about me." For every other selfish need, isn't it "always about me?" Prayer is a different necessity; it is a need of the soul, an investment in the soul and in one's reality. This is what God wants from us. The Rambam says: "If we were convinced that we could never make our crooked ways straight, we should for ever continue in our errors, and perhaps add other sins to them since we did not see that any remedy was left to us. The belief in the effect of repentance causes us to improve, to return to the best of the ways and to become more perfect than we were before we sinned. God can make our ways successful if we worship Him, or disastrous if we disobey Him and that success and failure are not the result of chance or accident."

What person would want to forfeit God making their ways successful? Who would be so foolish? Don't take prayer for granted and/or don't ignore it. Even when things are "ok" there is always a need to repent. Not only from guilt, although guilt is a great motivator, but from actual sin. For every sin one commits, one is obligated to repent. God once again has given us the gift of repentance through prayer to be used as a tool for perfection. "Bring us back our Father, to your Torah and bring us near, our King to Your service, and influence us to return in perfect repentance before You. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who desires repentance." (The Shemoneh Esrei.) Have a great Shabbos! ■

(1) This does not mean a gentile cannot pray. The author is simply describing the Jews' obligatory phenomena of prayer. Gentiles are not obligated in prayer, but may do so provided their concept of God is true.