

Metaphor



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IN THIS ISSUE

PARSHA: VAYIKRA	I-3
PERFECTION: "NAASEH"	I,4,5
PARSHA: PILLARS OF CREATION	6
PARSHA: PRAYER & SACRIFICE	7,8

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Weekly Parsha

Vayikra

RABBI BERNIE FOX

"No meal offering that you sacrifice to the Lord shall be made [out of anything] leavened. For you shall not cause to [go up in] smoke any leavening or any

(continued on next page)

Perfection

*What?
You see a crown below?
Are you sure?
Why am I asking?*

Naaseh 'N Nishma

a "Crowning" Moment

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Prior to the Jews' receipt of the Torah and the Ten Commandments, Moses read the "Book of the Treaty" to the nation. (Exod. 24:7) Rashi (ibid) says this book refers to the Torah that transpired up to that point in history – namely, from Genesis through Parshas Yisro.

(continued on page 4)

(Vayikra cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

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Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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honey, [as] a fire offering to Hashem.” (VaYikra 2:11)

The Torah contains six-hundred thirteen commandments. All of the various laws and instructions contained in the Torah can be categorized within this system of six hundred thirteen commandments – Taryag mitzvot. However, although we know that all of the laws of the Torah can be divided into and among the Taryag mitzvot, the Torah does not contain an enumeration of the specific commandments.

Various authorities have developed lists of the Taryag mitzvot. Perhaps the most well known and most often quoted is the list developed by Maimonides. Maimonides wrote a work devoted to this issue – Sefer HaMitzvot. In this work, Maimonides presents his list of commandments with a brief description of each. In addition, the list is preceded by an exhaustive explanation of the means by which Maimonides came to his conclusions.

Although, Maimonides' list is the most well-known and often quoted, it is likely that of the works that discuss the Taryag mitzvot the one most read is Sefer HaChinuch. The authorship of the work is somewhat of a mystery. The author does not provide biographical information and the work contains few hints to the author's identity. The author only identifies himself as Aharon HaLeyve of Barcelona. It is generally assumed that he was a student of Nachmanides.

Despite this close association with Nachmanides, the author of Sefer HaChinuch closely follows Maimonides' position regarding the identity of the six-hundred thirteen commandments. In area in which his teacher disagrees with Maimonides, he will sometimes quote Nachmanides' dissent.

Sefer HaChinuch's discussion of each commandment consists of five components:

Definition of the commandment.

A brief discussion of some of the fundamental laws included in the commandment.

An explanation of the reason for the commandment.

A list of the general areas of discussion related to the commandment and the location of the Talmudic discussion of these areas.

A summary of to whom the commandment applies, when it applies, and the consequences for its violation.

The author's reasons for including most of these elements in his discussion of each commandment are self-evident. He is providing the reader with a brief, yet meaningful description of the commandment and citing the sources to be consulted for further study. However, the reason for one component is not clear. Why does the author include a reason, or rationale, for each commandment?

Furthermore, it is sometimes very difficult to determine the reason for a commandment. In some instances the reason is self-evident. We do not require the Torah to provide us with an



explanation for the commandment prohibiting murder. In some cases, the Torah provides an explanation for the commandment. The Torah tells us that we observe Shabbat in order to recall creation and our redemption from Egypt. However, in many instances, the rationale for the commandment is not self-evident and the Torah does not provide any hint to the reason for the commandment. In these instances, the author of Sefer HaChinuch relies upon sources in Talmud and midrash, and his own reasoning, to develop a plausible rationale for the commandment. But this raises a

question: Why suggest a rationale for each commandment if, in some cases, there is no clear rationale offered by the Torah?

The passage above provides an illustration of the dilemma that sometimes confronts Sefer HaChinuch. The passage prohibits us from offering leavened products or honey on the altar. Sefer HaChinuch – following the position of Maimonides – maintains that both of these prohibitions are included in a single commandment. He notes that Nachmanides disagrees and maintains that each substance – honey and leavened products – is the subject of its own commandment.

Sefer HaChinuch notes that there is not an obvious reason for these prohibitions. Furthermore, he notes that there is barely a hint or allusion to a reason in the traditional texts. He explains that he feels he must nonetheless offer a hypothesis. He then proceeds to

(continued on next page)

offer a number of plausible but unproven explanations.[1]

In this instance, Sefer HaChinuch raises the issue outlined above. If the Torah does not provide an explanation for the commandment, and there is no clear indication of its rationale in the traditional sources, then why speculate? Why not just allow the mystery of the commandment's reason to remain unsolved and recognize the limits of our knowledge?

In order to understand Sefer HaChinuch's answer we must be aware of the audience for whom the work is designed. In the introduction, the author of Sefer HaChinuch explains that one of his objectives in writing this work is to teach the youth. He hopes that young students will read the work and learn the mitzvot and the basic laws of each commandment.

Sefer HaChinuch explains that because the work is designed to serve the young student, it is important to provide a rationale for each commandment. The author explains that he wishes to strengthen a student's appreciation for the wisdom of the Torah and the benefits of the Torah life. In time, as his intellectual powers grow and mature, the student will come to appreciate the wisdom of the Torah expressed in the intricate system of halachah. The young student is not ready for this in-depth and often abstract analysis of halachah, but the young student can appreciate the wisdom expressed in the rationale for the commandment. Providing a rationale for each commandment provides the student with a tangible and accessible example of the Torah's wisdom and the benefits of the Torah life.

Furthermore, Sefer HaChinuch suggests that not providing a rationale for each commandment is potentially harmful. If the probing student is told that there is no reason for a commandment – or that the reason is not knowable – he may conclude that the Torah is not accessible. He will lose interest and will conclude that there is little reason to devote his time and energy to studying a subject that cannot be understood.[2] This may be an erroneous and childish conclusion, but children tend to be childish.

Many modern-day Torah educators would disagree with Sefer HaChinuch's analysis and conclusions. There are two common objections raised to Sefer HaChinuch's position. First, presenting reasons for commandments can be understood by the student to imply that our obligation to observe the commandment

is somehow linked to its "rationality". The student may conclude that we are required to keep the commandment because it is intellectually compelling and beneficial. This is a faulty conclusion. Furthermore, it can easily lead to the student's abandonment of observance. If the student begins to question the reasons for the commandments and rejects these explanations, then he has no reason to feel compelled to observe these meaningless directives.

Second, it is important that we impress upon our children the importance of obedience to the Torah. By providing a reason we compromise this lesson. Obedience means following instructions regardless of one's assessment of the personal benefit derived from compliance. When reasons are provided for commandments, observance becomes more an expression of self-interest and less an expression of steadfast commitment.

Obviously, Sefer HaChinuch rejects these considerations. It is important to understand his position. If we carefully consider Sefer HaChinuch's position, it is clear that the primary focus in teaching children is to recognize what will appeal to, or discourage, a child and to use this knowledge to assure that the learning experience is rich and exciting.

This focus is more evident when we compare his position to that of the more modern educators described above. These educators make two assumptions. First, they assume that the young student will not understand the distinction between appreciating the wisdom and benefit of a commandment and believing that this rationale is the reason for personal observance of the commandment. Children can grasp this concept. They can understand that we can appreciate the wisdom of the Torah through recognizing the rationale for commandments. They will not confuse this objective with the conclusion that the rationale for a commandment is the reason for its observance.

Second, these educators assume that from an early age, obedience to the Torah must supersede appreciation and love of the Torah. They sense that there is a potential contradiction between obedience and appreciation of the Torah. They assume that the child need not love the Torah or appreciate it in order to be obedient to its commandments.

Both of the assumptions suggest a perspective on the outlook and thinking of the young student. It is true that our obedience to the Torah should not be dependent upon our

assessment of personal gain through observance. However, this is a remarkably mature attitude that even most adults never achieve. To deprive our children of the opportunity to appreciate the beauty of Torah in order to attempt to instill in them the loftiest mode of observance is not in the best interest of the students. The student must be taught in a manner that is consistent with his developmental stage and intellectual maturity. He cannot be addressed and treated as a mature adult.

Second, it is true that some individuals who abandon Torah observance will rationalize their decision by criticizing the rational for various mitzvot. However, it is unlikely that these questions and criticisms are the source of their crisis of faith. Instead, these issues are elicited as a justification for their abandonment of the Torah. It is not reasonable to assume that the young student will experience a similar crisis simply because his teacher provided a rational for the mitzvot and explained their benefit.

In short, Sefer HaChinuch's message is that our approach to education must be age appropriate. Children are not adults. We must be careful to teach our children in a manner that is developmentally appropriate. ■

[1] Maimonides (Moreh Nevuchim 3,29 and 3,46) explains that it was the common practice among idolators to offer sacrifices of leaved bread or sweets. The Torah prohibits offering these substances in order to differentiate our offerings from those of the idolators. From Maimonides' perspective, there is no reason for the Torah to provide an explanation for this commandment. Those who received it were familiar with the pagan practices. To them, the rational and objective of the commandment would have been self-evident. This will also apply to other commandments designed to banish idolatry and pagan practices. We are not familiar with these practices. To us the commandments seem arbitrary and without clear purpose. However, to the generation to whom the Torah was given, the rational was clear.

[2] Rav Aharon HaLeyve, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 117.

Moses read this book to the Jews, apparently for good reason: the imminent acceptance of Torah must not be accepted blindly. Man is not expected to accept a Torah, without knowing its fundamentals. Man earns no merit through blind acceptance. This outlook is only sustained by false religions offering no reasoning. But God's Torah reflects the wisdom of the Creator, and God therefore gifted mankind with intelligence, essentially, to perceive the Torah's wisdom, guiding him intelligently in his religious life. Wisdom is to be applied in all areas, starting with religious life.

Subsequent to hearing this book read, the Jews unanimously said they would "perform and listen" to all contained. Their famous words "Naaseh v'Nishmah" are a testament to their great level. Based on what they had heard, they even accepted what they had not yet heard. In other words, they said "We will do what we have heard, and we will listen and perform all what we have not yet heard." Based on first fifth of the Torah they had heard, they were convinced that all else must be of the same perfected character...a lifestyle they had no doubt was to be cherished. On this verbal acceptance, Talmud Sabbath 88a records a metaphor:

R. Simai lectured: "At that time, when Israel preempted "We will do" to "and we will listen", there came six hundred thousand ministering angels to each and every Jew, binding two crowns: one corresponding to "we will do", and one corresponding to "and we will listen". Thereafter when Israel sinned [with the Golden Calf] twelve hundred thousand destroying angels descended and took them away; as it is written [Exodus, xxxiii. 6]: "The children of Israel then stripped themselves of their ornaments (they wore) from (the time they were at) Mount Horeb." R. Chama b. R. Chanina said: "At Sinai they received the crowns and at Sinai they lost them", as it is written "The children of Israel then stripped themselves...". Said R. Johanan: "All of them Moses merited and he took them, as immediately after the verse cited it is written, "And Moses took the tent and pitched it outside the camp of the Jews." Said Resh Lakish: "In the future God will eventually return them to us, as it is written [Isaiah, xxxv. 10]: "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with song, with everlasting joy upon their head." The expression everlasting means that it was already upon their heads at the time of reception of the Torah."

This Talmudic section refers to the verses below in Exodus 33:4-7 where after the sin of the Gold Calf, God instructed the Jews to "take down" their adornments:

"When the people heard this bad news they mourned and no man wore his ornaments [crowns]. God said to Moses, "Say to the B'nei Yisrael, 'You are a stiff-necked people. Were I to go up among you for one moment, I would destroy you. And now remove your ornaments and I know what to do with you'. The B'nei Yisrael took off their ornaments that they had [worn] at Mount Sinai. And Moses took the tent and set it up outside the camp, a distance from the camp, and he called it [the] Tent of Meeting. Everyone who sought God would go out to the Tent of Meeting that was outside the camp."

The Talmud refers to the adornments as crowns, while according to other Rabbis, there are quite disparate views held by each. One Rabbi says they were crowns, another says they were select garments worn at Sinai, still another (Unkelos) says they were military objects, one adding they were "gold" military objects (Yonasan ben Uzziel). On that mention, Yonasan ben Uzziel adds that when Moses removed the tent out of the camp, Moses placed in it those adornments. (Exod. 33:7) What does he mean? And Sfomo is most distinct in his view, saying the adornments were the Jews' "spiritual preparedness".

What caused such divergent opinions is that the term used in the actual verses is "edyo", which simply refers to the "affect" of being adorned, not a crown or an object per se. Since the Torah verse is not addressing what the adornment was, this leaves interpretation wide open.

Questions

What is significant about the Torah from Genesis through Yisro, that it became the "Book of the Treaty"?

How are the words "Naaseh v'Nishmah" so unique, that here alone the Jews merited "crowns"?

What exactly are these "crowns"?

Why does the Torah use an ambiguous term of edyo, in place of a clearly described "crown"?

How are we to understand these angels and the entire Talmudic metaphor?

How does the Gold Calf sin cause the crowns to be removed?

Finally, where do we start so as to find answers?!

Step One

The first place to seek clues always lies in the most unique aspects of a given account. Here

alone do the Jews received crowns, or adornments. And this is due to something they did. So we must uncover the greatness of their act. They said they would accept to perform what they heard, and also all that they had not yet heard. We can now define their greatness. First, they used their intellects to realize how great the Torah was. But they also accepted that whatever God will eventually command, they would do.

We may answer that human perfection is expressed in man's use of his intellect. He identifies human knowledge of what God is, and His commands, as correct and true. This was expressed when the Jews said "Naaseh", "we will do". They admitted what they heard was true. But when they said "Nishmah", "we will listen", they admitted to "human limitation". They accepted that their understanding couldn't be the litmus test for what man accepts. In other words, they said, "We have conviction in God's nature and His commands based on what we heard already, so all that He commands must be good and true. And even what man cannot comprehend, we will accept."

Here is the key:

It is insufficient if man follows only the Torah laws that please his mind. In such a case, he fails to confirm God as superior to himself. His view of God is compromised. Man must defer to God. If he doesn't his emotional component is corrupt. His ego has obscured his view of God.

Thus, when the Jews said both Naaseh v'Nishmah, mankind reached the optimum level, where man 1) followed reason, and 2) he accepted he could not know all. For if man feels he can know all, then in the areas that he is ignorant, he will force faulty conclusions, and eventually destroy himself.

Here, man actualized the purpose in creation of Earth. This was a unique event, and why only here "crowns" are received.

Angels

It was these two perfections that the Talmud hinted to with the first set of angels. The ministering angels truly refer to man's intellect, which earned him "crowns". "Crowns" simply mean merit...exactly as Sfomo stated. So valued before God is this state when man follows intelligence, that God equated this human perfection with "adornments". God intended to elevate an intangible state of perfection, with something real and priceless, so man reading the Torah could more easily relate. King Solomon also refers to man following a life of wisdom, as "head adornments and necklaces". (Proverbs 1:9) So the binding of these crowns by angels, simply means

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Perfection

that man's intellect (angels) earned him an elevated status (crowns).

The two crowns correspond to the two intellectual perfections: man's allegiance to wisdom, and his admission of human limitation.

The Gold Calf

The sin of Calf is precisely man's inability to accept human limitation. Those Jews caved in to their psychological need to relate tangibly to religious life. They – like Christianity's inventors – fabricated a leader based solely on their own physical and psychological terms, ignoring the truth, that human intelligence is limited, and cannot fathom a metaphysical God. The Jews said, "Moses, the 'man' ..." was no longer with them. They craved the tangible man of Moses, as Christians crave the tangible Jesus, and as Jews today immortalize their Rebbes, or project powers onto them. It is all one sin.

The Jews lost their "crowns" when caving in to their need for tangible leaders with which they could relate physically. This danger existed at Sinai, and this is why God commanded Moses to relate the prohibition of ascending the mountain, and to rope it off. The Jews would have ascended, since they sought some sensual connection with God. And when they miscounted Moses' day of decent, they quickly created a golden, physical replacement, since as they said, "Moses, the man who took us out of Egypt, we know not what has happened to him." They needed the "man" of Moses. So with their creation of the Gold Calf, they no longer accepted human limitation, previously accepted with their words "We will listen".

The Jews committed two sins: 1) they abandoned a life led solely by intellect, and catered to their psychological and emotional needs, and 2) they no longer accepted limitation of their intellects, assuming their fabricated god was correct. Thus, the Talmud says two angels of destruction removed their two crowns. This means that to earn the crowns, only one "ministering" angel was needed – ministering being a positive phenomenon, referring to the intellect's ministering to every Jew. (Each man has but one intellect, or one "ministering angel".) But to lose their merit of Naaseh v'Nishmah, two "destructive" angels, or two emotions, were responsible, as we stated above. There were two, distinct instinctual flaws.

R. Chanina said: "At Sinai they received the crowns and at Sinai they lost them."

Rabbi Chanina means that the very event of Revelation was a double-edged sword. God's revelation endangered the Jews into the heightened emotional and religious state, and this excitement arouses emotions; dangerous religious emotions.

Why the ambiguity?

God uses a term that could be understood as a literal crown. He does so in order to convey how real and prized is the state of man when he lives in line with reason. When man both 1) realizes the perfected wisdom in Torah, and 2) accepts limitation of his human knowledge, he exemplifies man's highest state...a state worthy of being "crowned". God alludes to the reality of this non-physical perfection, by equating it to a real physical and prized object: a crown.

Man is thereby taught that although intangible, human perfection is what God values most. So the "Torah speaks like human language", as the Rabbis said, "Dibra Torah kilashon bnei adam". Man views the physical as most real, so God equated what is truly most real – human perfection – with something physical. But God does not call that perfected state a literal crown, for that would be false, and misleading. Therefore, "adornment" is used, so as to confirm the positive nature of the subject at hand, while alluding to its intangible state. Indeed, a highly clever maneuver. Again, this state is the purpose of Earth's creation, and why here alone, mankind earns a crown. God's plan was achieved. It was truly a crowning moment...but a moment, and no longer.

To reiterate, mankind's perfection lies in his intellectual life. And when man expresses complete satisfaction with the Torah, he demonstrates this perfection. But this perfection of "We will do" must be accompanied by "We will listen". Meaning, man must simultaneously accept his intellectual limitations. Admitting what we know, and what we can't know, are equally important beliefs.

God's Response

Although God does not exist in physical space or in the Temple, God corrected man's flaw with the Holy of Holies – the central focus of Temple – where man must never enter. Thereby, God instituted the fundamental that man's knowledge is limited. Man cannot enter this room, as a demonstration that he cannot approach any understanding of God. Additionally, man must not make his obedience to God dependent on his knowledge. God created everything, and as the source of all, He alone determines what is true...what is real. For man to argue with God, man denies the absolute and exclusive authority God reserves as the only Creator.

Said R. Johanan: "All of them [the crowns] Moses merited and he took them, as immediately after the verse cited it is written, "And Moses took the tent and pitched it outside the camp of the Jews."

Yonasan ben Uzziel adds that when Moses removed the tent out of the camp, Moses placed in it

those removed adornments. This is our previous point...

The Tent of Meeting was where God communicated with Moses, seen by the descending cloud pillar miracle. Moses now intended to teach the Jews that only through searching out God and living intelligently, would they merit that perfection. That is what Yonasan ben Uzziel means by "Moses placing the crowns in the tent." Since we are subscribing to Sforno's interpretation of "edyo", there were no literal crowns. They represented the Jews' perfection. Thus, to repossess that perfection (crown) the Jews had to seek out God at His Tent of Meeting. Therefore, saying that "Moses placed the crowns there" means Moses directed the Jews' perfection to that tent, or rather, to the act of seeking out God.

Said Resh Lakish: "In the future God will eventually return them to us"

This refers to the future when God will teach the whole world His undeniable truth. At that time, we will once again enjoy those "crowns", or rather, a state of perfection. May it come soon!

As a final note, my friend Lewis added that the reason the Jews accepted the entire Torah based only on what they heard read from Genesis through Yisro, is for good cause.

That first fifth of the Torah describes the perfections of Adam, Noah, and Abraham, the patriarchs and matriarchs, and the tribes. As well, it includes God's providence of those perfected people. This portion includes accounts of people who possessed the perfections of the Torah, but without having the Torah. These accounts depict man at his finest, where without Torah direction; man's mind alone directed him and her to the service of God, which really is the service of the self, as a wise Rabbi once stated. When the Jews heard Moses read these accounts, they were filled with a deep contentment with the lives of the righteous, with God's fulfillment of His promises to them, and His providence. They understood the fundamentals of rejecting false gods and idolatry, of being honest, of not chasing wealth, of observing modesty, and of upholding defending morality. They valued these at the cost of life itself. Grasping and agreeing with these fundamentals, the Jews unanimously accepted all which God said, and all He will ever say. In other words, the Jews recognized the great gift God gave man of being able to recognize and live by truth, without any external direction, using intellect alone. They deserved the two crowns of subscribing to intelligence, and accepting the limit of that intelligence. This is Naaseh v'Nishmah.

I thank my dear friends Lewis, Howard and Yehoshua for working through this area with me. ■

Weekly Parsha

Star-forming towers found in the Eagle Nebula by the Hubble Telescope. Each pillar is over a hundred light years high.

Creation

THE SECOND PILLAR OF

RABBI DR. MICHAEL BERNSTEIN

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 sefaseinu. 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 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. ■

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

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good, or, he has a sever 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 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) ■