



THE PASCHAL LAMB WAS OFFERED TO REPUDIATE EGYPT'S ANIMAL GOD. WHY WERE WE COMMANDED TO AGAIN BRING A CALF DURING THE INAUGURATION?

Discussed in this week's article: "Parashas Shemini"

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**Learning
from other
Religions?**

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: My question basically is as follows: While I accept your assertion that falsehoods dominate the non-Jewish religions and philosophies of the world, would you not admit that if some truth is contained in those religions or philosophies - heretofore not explicitly propounded by Jewish

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Parashas Shemini

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"Speak to Bnai Yisrael and tell them to take unblemished animals: a goat for a sin offering, a yearling calf and a lamb for a burnt offering, and a bull and a ram for a peace offering." (VaYikra 9:3)

Our parasha describes the sacrifices offered on the eighth day of the inauguration of the Mishcan. Our pasuk indicates that Bnai Yisrael offered a sin offering and two Olah sacrifices. Why were these specific sacrifices required? Gershonides observes that these sacrifices are similar to those required to atone for idol worship. If the nation unintentionally engages in idolatry, it must atone through sacrifices. The required sacrifices are a goat as a sin offering and a bull as an Olah sacrifice. In our case, a goat was brought as a sin offering. However, two Olah sacrifices were required. One was a calf and the other was a lamb. Gershonides asks the obvious question. Why did the Olah offerings differ from those typically brought to atone for idolatry?

Of course, there is a more basic question. If these sacrifices were intended to resemble the atonement for idolatry, the nation must have been guilty of that sin. What act of idolatry had the nation performed? Gershonides suggests that the calf was intended to atone for the Egel



HaZahav – the Golden Calf. The lamb was offered because the Egyptians had worshipped this animal. This explains the significance of these two offerings. Nonetheless, we are still left with a question. We can understand that the need to atone for the Egel. However, why was the nation required to offer a lamb representing the deity of the Egyptian? Initiation of the Mishcan required an absolute repudiation of the idolatry. Bnai Yisrael had been influenced by the idolatry of the Egyptians. The nation was now required to again reject these practices. The Egyptians worshipped the lamb. Through the Olah offering, Bnai Yisrael rejected the Egyptian deity. This does not completely resolve the issue.

The nation had already performed the service of the Pascal lamb before leaving Egypt. This service certainly demonstrated the nation's

rejection of Egyptian practices. Why was this further demonstration needed? The answer lies in the second Olah offering. This Olah was a calf. It represented atonement for the Golden Calf – the Egel HaZahav. Through constructing the Egel, the nation returned to idolatrous practices learned in Egypt. Therefore, Bnai Yisrael was required to again repudiate these attitudes.

The Midrash Torat Kohanim offers a different reason for offering a goat as a sin offering. This sacrifice atoned for the goat slaughtered by Yosef's brothers. The brothers killed a goat and dipped Yosef's cloak into the blood. They sent the garment to Yaakov and suggested that Yosef had been killed by a wild animal. With this deception, the brothers attempted to conceal their own treatment of Yosef. Why was it necessary at this point to atone for this sin? What is

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Parashas Shemini

RABBI BERNARD FOX

the relationship between the inauguration of the Mishcan and the brother's plot against Yosef?

We must consider the brothers motivation for wishing to destroy Yosef? One factor was Yosef's claim that he would assume a position of authority over the brothers. Yosef told the brothers that they would not all be equals. He would be a leader over the others. The brothers rejected this vision. They were unwilling to accept the arrangement Yosef described. Bnai Yisrael was now faced with a similar situation. The service in the Mishcan would be performed by a single tribe – Shevet Leyve. The other tribes would not participate in this service. The nation was required to demonstrate acceptance of this arrangement. The goat offering provided this demonstration. Through offering this sacrifice, the nation rejected the view of Yosef's brothers. The nation acknowledged the right of Shevet Leyve to assume a leadership role. The people confirmed that the tribes would not be entirely equal.

"And a fire went forth from before Hashem. And it consumed the Olah sacrifice and the fats from upon the altar. And the nation saw. And they sang out and fell upon their faces". (VaYikra 9:24)

The Mishcan was completed and inaugurated. Ahron, the Kohen Gadol offered his first sacrifices. A flame came forth, directed by the Almighty, and consumed the sacrifices from upon the altar. The nation of Israel responded in song. Targum Unkelos explains that the song of the people was not a mere expression of joy. The song was composed of praise of the Almighty. Why did Bnai Yisrael feel compelled to praise Hashem at this moment? The Almighty is the Creator of the Universe. He is exalted above all of His creations.

Yet, He relates to and cares for humanity.

It is easy for us to misinterpret this relationship. We can become egotistical about this special attention. There is an even greater danger. Chovot HaLevavot explains that we can begin to take G-d's kindness for granted. We may even begin to believe that we deserve this attention from the Creator and He owes us this special treatment. The Torah requires that we never forget the greatness of Hashem. He does not act with grace towards humanity to satisfy His needs. He has no needs or wants. We must realize that the Almighty's love for us is an expression of His unfathomable kindness. We cannot explain His benevolence. We can only conclude that it emanates from His incomprehensible essence.

The flame descended and consumed the sacrifices upon the altar. Praise was essential at this moment. Bnai Yisrael must be reminded of Hashem's greatness. The people could not allow the Almighty's attention to lead to a diminution of His greatness. This praise helped assure that the people remained focused upon the infinite greatness of Hashem.

"Moshe said to Ahron, "This is exactly what Hashem meant when He said, 'I will be sanctified among those close to Me, and I will be glorified'". And Ahron was silent." (VaYikra 10:3)

Ahron's sons Nadav and Avihu offer a sacrifice that is not authorized. They are killed by the Almighty. Moshe consoles Ahron. He tells Ahron that he had realized that the sanctity of the Mishcan would be demonstrated through the death of a righteous individual. Nadav and Avihu have provided this demonstration. Ahron accepts this consolation. Moshe communicates a second message to Ahron in his consolation. Ahron is required to offer the sacrifices on this eighth day of the inauguration. This will prevent Ahron from mourning his sons. Ahron accepts Moshe's direction. He does not forsake his responsibilities as Kohen Gadol. Instead, he continues to serve in the Mishcan. Rashi

explains that Ahron was rewarded for his silence and his acceptance of Moshe's direction. As a result of his response, Ahron received a commandment directly from the Almighty.

Hashem rewards us in a manner that corresponds with our merits. How did this reward correspond with Ahron's behavior?

Maimonides explains that a person cannot receive prophecy when sad or mourning. This is the reason Yaakov did not receive prophecy during the period he mourned for Yosef. Yet, Ahron experienced prophecy almost immediately after the death of his sons! How is this possible? Moshe's condolences were not merely aimed at comforting Ahron. Moshe did not want Ahron to allow his personal tragedy to interfere with the inauguration of the Mishcan. According to Rashbam this was the essence of Moshe's message to Ahron. Through continuing to serve in the Mishcan, Ahron would demonstrate that this service was more important than mourning his sons. Ahron's silence indicated that he had accepted Moshe's counsel. We can now understand the relationship between Ahron's silence and the prophecy he received. This prophecy was a direct result of Ahron's response to Moshe's words. Ahron realized that it was not appropriate to mourn. He continued to serve the Almighty in happiness. As a result, he was fit to receive prophecy. Hashem rewarded Ahron in a manner that demonstrated Ahron's remarkable character.

"To distinguish between the unclean and the clean and between the animals that may be eaten and the animals you may not eat." (VaYikra 11:47)

The Torah discusses the species that are prohibited and those that we may consume. This discussion ends with the above pasuk. On a superficial level the pasuk is explaining the reason for the preceding discussion. The Torah requires that we distinguish between the clean and unclean animals. We must know which species are permitted and which are

prohibited. In order to fulfill this obligation, a body of law is required. The lengthy discussion provides the legal basis to perform our obligation.

Sforno offers an alternative explanation of our pasuk. He explains that the Torah is revealing the reason for the prohibitions. Certain species are permitted and others are prohibited. The reason for these laws is to teach us to distinguish between the prohibited and the permitted. This explanation is difficult to understand. In short, Sforno is saying that the Torah requires that we distinguish between various species so that we learn to distinguish. This seems circular!

Sforno is teaching us an important lesson. To understand his message we must remember that the human being is composed of a material element combined with a spiritual component. The mission of the human being is to exert the power of the spiritual over the material. How is this accomplished? We cannot ignore our material element. We must eat and respond to other material needs! How do we prevent ourselves from becoming excessively involved with our material element? The Torah responds to this dilemma. It provides a means by which the material function of eating can be converted to a spiritual expression. Through following the laws of the Torah we learn to guide our desires by a system of law. Eating becomes an expression of halacha rather than a purely instinctual function. This is Sforno's message. The laws teach us to distinguish. This process of discerning the permitted and the prohibited transforms the act of eating into a spiritual activity. □

Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Shegagot 12:1. Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer VaYikra, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1997), pp. 119. Rabbaynu Bachya ibn Paquda, Chovot HaLevavot, Part 3, Chapter 2. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Moreh Nevuchim, volume 2, chapter 36. Rabbaynu Shemuel ben Meir (Rashbam) Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 10:3. Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer VaYikra, 11:46.

Learning from other Religions?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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teachers - that they should be accepted? Rambam admits in his introduction to *Shemonah Perakim* that many concepts contained in that treatise can be attributed to the non-Jewish philosophers, and encourages, "Hear the truth from whoever says it." As you are also aware, Rambam calls Aristotle "the greatest of all philosophers" in *Moreh Nevuchim*; shouldn't we similarly be able to objectively glean aspects of the truth from non-Jewish systems?

Mesora: Other religions may have specific ideas which seem to fully comply with reality. But there is one major problem; they do not teach their ideas outside the context of their religious beliefs. For example: If Christianity supports death for blasphemers, on the surface this seems proper. But if we look at the larger picture, and grasp that their idea of God is physical, this estranges their law regarding the blasphemer from Judaism's law. Since God is in no way physical, a Christian who rebels and blasphemes his "idea of God", is in fact, not a true blasphemer according to Torah, and is not deserving of death. He is cursing his subjective, false notion of God, and not the true God. He did not blaspheme. Punishment in such a case would be evil - against Christianity's opinion.

Another example would be a comparison of Judaism's and Christianity's views of "abstinence." Christianity views sexual abstinence as a good, so does Judaism. But it is not that simple. Christianity praises nuns and priests, as they abstain their entire lives. This is a denial of God's wish for mankind to procreate. Christianity, in its attempt to reach "saintly" levels,

created man made goals that are impossible to reach, and are wrongful to value. Denial of human feelings and functions, and psychological needs, is against God's true plan that man have these organs, desires and feelings. Additionally, such abstinence is an inherent contradiction. On the one hand, Christianity feels nuns and priests are a good. On the other hand, their abstinence prevents the creation of new nuns and priests, as they cut off births of those who could fill these roles. Judaism does value a limit on the physical. But it is for an entirely different reason.

Judaism desires that man reach his most happy and perfected state. This is when man is pursuing life with his essence, his elemental distinction - his intelligence. To live in accord with God's perfectly designed world which functions according to reason and precise laws, man achieves his greatest happiness when he follows the rules of the world. If he complies with how the world works, he will reap its bounty. If he fights reality, he will be doomed. Imagine someone who uses oil - instead of water - to irrigate his crops. Since he violates the rules of plant life, he will waste his energies and produce nothing, and even create more work for himself to reach the point where he was at prior to his error. Similarly, if one attempts to achieve happiness but does not satisfy his nature as a being possessing a mind, he will experience dissatisfaction his entire life. His essential component is not being addressed or satisfied. To help man direct himself towards a life where he pursues knowledge and intelligence, he must diminish his

striving for physical luxuries and emotional satisfactions. Yes, desires have their time and place. And our point is precisely that. According to Judaism, abstinence is not for itself, to foolishly make one "holy" as suggested by Christianity. Abstinence targets a true goal; setting the stage where man is in control of his desires, satisfying them under the guidance of Torah law, but always realizing his true aim - the pursuit of God's wisdom. Only here will man find true happiness. Only in discovering new marvels does man realize his goal of God creating him as an intelligent being.

So we see that we cannot simply suggest to learn from other religions, even if they value the same things - "by name" - that Judaism values. In truth, the name alone is all that is similar.

When Maimonides praised Aristotle's ideas, he was not agreeing with Aristotle's "religion". This was not the topic of Maimonides' praise. Maimonides agreed with Aristotle's scientific and philosophical accuracies - not religious beliefs. Science explains God's physical creation. Philosophy deals with man vs man, and man vs God. Both science and philosophy - as thought by Aristotle - were divorced from religion. Maimonides viewed Aristotle as a seeker of the same system of truth that Maimonides sought. There was no conflicting system. These independent ideas of Aristotle do not form a part of a false religion, and therefore they were correct as ends in themselves. Here is the point of divergence from what we discussed earlier. Earlier, via our example of blasphemy, we

showed how a seemingly innocuous and a apparently correct idea, when forming part of a false religion, is in fact corrupt. But in science and philosophy, Aristotle's statements were divorced from any extraneous goal such as anthropomorphizing God.

But as for religion, should we look to other religions? The answer is a clear no. Although Rashi says in Deuteronomy 18:9 that one may study the false practices of other nations to see how damaging they are, and to instruct his son on the right path, we must be convinced of God's divinely designed Torah system which needs no amendments from man made, flawed religions. God's system of Torah is complete and based on God's ultimate knowledge. God has gone so far to command us not to add or subtract to the Torah.

God's Torah system is complete. A false, man made religion cannot add to a complete system designed by God. It is the height of arrogance for man to have created new religions, after God has informed mankind of the only religion for all men. "...for what is man that he comes after the King, that all is already completed?" (Ecclesiastes, 2:12) "Do not be excited on your mouth, and (on) your heart do not hurry to bring forth a matter before the God, because God is in heaven, and you are on Earth, therefore let your words be few." (Ecclesiastes, 5:1) King Solomon puts man in his place with these two statements.

There can be only one "best" lifestyle, and only God knows how to design it. He did so, and called it Torah. Fortunate is man that God gave us direction in the form of Torah. Foolish is the man who thinks otherwise. ■

Ibn Ezra II: Using our Minds to Determine "Mitzvah"

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The Ibn Ezra (Exod. 20.1)

"...The second category (of commandments) are commands which are hidden, and there is not explained why they were commanded. And God forbid, God forbid that there should be any one of these commands which goes against human intelligence. Rather, we are obligated to perform all that God commands, be it revealed to us the underlying "Sode" (principle), be it hidden from us. And if we find any of them which contradict human intelligence, it isn't proper that we should understand it as implied. But we should consult the books of the wise men of blessed memory, to determine if such a command is a metaphor. And if we find nothing written (by them) we (must) search out and seek with all our ability, perhaps we can fix it (determine the command). If we can't, then we abandon that mitzvah as it is, and admit we are ignorant of it".

In a previous article on the above commentary, "Ibn Ezra - Honest Inquiry", I quoted a Rabbi who explained this statement to mean that if we locate a command in our Torah which is incomprehensible, we cannot perform it. The following is a conversation which followed the posting of that article:

Reader: If we can't, then we abandon that mitzvah as it is, and admit we are ignorant of it". The Hebrew is "Nanichena kaasher hi, v'nodeh shelo yadanu ma haya..." I think a better translation would be "We leave that [mitzva] as it is, and admit..." "Abandon" leaves the impression that one would not have to perform or obey that mitzva which challenges our reason. We still have to obey it (cf. Shaul and Amalek). Of course, the example he uses is not a mitzva per se (U'maltem es orlas levachem), but a metaphor - which is clearly his understanding. Otherwise, an opening is left for some to argue that any mitzva which does not accord with our reason can be abandoned.

Mesora: That is precisely what the Ibn Ezra means by his example of "U'maltem es orlas l'vavchem." That were it not for the understanding that it means to perfect the heart - not cut it out -

we would in fact abandon such a vicious act as cutting out someone's heart, and not comply with even a Torah command, were it completely in coherent.

Reader: I would suggest that "leaving it (a command) as it is" does provide a new insight, to wit: We are obligated to fully explicate every mitzva - its particulars, structure and philosophical underpinnings. If we have exhausted our understanding of a mitzva and can no longer explain it rationally, then we revert to our position as avdei Hashem, humbly admit that our inferior intellects cannot fully understand this mitzva, and perform it - as servants - as our Creator intended.

"Nanichena kaasher hi" means we abandon (at least temporarily) further exploration of this mitzva, and perform it as is. (Perhaps years later another area of Torah will shed light on it, or perhaps a new idea will occur.)

On one level, this was Shaul's sin - some of the particulars of the mitzva of destroying Amalek challenged his reason, so he did not do it (to his detriment). The navi's expectation was that he obey the command (by the way, the Torah says nothing about destroying the cattle of Amalek), and continue to probe the area if he did not understand. But his Kabbalas HaMitzva cannot be dependent on his understanding, otherwise Shmiras HaMitzvos becomes very subjective. I.e., people's intellectual capabilities differ and even the wisdom of their Rebbeim is not uniform. If the system allowed one to opt out when his reason dissented from a particular mitzva, then it is no longer binding. (Cf. Shlomo's sin, Sanhedrin 21b).

Thus, I would translate Ibn Ezra as saying: "We leave the mitzva in its current state [of incomplete understanding] and admit... Descriptively - perhaps there is a p'tur of talmud Torah on this area - go study another area of Torah - until he can re-visit it. On the premise we agree - the Torah and mitzvos must be reasonable; the only issue is our understanding of the Ibn Ezra on the response of the person to an area of Torah which, presently, is beyond his ken. I would say: Do the mitzva, move on to study another area, and keep plugging away at this one. That is Kabbalas Ol Malchus Shamayim. (Otherwise, there is no Kabbalas Ol -

it is natural and proper for man to follow his reason.)

Mesora: Based on Ibn Ezra's words I cannot agree with your interpretation. He first writes, "And if we are not able, we leave it as it is," but he then continues, "and admit that we do not know what it was."

Regarding any of God's commands, if one does not know what action is required of us, it is impossible to perform - compliance with the unknown is impossible. This of course is so basic. But I believe Ibn Ezra's point goes one step further; obligation of the commands are based on some minimal level of comprehension. Torah is not a system of empty actions. Mitzvah - by definition - means that man acts with his body in accordance with ideas that appeal to his mind. He is not just a theoretician, but a philosopher and an activist. Following through in his daily activities is the only true barometer that displays man's full agreement with God's ideals. But in a case where man cannot grasp what is asked of him, even by God, man is bereft of any method to observe such a command. The very performance is unknown, and impossible.

Your example of Saul and Agag is not an argument in my mind. Despite any emotional reluctance on Saul's part, it is clear what was meant by the command of "killing Agag". Saul did not say to Samuel, "I know not what the command meant." Conversely, Ibn Ezra's example is the Mosaic statement of "cutting one's heart", obligatory not on only a wicked Agag, but on the entire Jewish nation simply requiring rebuke. Taken literally, genocide is incomprehensible, certainly when the verse quoted ends with, "and your necks shall no longer be stiff." (Deut. 10:16) If one were to take the first part of the verse literally, to actually cut out everyone's heart, how can they be more submissive when dead? The latter part of the verse clarifies the former.

Moses, a just and fair leader sanctioned by God's inclusion of Moses words in the Torah, would never ask those not worthy of death to have their hearts mutilated. Ibn Ezra rightfully says in such a case where we cannot fathom the

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Ibn Ezra II

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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command's meaning, "we know not what the command is." This being the case, there cannot be performance, as you suggest.

I would agree that when we know an action required by Torah law, but we are ignorant of its reason, as was the case with Saul and Agag, we must nonetheless adhere to God's commands. This is only possible when we know the action required by the Torah. But when we are ignorant of even the very action asked of us, if we cannot even grasp the commands' structure, then there is no way we can perform it. This I believe to be Ibn Ezra's teaching.

Reader: Your point answers the question - The Ibn Ezra's examples are not mitzvos; they are comments in the Torah that, literally, do not make sense, and therefore require accessing our reason to understand and apply. They are not part of Taryag.

My only concern is that the impression not be left that Ibn Ezra was referring to some statement, concept, or entity which IS part of Taryag (the 613 commands). I would posit that there can be no part of Taryag that is beyond our comprehension, because, as you correctly state, if we don't know what to do, what kind of mitzva is it? It would not be commanding anything.

And you duly note that his examples are not mitzvos - as opposed to Shaul, who received an explicit command. (Not to belabor the point [Pesach is coming] - but Shaul argued that he intended to kill Agag in front of the whole nation, and that is why he brought him back to Gilgal - whereas the command was to eliminate Amalek entirely at once. He failed, and enabled Agag to procreate another child. He thought it would be a greater Kiddush Hashem to kill him publicly.

Response: "Al tehi tzadik harbeh", "do not be overly righteous". ▣

Accountability & Avoiding Reality

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

There is an interesting Rashi on Deuteronomy 32:6, commenting on Moses' rebuke of the Jews. Moses says the Jews are "despicable and not wise". On the words "not wise" Rashi says, "You were not wise to understand the outcome (of your actions) that you have the ability to make things good or bad for yourselves." Sforno also comments similarly.

What is Rashi's point? According to Rashi, Moses clearly teaches accountability for one's actions. He states that the Jews can create their own future. One where they experience either success or failure. Nothing is preordained. Each person has the ability to create his life's path. This is God's design, and supported by God's gift to man of free will. This is of course a problem for the proponents of reincarnation. They suggest no accountability for one's actions, as they believe you can return after death to "try again." Moses doesn't teach this view, and Saadia Gaon too opposes reincarnation - or transmigration. But Saadia Gaon doesn't simply hold an opinion with no reasoning. He elaborates at length, discussing the absurdities of reincarnation, and basing his position on many rational arguments. Many Jews believe in reincarnation, but not one has ever offered a rational support for this view. This is the first sign of a flawed philosophy - I refer to blind faith.

Both Moses and Saadia Gaon offer rationally pleasing explanations for their views. And this must be. God designed all which exists and that is truly real. All God's creations follow precise designs and formulations. They are pleasing to our minds' operating system of rationale. If an imagined phenomenon does not comply with reason, we dismiss it, as it could not possibly be the true work of our wise God.

Additionally, Moses teaches something even more important; that one should not run to people to make their lives better, as is seen by those seeking brachos. Moses did not tell the people, "come to me so I will change your fate". He said "you must change your own fate." Moses also said, "choose life". (Deut. 30:19) This is God's design for our lives. We are to use our minds to understand the world, and live a life perfectly in line with our design as humans. This is the Torah lifestyle. We must be careful to select Moses' words over our peers' or leaders' words when they are in conflict. But we do so because we admit to Moses superior knowledge. God selected Moses' words to be incorporated into the Torah. His words must be of great truth if God chose to write Moses' words side by side to His own words.

This makes sense, as this is how the world operates. All laws, such as cause and effect, are inescapable truths. If you do "X", "Y" will happen. Seeking blessings(1) from humans displays the false impression that human words can change how God's natural laws operate. If one is foolish in business, he will fail, and no one's words can magically change that reality if he continues in his folly. If one eats poison, a rebbe's words cannot change the effects that poison have on one's body. God designed laws of how poisons and foolish business practices will definitely hurt man, and man cannot overthrow God's laws. Yes, one may pray to God. But counting on miracles is not the Torah way, "ayn somchin al hanase", "don't rely on a miracle." One seeking blessings will lead to very rude awakenings.

God created a world that functions by reason. Moses, the greatest man ever to live, taught us to use reason and follow God's system. ▣

(1) Blessings do not refer to magical words which can change natural law. Blessings are insights verbalized by a wise person. If the listener adheres to such wisdom, he will lead a better life. But one need not seek such blessings when he has the ability to think into his actions, and himself, correct his flaws.

The Purpose of Friendship

RIVKA OLENICK

Yehoshua ben Perachiah said: "Provide yourself with a master; acquire for yourself a friend; and judge every person favorably." Pirkei Avos 1:6. What is the real purpose of friendship? How does one "acquire" a friend, as stated above? Acquire means to gain or get by one's own actions or efforts, to gain by means, which becomes permanent or inherent to the possessor. To earn, procure or obtain a friend, not to merely "make a friend." If a person doesn't acquire this friend easily then one should make a great effort to do so. Most of the friendships people "have" are those friendships that are based on mutual admiration. "You're my friend because you satisfy my ego and make me feel good." According to our Sages: "Do not establish friendship according to your nature; establish friendship according to your friend's nature." One should not cease accommodating oneself to the other person's nature until such a friendship has been established. Do not choose a convenient friendship, rather, look for a friend who can provide you with an opportunity for growth. This kind of friend will look for ways to help you and improve you in the ways of perfection that will bring you closer to God. A true friend will honestly and gently point out your weaknesses and your flaws. You will feel grateful because intuitively you know this friend is sincere and cares about your life.

Aristotle says: "Your friend is really yourself." Do not make the mistake in thinking that this means satisfying each other's ego. "I'll scratch your back and you scratch mine." It means that your friend is

really yourself within the framework of the good that you want for yourself. What you want for yourself regarding the perfection of your personality, your emotional self as well as who you aspire to be in your philosophical self. This you genuinely want for yourself as well as for your friend. You and your friend identify with each other this way, philosophically and intellectually, which is the foundation of your friendship.

There are three types of friendship. One type is for a mutual benefit, one is for satisfaction and one is for the sake of a higher purpose. An example of friendship based on mutual benefit is that of two partners in business who have a mutual desire for financial gain. They are a partnership and have a goal that they will mutually benefit from, as the result of their paired efforts. Another type of friendship is the two friends, husband and wife, who grant each other satisfaction and trust during marriage. They can rely and depend on each other with the goal of raising their family to live the correct life and serve God. The close friendship of siblings or close friends, can also be for satisfaction as they can rely on each other and do not withhold anything. They are not worried that they will be shamed or embarrassed in private or public. Friends who trust each other genuinely will gain tremendous satisfaction from the friendship. They will get great benefit from talking together and sharing each other's company. A friendship that is established for the sake of a higher purpose is based on both parties who have an objective: wanting to do good. An example of this is a teacher and student, as

each needs the other. In one unique and extraordinary example is that of all three kinds of friendship: "Sarah was not only Abraham's mate but his comrade as well. She was part of Abraham, not only as wife but as disciple and teacher. They exchanged roles from time to time. At times she used to sit at his feet, at others, he would sit at hers. Sarah was his collaborator and co-participant in all the great plans, hopes and visions. Together they discovered God; together they discovered a new morality; together they joined the covenant. Sarah and Abraham started the Masorah, the Tradition. Not only Abraham taught the people, but Sarah as well. 'Abraham would convert the men and Sarah the women' (Gen. Rabbah 39:14) Such a life of common suffering and common joy engenders love and deep friendship. Taken from: Out of the Whirlwind by Rabbi Yosef Ber Soloveitchik.

From Horeb, Samson Raphael Hirsh states: "Avoid those whose actions are unjust and harsh, whose enjoyments are unholy and bestial, whose words are false and frivolous and make sport of holy things and the honour and peace of one's neighbor, whose morals are corrupt, whose nature is selfish, pleasure loving, unlovable and mean, or even just frivolous with no desire for the higher things in life, in whose idea of life you find everything except God and the fear of God and the love of God, the striving upwards towards God. Do not be blinded by someone's other attractions, evil knows how to cloak itself in wit and charm. Test a person before you call that person your friend."