

*Jacob blessed Joseph's half-Egyptian sons,
and did not view them as lesser souls.*

ARE WE FOLLOWING JACOB'S LESSON?

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Weekly Parsha

VaYikra

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“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)

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the HEART and Soul of the JEWISH PEOPLE

RABBI SAUL ZUCKER

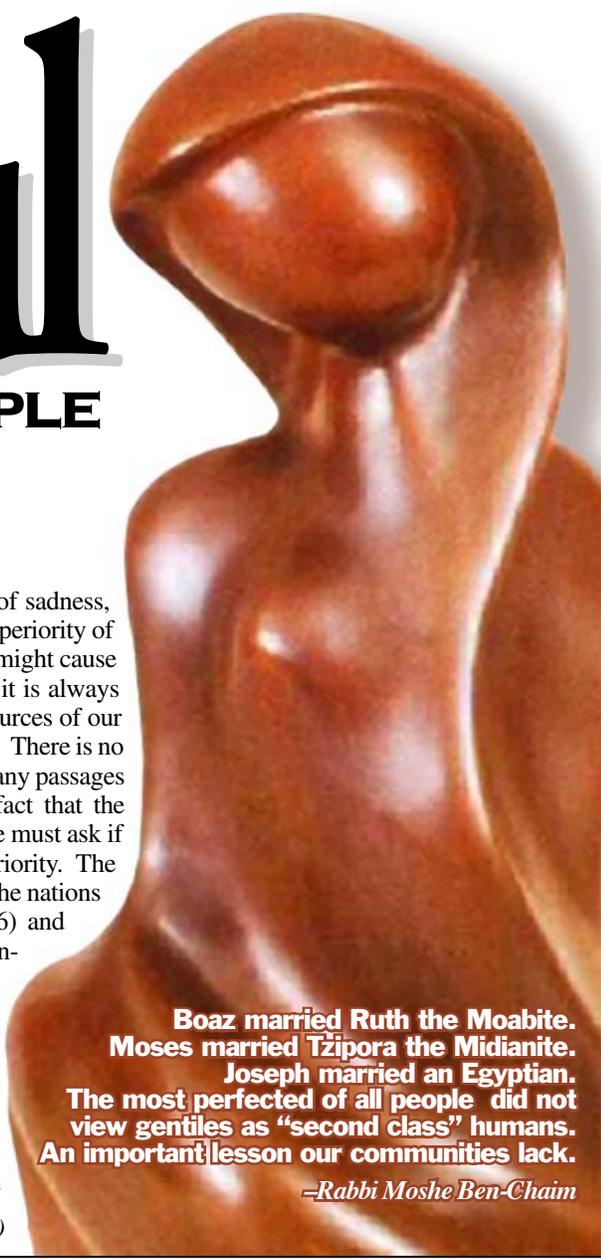
I have read with great interest, and a deep sense of sadness, the recent exchange concerning the notion of the “superiority of the Jewish soul”. I must say that I understand what might cause one to say, “the Jewish soul is superior”; however, it is always important to check one’s own notions against the sources of our mesorah along with a clear analysis of those sources. There is no question that there are many verses in Tanakh and many passages in the Talmud and Midrashim that speak of the fact that the Jewish people are special and chosen. However, one must ask if the qualities special and chosen mean inherent superiority. The Jewish people were chosen by God to be a light for the nations (Isaiah 49:6), to model wisdom (Deuteronomy 4:6) and morality (Genesis 18:19). This is an awesome responsibility. And yes, it does result in the fact that the Jewish people are special (Exodus 19:5). But special due to the task we were given and the lifestyle associated with that task, not due to an inherently different soul.

There are areas in halakhah, such as Leviticus 19:18, that are designed to promote a sense of unified community within the Jewish people, a sense

(continued on page 4)

**Boaz married Ruth the Moabite.
Moses married Tzipora the Midianite.
Joseph married an Egyptian.
The most perfected of all people did not
view gentiles as “second class” humans.
An important lesson our communities lack.**

—Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



(Vayikra cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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Much of Sefer VaYikra deals with the laws regulating sacrifices. The idea of animal sacrifice presents a challenge for many of us. The Torah was given to us by Hashem as a revealed truth. It is designed to elevate humanity. Its mitzvot establish the highest standards for human conduct. The Torah gives us an advanced system of justice and jurisprudence. It describes standards of social responsibility and charity. The Torah derides superstition and primitive religious attitudes. So, it seems quite remarkable that a system devoted to the elevation of humanity above paganism and primitivism endorses and requires animal sacrifice. How can we reconcile this institutionalization of animal sacrifice with the progressive attitudes of the Torah?

Generally, Maimonides is regarded as offering the most compelling response to this issue. His response is significant, not only in its treatment of this issue, but also in its treatment of related issues.

Maimonides begins by stating an assumption that is fundamental to his approach to understanding sacrifices. He explains that the wisdom and intelligent design of Hashem is evident in the complexity of the universe. This same wisdom is manifest in Hashem's providence over humanity and Bnai Yisrael. This means that Hashem considers human nature in His interaction with humanity. One element of human nature that Hashem considers is that human behaviors and attitudes cannot be suddenly, radically altered.

Based on this assumption, Maimonides offers a novel approach to explaining animal sacrifice. He explains that Hashem's objective in His relationship with Bnai Yisrael was to develop the people into a nation devoted to His service. Hashem chose to not forsake sacrifice as one of the forms of service. This was because sacrifice was an

established form of worship. Abandonment of sacrifice as a form of worship would have represented a radical change of attitudes and behaviors. In other words, in order to achieve the goal of forming a nation devoted to Hashem, a concession was made to human nature. The traditional, accepted form of worship was preserved.

Maimonides continues with an amazing analogy. Imagine our reaction if Hashem were to tell us to abandon prayer as a form of worship. Instead, we are to serve Hashem through thought alone. We

would not know how to serve Hashem without some available mode of material expression. Sacrifice played an analogous role in the minds of Bnai Yisrael. Therefore, Hashem chose to not abandon it.

However, this created a dilemma. Sacrifice was associated with idolatry. Hashem had to reform sacrifice and strip it of all idolatrous elements.

In order to reform sacrifice, it is highly controlled and structured. This intensive attention to detail assures that all elements of idolatry are removed and not permitted to reenter sacrificial service.[1]

In essence, it seems that Maimonides acknowledges that animal sacrifice does not represent an ideal form of worship. In fact, he seems to accept that this form of worship is a remnant

from more primitive times and cultures. Nonetheless, he argues that the Torah – in recognition of the limitations of human nature – chose to preserve this ancient form of worship.

Next, Maimonides discusses a related question. He asks why Hashem did not merely require the ultimate level of service. Certainly, He can instill within us the ability to meet this requirement! Maimonides' answer has two parts.

First, Maimonides shows that Hashem typically does not resolve human shortcomings through altering human nature. For example, when Bnai Yisrael were brought out of Egypt, Hashem did not



(continued on next page)

lead them to the land of Israel by the most direct route. This was because the nation was not yet prepared to battle mighty nations. Hashem did not alter the people's nature. Instead, He accommodated it.

Second, Maimonides explains this practice of Hashem on a deeper level. Although Hashem can alter human nature, this is not His method of relating to Bnai Yisrael. Instead, He gave us the Torah and sent us prophets to guide us and help us improve ourselves.

Finally, Maimonides asserts that a careful study of the Torah and the Prophets supports his thesis. He identifies various passages that support his explanation of sacrifices. Maimonides also points out that the offering of sacrifices is restricted. They must be offered in the Bait HaMikdash and by Kohanim. Other forms of worship are not subject to as many restrictions. For example, one can pray virtually anywhere. No Kohen is required to participate. This encourages a de-emphasis of sacrifice and a reorientation to other, more meaningful, forms of worship.[2]

Maimonides' explanation of sacrifices provides a compelling answer to a difficult question. The Torah – the Written Law – describes the laws governing sacrifices in great detail. The Written Law deals with other important mitzvot much more concisely. For example, nowhere does the Written Law provide a detailed, or even general description of tefillin. Similarly, the Written Law does not precisely define the type of activity that is prohibited on Shabbat. The Written Law provides a general statement, and the details are provided by the Oral Law. This same pattern is followed in the Torah's treatment of most other mitzvot. This is not the case in regard to sacrifices. Sacrifices are described in elaborate detail in the Written Law. The only other area that receives the same meticulous treatment is the design and structure of the Mishcan. Why does the Torah treat these two areas in a manner that is starkly inconsistent with its usual approach? Maimonides' thesis regarding sacrifices provides a response.

According to Maimonides, the Torah created its system of sacrifices in response to two considerations. First, it would have been impossible to develop a new religion that completely abandoned traditional, deeply rooted forms of worship. So, sacrifices were preserved within the Torah. Second, the Torah was compelled to regulate and structure sacrifices in order to "sanitize" them and strip them of any element of idolatry. But, it must be added that this structuring and regulating of sacrifices did not just eliminate all elements of idolatry. These same detailed laws prevented the restoration of idolatrous practices and traditions into the Torah's system of sacrifices. The Torah's concession to human nature in allowing sacrifices is a dangerous one. It allows an institution identi-

fied with idolatry to continue to exist. It responds to the danger that this institution might become corrupted and degenerate back into idolatry through careful regulation. The Torah deemed these regulations so important that it was unwilling to relegate them to the Oral Law. These regulations must be well known and their importance must be fully appreciated. This is accomplished by placing these laws in the Written Torah.

The same reasoning can be applied to explaining the Torah's treatment of the Mishcan. The Mishcan is a place designated for worship of Hashem. As a place of worship, it also is subject to idolatrous influences. The same human tendencies that could lead to the corruption of sacrifices and their degeneration back into a form of idolatry could find expression in the structure and form of the Mishcan. In order to prevent the infiltration of idolatrous attitudes into the design of the Mishcan, its design is meticulously described in the Written Law.

“And its innards and its legs he should wash in water. And the Kohen should burn the entirety on the altar. It is an Olah, a burnt offering, a sweet odor to Hashem.” (VaYikra 1:9)

Nachmanides raises a number of objections against Maimonides' position. Most of his criticisms center on a single issue. He argues that the Torah, in many ways, indicates that sacrifices are inherently valuable and a fitting form of service to Hashem. Based on these criticisms, Nachmanides rejects Maimonides' position.

Nachmanides cites a number of examples of the Torah's positive treatment of sacrifices. But, let us focus on one specific example.

Nachmanides points out that in a number of places, the Torah describes sacrifices in positive terms. One instance is in our pasuk. The Torah refers to the Olah sacrifice as a sweet odor to Hashem. Nachmanides argues that if Maimonides is correct, then the Torah should, at best, tolerate sacrifices. But, in our pasuk, the Torah is not neutral in its treatment of sacrifices. On the contrary, the Torah describes the Olah in a remarkably positive fashion.[3]

How might Maimonides explain our pasuk? In order to answer this question, an important distinction must be made. Although the Torah tells us the Avot and others offered sacrifices before the revelation of the Torah, in these instances the Torah does not generally describe these sacrifices in positive terms. The Torah's treatment of the sacrifices offered by the Avot is completely neutral in tone. Our pasuk marks a new treatment of sacrifices in which the Torah describes a sacrifice as a sweet odor to Hashem. Why does the Torah suddenly change its tone in our parasha?

The answer to this question is fundamental to our

attitude towards the Torah and halacha. Anyone who has seriously studied science is astounded by the eloquent laws that govern the natural universe. The wisdom and intelligence reflected in these laws is awe-inspiring. These laws are so wondrous because they are the creation of Hashem and reflect His wisdom. The system of halacha contained in the Torah is also the creation of Hashem. He authored the laws that govern natural phenomena and fashioned the Torah that is designed to guide human behavior. Therefore, halacha partakes of the same beauty and eloquence as the laws of nature. The wisdom and genius of halacha are also awe-inspiring.

Before the revelation of the Torah, there was no system of halacha to govern sacrificial service. Sacrifice became endowed with a system of halacha only when the Torah was given. It is halacha that converts the sacrifice into a sweet odor to Hashem. The Torah tells us that sacrifices were offered before the Torah was given. But, the Torah does not praise these sacrifices. They were not expressions of halacha. In our parasha, the Torah begins to reveal in detail the Torah's system of sacrifice – a system governed by the laws of the Torah. These sacrifices – those authorized and governed by halacha – can be referred to as a sweet odor to Hashem.

Let us now return to Maimonides' position. It is true that Maimonides maintains that the Torah includes a system of sacrifices in response to primitive practices rooted in ancient cultures. But, it is an error to assume that Maimonides maintains that the Torah's system of sacrifices is nothing more than a concession to primitivism. Maimonides recognizes that the wisdom embodied in the halacha governing sacrifices is just as ingenious as the halacha that guides other areas of endeavor. The halacha transforms the sacrifices from a primitive religious practice into a sophisticated and advanced form of worship. By virtue of this transformation, the sacrifices are referred to as a sweet odor to Hashem.[4] ■

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Moreh Nevuchim, volume 3, chapter 32.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Moreh Nevuchim, volume 3, chapter 32.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides) Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 1:9.

[4] See Rav Meir Simcha of Dvinsk, Meshech Chachmah on Sefer VaYikra, introduction.

The Soul

the
HEART
and
Soul
of the JEWISH PEOPLE



(continued from page 1)

of “family”. This is to create a bond of shared responsibility, not a feeling of superiority. There are areas in halakhah, such as Numbers 19:14, that are designed to inculcate within us the notion that a life of wisdom and morality, as modeled by the Torah, is the height of human achievement. This is to create a paradigmatic lesson for all humankind, not a feeling of superiority. We have been charged with the mission of teaching the world, through word and deed. The soul of the teacher is not inherently superior to that of the student. Their roles may be different; their souls are not.

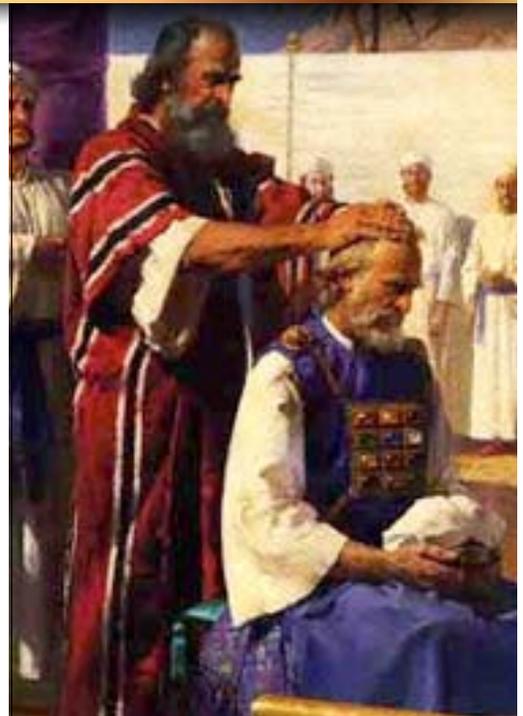
In this regard, it may be beneficial to study the introduction to the Sefer HaChinukh. The Sefer HaChinukh writes that the Jewish people were chosen from among the nations for the special responsibility of receiving the Torah. He further states that the tribe of Levi was likewise chosen from among the Jewish people to serve in the Temple and to teach. Now, I do not know of anyone who claims that the souls of the Leviim and Cohanim are inherently superior to those of the rest of the Jewish people. We must not mistake “chosen for a task” with “inherently superior soul”.

Along these lines, please permit me to address the letter quoted in last week’s issue from the Rabbi of a mainstream Orthodox website. He stated, “It is important to first quote Teshuvot Ba’alei HaTosefot Addenda 1:19, that converts

are Jewish souls that were placed in the embryos inside non-Jewish mothers. Rishonim such as the Ba’alei HaTosefot usually do not write metaphors...” It is so important to check the original sources. First, the editor of the addenda to the Teshuvot himself points out at the end of the teshuvah that the source for this teshuvah is not the collection of the Teshuvot Ba’alei HaTosefot. He writes the one word “matzati” after the teshuvah, signifying that this responsum was not found in the original collection; rather it was found quoted by someone, elsewhere.

Be that as it may, the teshuvah’s focus is an interpretation offered by Rav Yehudah HeChassid concerning the midrash that “mashiach will come only after the souls are depleted from the body”. However, when one checks the Sefer Chassidim (siman 500), indisputably written by Rav Yehudah HeChassid, one finds an interpretation of that very same midrash, which is completely different from that quoted in the teshuvah. In fact, the Sefer Chassidim there clearly teaches that all of mankind is descended from the same ancestor, and he implies that there is no inherent difference between the souls of Jews and those of non-Jews. Finally, the teshuvah cited by the website’s Rabbi speaks of a “room in heaven called Guf...” Clearly, this is a metaphor, as there are no physical “rooms in heaven”. If so, a strong case can certainly be made that the rest of the teshuvah is metaphorical as well.

I write all of this to present the sources, in the interest of understanding Chazal’s view of our



issue. (Again please note, as quoted in last week’s issue, that Chazal in Sanhedrin 59a state that a non-Jew who engages in Torah study related to the Noachide laws is akin to the High Priest). We must be concerned with truth, with our mission as teachers to the world (which, by the way, is contravened if the world believes that we hold ourselves to be inherently superior), and with our own middos. In this way, we can truly live the life chosen for us as the Am Segulah and the Or Goyim. ■

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TRUE FRIENDS RISK FRIENDSHIP

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



I can't help but feel sorry for the depth of some community members' despair and troubles, and how many others quietly suffer with no expectation of change, or happiness. Our ignorance of how many others we don't know about compounds this pain.

But the truth is that so many others, who suffer, can find relief. First, our simple expressed concern dissolves their sense of despair. Desperation is the conclusion one makes when no light is seen at the end of the tunnel. So with our expressed concern, we shine a light towards an opening.

Our assistance in alleviating their problems must come second. To this end, I decided to write to all of you, our readers, and ask that if you are not assisting someone at present, to look around this Shabbos. Look for someone who is missing from shul, or ask others if there is a community

member in any need whatsoever, regardless of age. An elderly person could use a little company walking home from shul. And a young child of divorce might yearn for a male or female role model. Aside from the Bikkur Cholim and Tomchei Shabbos, community members are in need of other help...love, friendship, company, finances, as well as other areas they lack. And this need not take much time on our part...but if it does, the reward is greater. Of course, a higher level surpasses acting from a 'reward' mentality: wishing the same good for others, and we wish for ourselves. Our sense of equality, and that God's will extends to all members of our community must be what we target with these actions.

We cannot live without health, finances, housing, clothing, and friendship. In truth, a sane individual will know when he or she is ill, and will address this. If finances are low, there are means available. And if they are not in your community, this should be the first matter we address publicly. The next, easiest matter to address is to help someone find work. Most people are healthy enough to work, and psychologically ready to address their needs, as human dignity desires. So we must make jobs available for others. We can accomplish this personally, or create some publicized database for all community members to contribute to, adding job openings they have heard about, or publicizing email lists and websites.

The more difficult area to address is one that we feel most hesitant to approach: rebuking others. And I don't mean in a harsh manner, but in a concerned way. We fear others - even close friends or relatives - will take offense at our rebuke. We may risk a relationship. But our concern must not be losing a friend, if in doing so, we can help them get back on track to a healthy lifestyle. We should risk forfeiting friendships, if we sense that a true chance exists that we can enlighten another person to a behavior or attitude that jails them from progress, and happiness.

Many emotions contribute to why people lose work, health, friends, or lose a spouse to divorce. And on the flip side of the coin, sometimes it is our own egocentricity that desires to rebuke another. This is why the verse states, "Do not hate your fellow Jew in your heart; certainly rebuke your fellow Jew, and do not carry upon this a sin". (Lev. 19:17) We are taught three ideas. First: we must not live with hatred. There is no basis for hatred, and worse, it is considered on par with idolatry. Why so severe? It is due to the common desire in both sins to alter reality to a subjective wish. In idolatry, we desire a change in our lives, and feel real change can occur by using

objects, which in truth, have no causal relationship to our desired outcome. Hatred is the expression of frustration and the wish for change of what is real right now. Thus, both hatred and idolatry are denials of reality. Hatred has no place in the life of one searching for, and living by truth. Therefore our verse teaches against hatred.

In connection with hatred, the verse continues with the second lesson, that we must "certainly" rebuke another. "Certainly" implies this is against our normal disposition...therefore it is stressed. We may see someone living improperly, so instead of hatred, we are to rebuke. But we are normally reluctant to create friction in a friendship. Thus, the Torah teaches we must "certainly" do it. But, as Rabbi Reuven Mann taught, the awareness to our own egocentricity demands we do so in a tender manner, and not out of arrogance, or insensitivity. This is the third lesson: do not sin in our rebuke. The sin being our arrogance or insensitivity.

However, there are times when sarcasm and other modes of calculated expression are effective, and should be used. King Solomon said to the procrastinator, "How long you lazy one, will you lie down? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber...a little folding of you hand to lie down?" (Proverbs 6:9,10) What is a procrastinator? Why does he procrastinate? The answer is, he is one who needs to tell others that he will do something...but "later". He needs to "tell others", as he is motivated by social approval, and telling them he will fulfill responsibility is a means of retaining approval. On the one hand, he is not interested for some reason in addressing his own needs. On the other, he desires friends. King Solomon's wisdom dictated that he removes his approval through sarcastic expression: "Sure you're going to do it: sleep a, little, slumber a little." In other words King Solomon said, "I don't believe you". The procrastinator's response is to insure he doesn't lose the approval of this friend doubting him. And since the need for approval is his strongest desire, King Solomon gambles that with his removal of his approval, the procrastinator will jump top action, for his own well-being. King Solomon did not care to lose a friendship by doubting another, if he saw an opportunity to help this person. A true friend will risk friendship.

The myriad of scenarios and problems others face is beyond description. When we seek to help others, advice from Torah scholars or psychologists is well advised, and by none other than Maimonides.

Look around this weekend...who can we help? How can we make another person's next Shabbos...Shalom? ■

the Weekly Parsha:
Vayikra
taken from
Windows to the Soul

RABBI DR. MICHAEL BERNSTEIN

The Second Pillar of Creation

Creation rests on a tripod. The entire world, according to our Sages (Avos 1:2), is supported by three pillars^{3/4}Torah, avodah and acts of kindness^{3/4}and should one of them be removed, the entire edifice would collapse. Avodah, the second pillar of creation, refers to the divine service performed by the Kohanim, the priestly caste, in the Mishkan and, afterwards, in the Temple; this is the overarching theme of the Book of Leviticus. Tragically, the divine service has been interrupted for some two thousand years, ever since the destruction of the Second Temple. In the absence of the second pillar, how is creation supported?

There is a substitute. The prophet declares (Hosea 14:3), "Uneshalmah farim sefeseinu. We will supply bullocks with our lips." In other words, prayer can take the place of the interrupted divine service. Moreover, the Talmud (Berachos 26b) correlates the three daily prayers to the three primary offerings of the Temple service.

How does prayer serve as a surrogate divine service? After all, prayer is essentially a personal act of reflection, introspection and self-criticism. It is the silent, inwardly directed "duty of the heart," whereas the divine service is an elaborate and demonstrative set of physical acts performed as homage to God. How do we bridge the chasm between prayer and divine service? Why is prayer, more than any other commandment, the surrogate for the divine service?

There is a duality in all the commandments. They are personal acts that draw us closer to God as individuals. They also serve collectively as an expression of the servitude of the Jewish nation to God. As expressed in the Torah, God's goal is to create a realm on Earth where His presence is manifest and thereby extend His divinely willed good to all mankind. This second sacred duty endows the performance or nonperformance of

every mitzvah with the potential of a sanctification or desecration of His Name.

Most of the mitzvos address the idea of personal perfection either indirectly or by addressing a specific character trait. For instance, a person who performs a mitzvah commemorating a certain important historical event is creating and solidifying a personal bond with God, which elevates and perfects him; it is the resulting relationship more than the act itself that elevates his existence. Two mitzvos, however, are pure acts of human perfection^{3/4}prayer and Torah study.

Of these two, prayer more directly addresses personal improvement through human emotion; it is the supreme deliberate attempt to bring the human personality ever closer to its perfect form. It follows that for the Jewish people collectively prayer is the most effective way to express our servitude and heighten the awareness of God's presence among men. In this sense, prayer takes the place of the divine service; we perfect ourselves as members of a nation whose collective duty is to reveal God's presence, and this endeavor to achieve self-perfection (shleimus) is in itself our service of God.

In this light, we gain new insight into the Shema. The Talmud states (Berachos 63b) that if a person deliberately neglects to say the obligatory Shema even once, it is as if he has never said it. Why so harsh a judgment?

The Shema is a declaration of faith and acceptance of the obligation to serve God (kabalas ohl malchus shamayim). It cumulatively transforms a person and brings him ever closer to God. Each day, as he draws closer, the possibility of a deliberate omission becomes ever more remote. Therefore, if a person deliberately neglects the Shema, it proves he has never really said it properly, that it was never more than lip service.

During the Amidah of the festivals, we say, "You

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chose us from among all the people, You loved us and favored us. You lifted us above all the polyglot nations and sanctified us with Your commandments. You drew us close, our King, to Your service, and proclaimed Your great and holy Name over us."

Only on the festivals do we speak about being "lifted above all the polyglot nations," making reference both in the Amidah and in the Kiddush to the superiority of Hebrew over the myriad languages of the world. There is no such mention in the Sabbath liturgy. What is the connection between the Hebrew language and the festivals?

Both the Sabbath and the festivals are sanctified, but they differ. The sanctity of the Sabbath is inherent, and it is our obligation to acknowledge it. We do not create its sanctity. We are, however, involved in creating the sanctity of the festivals. We do it indirectly by declaring the new months and establishing the calendar dates; we bless God "who sanctifies Israel and the times," which the Sages interpret as "who sanctifies Israel who in turn sanctify the times." We also do it directly by the special festival offerings in the Temple.

After the destruction of the Temple, we no longer have the ability to bring the festival offerings, but we do have a substitute. Through our prayers, it is considered as if we brought the appropriate sacrifices, and in this way, we continue to participate in the sanctification of the festivals. Therefore, the Hebrew language, perfectly constructed and nuanced for holiness, plays a major role in the festival observance and earns special mention in their liturgical prayers.

Symmetry and elegance pervade God's creation. We find one example of this harmony in the three pillars of the world. Nefesh Hachaim, among many works, identifies the lower three elements of the human soul as nefesh, ruach and neshamah. They correlate respectively with man's physical self and actions, his emotional states and his intellectual activity.

Man's task is to improve these aspects of the soul. Fittingly, the Torah obliges us to place tefillin on our arms, near our hearts and near our brains, the three parts of the body associated with the three levels of the soul.

As we consider the three pillars identified by our Sages, we may discern the quintessential ideals of these three levels-kindness, service and prayer, Torah study. As man struggles and prevails in these areas, he ennobles these aspects of his soul and thereby strengthens the pillars of creation. ■

Letters



Letters

from our

READERS



Jewish Anti-Semitism

Reader: B'SD -- Dear Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim, I feel specifically happy about your courage to knock down certain ideas vastly spread in Jewry nowadays, specially backed by many mainstream orthodox groups and their well-intentioned but not so well-prepared rabbis, mostly guided in chassidus (no meant offense, G-d forbid, pls!) but lacking similar knowledge of Judaism backed on tradition. A major issue has been left out of the debate, i.e., the consequences of this Jewish-soul idea in the attitude of many orthodox Jews and many regular Jews in general towards converts and gentiles.

I have myself converted some 14 years ago (orthodox conversion, of course) and brought my family (2 children then) together and then moved to a smaller town with only one orthodox shul of mainstream orthodox chassidic group.

Mine and my wife's conversions were done by a lovely Hungarian Rabbi that felt surprised that goyim could wish earnestly to become Jewish but was a mensch, believing enough to conclude it could cause such an impact to people from any culture.

On moving to this new town, I experienced for

years the horrible condition of being treated as a 2nd class Jew and hearing outrageous things such as, "a convert has to fulfill more than a natural Jew", "a Jew, no matter what he does, even the worst crime, still he has his Jewish soul and is essentially holy", "a gentile originates from the flawed part of Adam and is not nor will ever be in the same level of a natural Jew". "Gentiles exist to serve Jews". Thus, I, a convert, no matter how much kashrus I kept, how shomer chagim/Shabbat...I would be still and never "good enough"! Then, when I rebelled against this, my punishment was to be held as Jew only twice a year: Yom Kippur & Simchat Torah! No matter what I did, still not good enough due to my origins. How I dare...comparing a mere "spark" of a Jewish soul in a convert, to a whole part of a "natural Jew"?

It is a long story and I could fill pages with all that happened for the 12 years I stayed in this town. Jews prohibited employees to sell kosher meat to me, irrespective of the fact half of it had been donated by me... I even recall a man saying in our first meeting, "I do not like converts so much. I had too many problems with them in the past..." Heard them tell stories of apostate Jews whom funny enough bore the same Jewish name I had...

Some 2 years ago, I moved to another town and again the only orthodox shul was also of this same mainstream orthodox group. Nonetheless, this time, this man in spite of being young, heard me, treated me nicely and helped thru a, let us call it, "a clarification process". After all, in his own words, "a Jew is a Jew irrespective of his actions" -- after 11 years, I could not believe my years. That was so, because this older Rabbi had the guts to call this other Rabbi to prevent him about the "danger I represented". Nonetheless, this caused me more humiliations of being counted out for the minyan in my first Rosh Hashanah in the new town.

My papers were okay then and this new Rabbi welcomed me, holding as 100% Jew. Finally, after nearly 12 years with raising my kids as Jews (now I had a 3rd one -- a daughter), instilling in them fear of heaven - they would see me take planes to the main big Jewish community (Sao Paulo, Brasil) to bring kosher meat every 2 months plus prior Pesach, celebrate Shabbos every week, chagim, teaching them out of breaking Shabbos (none of his natural born Jewish friends did so), etc. I could go to any shul whenever I wanted and lay my prayers to the G-d of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov without fearing the terror of not being counted for a minyan.

For nearly 12 years, I was submitted to weekly, monthly, yearly humiliations (whenever the occasion) just because I was not good enough -- I saw my other Jewish friends eat pork on a fasting

day...and be given honor in the next Shabbos! As for me, no and never at all...never called to the Torah! I was not born from a Jewish womb and would be always a 2nd class Jew! Entitled to be myself and my kids and my wife mistreated, disdained, treated with little respect, as it pleased this Rabbi...just because HAKODOSH BARUCH HU had decided to grant to a select group of people such an alienable right that no matter how bad they might act, still they would be superior to any gentile or convert that had taken the hard decision to leave their past behind, abandon the faith of their ancestors to embrace the faith of Avraham Avinu and of the fortune of his offspring!

I had been nearly a Baptist Pastor and left it all for a difficult-to-describe sense of attraction to Judaism. Spent a lot of money to keep kashrus, convince my kids to eat kosher with no Rabbi's support but still...Poor guy, not a natural Jew! And my kids...they bore in them the same flaw...thus, deserving harsh words and public mistreatments...

Well, Baruch HASHEM that this rabbi did not succeed. My 2 older boys and girl study and Israel (orthodox school) and the 3rd one is 11 and near her bat-mitzvah and the rebbetzin's point is she does not have to go thru a course since she knows it all (more than natural born Jews, that is to say). She feels happy to study in a Jewish school where the kitchen is Kosher, etc.

Now, what does my entire story have to do with this Jewish-soul thing? Three things:

a) This first Rabbi's belief and resulting attitude caused me immense suffering, financial losses, etc., influencing others to behave likewise,

b) This new Rabbi, despite being very kind, here and then utters corrupted ideas, "we can do everything about a goy, even lashon harah -- I thought not to do it was a principle to follow. But then now I see it is recourse with limited application... My mother's parents and brothers are goyim. Am I expected to mistreat them likewise?"

c) This idea ultimately transforms HASHEM into a servant to Jews. No need for repentance nor of observance! No matter what: you are still a Jew and this is all that matters. I am not here contradicting the fact they are still Jews but rather that observance and repentance are necessary even they being Jews. As if they feel, G-d has to abide with His mistake and cannot complain! After all, He had no others to choose only the Jews.

Obviously, I am a lot more experienced and can handle these situations more easily now but your last weeks' issues gave me the courage to stand out to say this: Jews that believe this ignoble idea of Jewish-soul-superiority should bear in mind the ugly consequences this might bring about in all of us, and, to my point of view, are giving to those

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Letters

who hate the Jewish People a fantastic leverage.

Be well and strong and never dismay at proclaiming the Torah's teachings. ■

Avner, Brazil

Halachik Reality

Reader: I submit a Torah thought that I knew you would enjoy. In addition to your journal, I also read works of other individuals rather religiously. One of them is Rabbi Sacks' Covenant and Conversation. Here is an excerpt from last year's article on this past week's Parsha (<http://www.chief Rabbi.org/tt-index.html>)

"Consider the following ruling of the sages (see Gittin 45b; Mishneh Torah, Yesodei ha-Torah 6: 8; Tefillin 1: 13): A Torah scroll, or tefillin, or a mezuzah, written by a heretic, is to be burned. Normally, to destroy a document containing G-d's name is absolutely forbidden. However, in this case, as Maimonides explains: "Since the person who wrote it does not believe in the sanctity of the name of G-d, and therefore did not write it with the requisite intent but merely as any other [secular] text, the [document containing] G-d's name is not sanctified [and may be destroyed]. Indeed it is a mitzvah to burn it so as to leave no record of heretics and their works."

Imagine two Torah scrolls, one written with the requisite intention and sanctity, the other written by an atheist. Physically, they may be indistinguishable. One cannot imagine any scientific test that - by examining the scrolls themselves - would establish which was holy and which not. Yet one is to be held in the highest possible sanctity, and the other to be burned. Holiness is not a property of objects. It is a property of human acts and intentions.

It is this idea that lies behind the very precise formula we use when we recite a blessing over the performance of a command: "Blessed are You . . . who has sanctified us by His commandments, and has commanded us to . . ." It is the commandments that make us holy: nothing else. When G-d said to the Israelites, before the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, "You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19: 6), He meant that the Israelites would become holy through their performance of the commands he was about to reveal to them, not that there was anything intrinsically holy about them, prior to and independent of the commands. As Issi ben Judah said (Mekhilta, Massekhta de-Kaspa, 20): "When G-d enjoins a new mitzvah on Israel, He endows them with new holiness."

The great commentator and halakhist R. Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (1843-1926, often known by the name of one of his commentaries, Ohr Same-

akh) was tireless and forceful in stressing the point. Mount Sinai was - as the site of the greatest ever revelation of G-d - momentarily the holiest place on earth, yet as soon as the revelation was over, even animals were permitted to graze on it (Meshekh Chokhmah to Ex. 19: 13). The first tablets Moses brought down the mountain were supremely sacred. They had been hewn and written by G-d himself. Yet Moses broke them to show the Israelites that nothing is holy except in the context of fulfilling G-d's will (Meshekh Chokhmah to Ex. 32: 19). We endow objects and places with holiness, through our intentions, our words and our deeds. There is no such thing as ontological holiness, intrinsic sanctity." ■

Talking Rocks?

Question: Upon Jacob's flight from Esav who sought his death, he lodged that night. The verse says he took from the rocks of that place, implying a "few" rocks were taken to lie upon. Upon his rising the next morning, the Torah says it was "one" rock. What does Rashi mean that the "rocks quarreled with one another saying, 'on me the righteous [Jacob] should lay his head', and immediately God made them into one rock" (Gen. 28:11) Rocks cannot talk!

Mesora: This metaphor indicates that the tzaddik - more than anyone else - makes best use of the physical world...implied by the metaphor of brute creation (rocks) "fighting to be used" by Yaakov. The second part of this metaphor where "God makes them into one rock" indicates that God intervenes when natural law might not work out for the righteous person. King David also said this, "Many evils befall the righteous, but from all of them, God saves him." (Psalms 34:20) Why can't God simply halt the mishap from commencing? The answer is that God created both; nature and free will, for a reason. At times, free will of the sinner disturbed by the righteous person's life, or natural law, have the potential of harming the good individual. Additionally, even a wise, righteous person cannot forecast what can go bad...or when. In "all" these cases, King David teaches that God will save the righteous from literally every mishap. For a mishap cannot visit someone undeserving. God is totally righteous, and metes out exact justice. However, He will not alter natural law, which is His desire.

I also feel Yaakov - as opposed to others - experienced the phenomenon of the physical "seeking to support him", since at this precise juncture, he was in need of the material, having given all his possessions to Eliphaz. Jacob's request of food and clothing make it clear that this was Jacob's precise need. ■

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Prayer & Sacrifice

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Talmud Brachos 26b records a dispute between Rabbi Yossi son of Rabbi Chanina and Rabbi Joshua. Rabbi Yossi claimed that our prayers today (Shmoneh Essray) were established based on the prayers of our three forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Rabbi Joshua claims that prayer was established based on sacrifice. Each Rabbi explained his reasoning: Rabbi Yossi cited three verses:

“Abraham established morning prayers, as it says, ‘And Abraham arose in the morning to the place where he stood’, and ‘standing’ refers only to the act of prayer. Isaac established afternoon prayers as it says, ‘And Isaac went out to converse in the field, at evening’, and ‘speaking’ refers only to prayer. Jacob established evening prayer, as it says, ‘And he reached the place, and he slept there’, and ‘reaching’ only refers to prayer.

It was also taught in accordance with Rabbi Joshua; ‘for what reason is the Morning Prayer said only until midday? It is because the morning sacrifice was offered only until then. For what reason is the afternoon prayer said only until evening? It is because the afternoon sacrifice was brought only until the evening. Why does the

evening prayer have no limit? It is because the (sacrificial) limbs were brought throughout the entire night.”

We must understand what these two rabbis were disputing. On the surface, it appears obvious that we pray based on the identical activity performed by the forefathers. Is it not a stretch according to Rabbi Joshua, to suggest that one activity, prayer, is derived from a completely different activity, from sacrifice? Our forefathers offered sacrifice in addition to praying. Is Rabbi Joshua saying that our act of prayer today, is not a repetition of our forefather’s prayers? Is this truly what Rabbi Joshua holds, that were it not for sacrifice, we would not pray, as our forefathers?

There are a few other questions that occurred to me as I pondered this Talmudic section. I wish you to also have the opportunity to detect additional issues, so pause here. Think about the quotes above, or better yet, study this page in the Talmud itself. See what questions arise in your mind, and then continue. To advance in learning, simply reading what someone else writes eliminates your act of analysis, and removes another opportunity to train your mind.

I will now continue with my questions.

1) Why did Abraham not establish all three prayers? Why did he - apparently - pray just once each day, in the morning? And do we say that Jacob most certainly observed his father and grandfather, praying all three prayers...or, did Jacob pray only once, i.e., the nighttime prayer, which he instituted? In this case, why would he omit what his father and grandfather instituted?

2) What is significant about the fact that each of our forefathers established a new, succeeding prayer? May we derive anything from the opening words in our prayer, “God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob”?

3) How does Rabbi Joshua claim that prayer is modeled after sacrifice, when he knew Jewish history quite well, and he knew these verses quoted above teaching of the prayer of the patriarchs?

4) Furthermore, what may we derive from each of the verses above in connection with each patriarch’s blessing? Are three, distinct ideas in prayer being conveyed in each of these verses?

5) And why did the forefathers stop at three blessings a day? Why no more than three: simply because there were only three forefathers? That seems quite arbitrary.

6) Why did our forefathers both pray, and sacrifice? What does each not accomplish, in that the other is required as an additional and essential act of perfection?

Sacrifice Defined

To commence, we must first define our terms: sacrifice and prayer. We learn that the very first sacrifice was Adam’s, offered immediately upon his creation. Thereby Adam taught that our existence – Creation – demands recognition of the Creator. And this recognition is in terms of our “life”. Meaning, we recognize that our very lives are due to God. We therefore sacrifice “life”, so as to underline this sentiment. Such an act of kindness by God, to create us, demands not simply an intellectual acknowledgement, but real action. Activity is the barometer through which man’s convictions and perfection are measured. This is our nature, to act out what we are convinced of. And if one does not act, then he displays a lack of conviction in whatever the matter is which he refrains from performing. If Adam had not sacrificed, he would have displayed a disregard for his very life. If man does not recognize the good bestowed upon him by another, then he lacks a true recognition of that good, or, he has a severe character flaw where he does not show his thanks to that other person.

Prayer Defined

What is prayer? This is the act of praising God for His works, His kindness, His marvels and wisdom, and all the good we see emanating from His will. A major theme of this praise is that act of beseeching Him alone for our needs. For as we recognize and praise Him as the sole source of everything, it follows that it is to Him alone that we make requests, and before Whom we judge ourselves and arrive at what we need.

We may then state that sacrifice is offered to recognize that our very “existence” is due to God, whereas prayer addresses what comes subsequent to our existence, i.e., our “continued life”, as we approach God to praise Him, having acknowledged His magnificence. And we continue to reach out to Him for the assistance, which only He can provide. Sacrifice recognizes God’s creation of our very beings, and prayer is our initiation of a continued relationship subsequent to our creation.

According to Rabbi Yossi, we pray today as the forefathers had shown this act to be a perfection. Rabbi Joshua does not deny history. He too acknowledges the forefathers’ prayers. But he says our prayer today also borrows from sacrifice. In truth, there is no argument: Rabbi Joshua states that our “timeframe” for prayer is derived from sacrifices in the Temple. He does not suggest that prayer is originated in sacrifice. Prayer is taken from prayer, of the patriarchs. These two Rabbis

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Perfection

are addressing two separate points in prayer: Rabbi Yossi says prayer is “derived” from the prayer of the forefathers, while Rabbi Joshua only addresses prayer’s “timeframe” as restricted to the same parameters as were the Temple’s sacrifices.

Combining Sacrifice with Prayer

We must now ask why Rabbi Joshua felt sacrifice had to be incorporated into our performance of prayer. Why must our prayers embody the timeframe of Temple sacrifice, according to Rabbi Joshua? We are forced to say that prayer and sacrifice have a common quality. Otherwise, it makes no sense to mix two separate actions. This quality is man’s “approach to God.” In these two actions alone, man is either offering something “before God”, or man is “addressing God”. A dialogue of sorts exists also in sacrifice. Prayer is not the only action possessing a “verbal” character. My friend Rabbi Howard Burstein reminded me of the verse in Hosea (14:3), “...and we shall repay sacrifices [with] our lips.” This means that sacrifice is somewhat replaced by verbal prayers. There is a relationship. Perhaps the Men of the Great Assembly who made this institution desired that as Temple sacrifice was no longer, and since sacrifice is essential to man’s existence, that we should have some representation of sacrifice. Thus, the timeframe of the sacrifices now guides our prayers. This translates as prayer having sacrifice as its “guide”. Prayer is to be guided towards the objective of sacrifice: recognition of God as our Creator. While it is true that we have needs, and prayer addresses them, these needs serve a higher goal: to enable us the life where we may remove our attention from needs, and ponder God and His works. The greatest mitzvah – command – is Torah study. The greatest objective in our lives is to be involved in recognizing new truths. Thus, Rabbi Joshua wished that prayer be not bereft of this ultimate objective. Let us now return to our questions.

The Patriarchs

Why did Abraham not establish all three prayers? Perhaps Abraham’s perfection included his idea that prayer, as an institution, should form part of man’s day. This is achieved with a single, daily prayer. Abraham made prayer the first part of his day, the morning, as it states, “And Abraham arose in the morning to the place where he stood”. This verse teaches that prayer was on his mind as soon as he awoke. Perhaps, it even teaches that Abraham’s purpose in awaking was to come close to God, as is expressed with prayer.



Isaac and Jacob were also unique individuals in their own rights. They did not simply follow the God of Abraham because they were taught to do so, but because they both arrived that the truth of God’s existence and reign independent of Abraham. This is what the Rabbis mean with their formulation: “The God of Abraham, God of Isaac, and God of Jacob.” The Rabbis could have simply written in our opening prayer, “The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” But they did not, to display that God was the God of “each” of the patriarchs: each patriarch made God his God through their own efforts in their study of reality, and finally realized with their own minds that God is God. And as they came to this realization independently, each one used this independent thought to arrive at new truths. Thus, Isaac saw that afternoon time deserved a prayer, and Jacob saw something about nighttime, which too deserved prayer.

I would suggest that there are in fact only three parts of the day to which man relates: its beginning, its end, and the psychological phenomenon experienced as the day ebbs away into night. Abraham instituted the Morning Prayer, teaching that man’s first thoughts should be those about God. Jacob prayed at night, teaching that again, the last thing on our minds is God. Both Abraham and Jacob demonstrated the central focus God had in their lives, as the first and last things on our minds are representative of what matters to us most. Why did Isaac pray towards the evening? Perhaps this indicates another phenomena in our psyches. As we turn from our daily activities, we remove our thoughts from the day’s sufficient accomplishments. But when we remove our thoughts from one area, to where do we redirect them: to another involvement, or to God? Perhaps Isaac’s afternoon prayer teaches that whenever man removes his energies from an area, if he turns back to God, he is living properly. But if he turns from one involvement to another, this means God is not in the back of his mind throughout the day. For Isaac to have prayed in the afternoon, we learn that when he removed his energies from herding for example, his energies went right back to pondering God. There are, therefore, only three main prayers, as there are only three relationships to reality: when men reenters waking life in the morning, when he leaves it just prior to sleep, and when during waking life, man’s thoughts turn from one area to another. If man is cognizant of God in all three phases of the day, then man has achieved certain perfection.

I cannot answer why Abraham or any of the patriarchs did not pray at all three intervals. It may simply be that Abraham did not see the idea that Jacob saw, and therefore did not pray at evening. No one man sees all of God’s knowledge. However, as Rabbi Reuven Mann stated, we learn from Maimonides Laws of Kings 1:1, that each succeeding patriarch added to the previous one. Therefore, Isaac prayed twice, and Jacob did in fact pray three times.

We end up with a deep appreciation for the structure of the Talmud. Through patient and an unabashed analysis, we may be fortunate to uncover new ideas in Talmudic thought, Jewish law, Scripture, and Torah philosophy. It is not a study to be sped through with the goal of amassing facts, but of realizing new truths, however few they may be. As Rava said, “The reward [objective] of study is the concepts”. Rashi says on this, “One should weary, labor, think, and understand the reasons for a matter.” (Talmud Brachos 6b) ■

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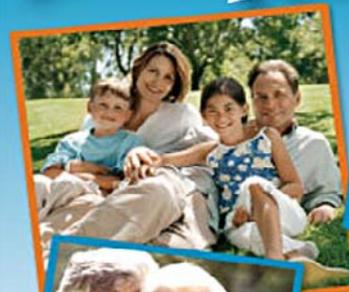
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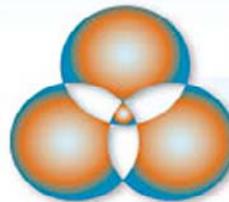
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