

# SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

SAV/SHABBAT HAGADOL

Haftarah: Yirmiyahu 7:21-8:3, 9:22-23

APRIL 7 – APRIL 8, 2017 12 NISAN 5777

**DEDICATION: In memory of Gerald Werman – Yosef Mordechai Ben Rachel  
And in memory of Joe D Bibi – Yosef ben Milo**

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## Think Before We Do – Sav 5777

Mother always told us to think before we do.

The early parshiot of the book of Vayikra – Leviticus deal primarily with the sacrifices offered in the Mishkan and later the Temple. Many rabbis when faced with giving a speech or class of sacrifices breathe a sigh of relief because these portions often fall during the weeks of Shabbat HaGadol and Passover when one can replac the talk on the weekly portion with thoughts related to the time period we find ourselves in. Even in a leap year, these portions often mesh with Purim, Shabbat Zachor, Shabbat HaChodesh where we can more easily give over a timely message.

Last week and this week though, we tried to break this unwritten rule and really focus on the idea of korbanot - sacrifices slaughtered and burned on the alter. It behooves us to examine the words of Maimonides in Moreh Nevuchim as to the reason for sacrifices in replacing pagan sacrificial custom and demonstrating the folly in zoolatry and the glorification of animal deities which was heavily practiced in ancient Egypt. Forms of animal worship included the Egyptian Capricorn as it related to the Nile and Aries worship as it related to Ra and the Mesopotamian worship of the great bull or Taurus. We must then examine the Ramban – Nachmanides who vehemently disagrees and explains that the various actions involved in bringing a korban relate to

different aspects of man's need for exoneration. This leads to a discussion of the future Third Temple and the questions as to whether sacrifices will return or if we are so removed from sacrifices as to no longer require them. Many cite Rav Kook's statement that, "only grain offerings will be offered in the reinstated Temple service." Yet they fail to also quote his words where he states, "With regard to sacrifices, it is more correct to believe that all aspects will be restored to their place. ... We should not be overly troubled by the views of European culture. In the future, God's word to His people will elevate all the foundations of culture to a level above that attainable by human reason.'

As to what will be, perhaps Rav kook states it best when he writes, "... I agree with you that we should not approach the practical aspects of sacrifices before the advent of revealed divine inspiration in Israel."

But with at least 20% of the Torah devoted to the laws of sacrifices, there must be tremendous lessons for us. And we must remember that although in our exile we are unable to return to Temple Service, Hashem has given us an opportunity and substitute. The rabbis teach us that by actively engaging in the study of korbanot, it is considered as if we actually offered these sacrifices ourselves.

Let us try to relate one lesson of bringing a sacrifice, first to our daily lives, to our shabbat service and to the holiday of Pesach which quickly approaches.

The Torah teaches that one bringing an offering leans his hands on the head of the offering, he confesses his sin and then he slaughters the bull. The Kohen takes the blood and throws it on the alter. Most assume that it is the Kohen who slaughters, but it appears based on the words of the rabbis that it is preferable for the one offering to do the slaughtering. In fact the Zohar explains that not only permissible for the non-Kohen to perform the shechita, but it is actually forbidden for the Kohen to slaughter the korban.

We have explained many times the words of Rabbi Abittan, z'sl, that the kavana, the thoughts one should have, when wearing tefillin each day upon our head and bound to our arm is an internal declaration and a

demonstrative one before all that our intellect represented by the tefillin of the head should always supersede our actions, represented by the tefillin on our arm. Our actions and emotions – the tefillin of the arm rests upon our hearts – are always to be bound to our intellect and Heaven above. Throughout our day, we must remind ourselves that our emotions and passions should never be in control.

We can perhaps find a similar message in the chametz we are commanded to remove from our possessions and refrain from consuming and the matzah (unleavened bread) we are commanded to eat on Pesach. We are reminded that we left Egypt in such a hurry that our dough did not have time to rise. On a deeper level, leavened dough symbolizes ego, which blows up like water and flour exposed to yeast and heat. This chametz represents our emotions and passions taking over. Matzah, on the other hand, is flat and symbolizes humility, controlling and keeping in check our emotion and passions and allowing our intellect to reign.

We can now comprehend why the sinner must lean with his hands on the head of the korban - sacrifice and confess his wrong doings. In this manner, he demonstrates that he recognizes that his failures are the result of not utilizing his head and brain like a human being but rather like an animal. As Rabbi Pinchas Friedman goes on to explain, an animal lacks the wisdom, understanding and knowledge to place the brain in its head in charge of the desires and cravings of its heart. An animal's entire behavior is controlled solely by the urges in its heart. The sinner must then slaughter the animal severing the head from the heart and the body and again demonstrating that he deserved to be punished in this manner measure for measure. Rather than having his brain reign over his heart, he separated and disconnected the brain from the heart. Nevertheless, we take solace in the fact that Hashem has mercy on us and allows the animal to stand in our place.

Let us close with a final related thought. We sit at the seder not as slaves, but as free men. We recline when we eat and we are considered like kings. The rabbis tell us that when Bilaam sought to curse the children of Israel, he had but a moment within the window of Hashem's anger. In that moment what could he say? The rabbis tell us, the word Kalem – meaning, "annihilate them", Kaf, Lamed, Mem. Hashem reversed the curse into a blessing and rearranged the letters into the reverse, Mem, Lamed, Kaf – Melech – King, as we read Utruat Melech Boh.

These three letters symbolize the three main parts of a person wherein our souls reside. They are Mem – Moach or Brain and intellect, LaMed – Lev or Heart and emotion and Kaf – Kaved or Liver representing our blood and animalistic soul and cravings.

Bilaam's curse was that we follow the route of Kalem. Our cravings should guide and influence our emotions and subsequently our heart will impose its will on our brain. When the brain becomes subservient to the heart and bodily desires it is in fact cut off from them. This is G-d forbid the road to destruction. Hashem in His mercy, reverses this within the blessing.

And this should be our goal always, that our brains direct our hearts, our emotions, our passions and ultimately our actions.

Rabbi Isaac Wahnon, who is visiting from the Darchei Horaah L'Rabbanim Kollel in Israel, commented as we gave this class that we can be reminded of this in the weekly prayer of Lecha Dodi. We state Mikdashe Melech Ir Melucha – Kumi Sei Metoch Hafecha. We typically translate this as - Sanctuary of the King, city royal, Arise, go out from amidst the turmoil. The word Hafecha though translates as opposite so we are asking Hashem to protect us from the opposite of Melech or the curse of Kalem. A beautiful kavana or thought to have each week as we sing this song.

How important is this message repeated again and again. We must recall our education in the laws of sacrifice imagining our own hands on the head of the bull and severing its head remembering that the origin of sin comes when we sever our own brain from our body and allow ourselves to be led by our animal inclination, our passions and desires. From the prohibition of leaven and the command to eat Matzah, reminding us to rid ourselves of negative ego and uncontrolled emotion. From our daily binding of tefillin on our head and arm, reminding us that our actions and desires should always be bound to and governed by our intellect. And finally from the song we recite each Friday evening of lecha dodi, reminding us that the Melech – the king should reign supreme; that our brain should rule over our heart and actions and chas veshalom, never the opposite.

Yes, mother knows best in reminding us again and again, to think before we do!

Shabbat Shalom and Chag Kasher VeSameyach

David Bibi

PS ... We added a column by Rabbi Meyer Laniado at the end of the newsletter. We would love your comments. There is also a story by Jack Rahmey. In addition as we are trying to get out the newsletter early so you have more time to review before Shabbat. This week we replaced our regular Parsha summary with one by Rabbi Aaron Tandler, we used an article from Rabbi Mansour we have not used before and we don't have Rabbi Miller's Z'sl column.

### Summary of the Perasha

1st Aliya: Additional instructions regarding the Olah - ascent offering, and the Mincha - meal offering are detailed.

2nd Aliya: The special meal offering of the Kohain Gadol and the special inaugural meal offering of the regular Kohain is described. This was the same offering in both cases; however, the Kohain Gadol brought his offering every day while the regular Kohain did so only on the day of his inauguration into the service of the Bais Hamikdash. Additional laws of the sin offering, and the guilt offering are detailed.

3rd Aliya: Additional laws of the peace offering are detailed along with those portions of the offering that must be shared with the Kohain.

4th, 5th, 6th, & 7th Aliyot: The remainder of the Parsha describes the first seven days of the inaugural process for Aharon and his four sons. Moshe functioned as the Kohain Gadol to officiate over the inaugural process, and Aharon and his sons were forbidden to leave the Mishkan the entire time.

### FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

**“You shall rejoice in your holiday, you and your son and your daughter.” (Debarim 16:14)**

At this time of year, many of our homes fill up with married children or children returning from yeshivah or seminary, coming to visit for Pesah. What a precious gift! It is one that some would give all the money in the world to experience. This is true in concept, but we know that it is not always experienced this way. Sometimes it is taken for granted. Why?

Rabbi Katsenbaum answers with a mashal. Imagine you find yourself in the most expensive restaurant. You order the cheapest thing on the menu, a two-hundred-dollar steak. It has a fancier name, but essentially it's a succulent piece of steak. You are expecting a portion the size of a football, but it is average size. How fast will you eat that steak? Not fast at all. You will probably savor every piece. At ten dollars a bite, you want to enjoy it to the fullest.

On the other hand, if you are grabbing an ordinary lunch, you might quickly stuff it into your mouth.

We pray, learn, or perform many misvot, but we might not be enjoying them the way we should. Very possibly, it is because we rush through them. When a person is in a hurry to get something over with, looking at what is next on his list rather than what is on his plate, he will not enjoy what he is doing.

On the holiday the focus is on getting things done. The focus is on the next meal and all the practicalities. There is surely a lot of planning, energy, stress and effort expended, and it's not always easy to manage, but we mustn't allow that to prevent us from enjoying the treasure before our eyes. We need to stop every so often, look around the room, and thank Hashem for the life He has bestowed upon us. As the verse quoted above, appreciating spending time with one's family is part of the misvah of Simhat Yom Tob.

Now more than ever, in this fast-paced society, we are running from one thing to another. There is rarely a dull moment. Although the holiday of Pesah teaches zerizut (alacrity), that refers to excitement and anticipation for a misvah. We rush to do a misvah; we don't rush through a misvah. On the contrary, we have to deliberate and drink up all that the misvah encompasses.

May we enjoy our misvot and utilize them for their purpose of drawing closer to Hashem. May we enjoy our families, develop closer relationships and derive much pleasure and joy. Rabbi Reuven Semah

**"In every generation it is one's duty to regard himself as though he personally has come out of Egypt."**

The Peninim Haggadah quotes Harav M. Gifter Shlita who explains that all the events which occurred to Bnei Yisrael were not singular, transitory events that were meant to be immediately forgotten. Every miracle, every incident bespeaks eternity. The events are eternalized in such a manner that when that date on the calendar arrives, the Jew must relate to "then" as if it were "now." Indeed, as the Haggadah says, one must regard himself as though he came out of Egypt. This is not an event of the past; it is occurring in the present. Consequently, one is obligated to recite Hallel even at night, since it is viewed as if the miracle occurred to him personally.

In a similar vein, Rabbi E. Dessler z"l observes that time is not a line that passes above us, but rather a circle through which we travel. Periodically, we return to those events which have been eternalized as a result of the spiritual values with which they have been suffused. During these unique periods, one has the opportunity to interface with the experiences which have consecrated these

moments in time. Thus, at the specific time of the year when we remember zeman herutenu, the time of our liberation, we are infused with the spiritual concepts that highlight that moment in time. We are inspired by the kedushah, holiness, of the moment; we are elevated by the experiences as we relive yesiat misrayim.

May we merit to truly experience these feelings during this holiday season and may we be privileged to celebrate Pesah in Jerusalem with the Mashiah speedily in our days, Amen Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

### How Old Are You?

Two three-year-olds accompanied their father to the store, where they spotted a bin full of rubber balls. Each started the singsong nagging which little children believe is necessary in order to get what they want. To avoid trouble later, the wise parent chose two balls and gave one to each child. Much to his surprise, within minutes each was insisting that the ball his brother was bouncing was his. The father switched the balls from one child to the other – but the squabbling broke out again! The children were never satisfied with the balls they had; each demanded the one his sibling was playing with. Silly children!

People don't easily outgrow the possessiveness of their childhood years. Jealousy and competition drive individuals to prefer that which belongs to another. Learning the truism that "Hashem gives everyone exactly what they need to perform their life mission" is easier said than done – but it is a lesson we must internalize.

Inevitably, the time will come when you see a person with something you wish could be yours. You might react with an envious stare, or you might not. It takes a healthy outlook and emotional maturity to focus on what you have and not compare it to another's acquisitions. (One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

### RABBI ELI MANSOUR Making Sacrifices for Our Children

Ironically, there are many Jewish schools that omit the Book of Vayikra from their curriculum, figuring that it is too detailed, intricate and difficult for their students. These schools would rather focus their attention on the exciting stories of the Torah, rather than burden the students with the complex laws of the sacrifices.

This is ironic because the Midrash records a tradition to do just the opposite – to make Vayikra the first section of Humash that schoolchildren are taught. The Midrash writes, "Let the pure ones come and

study that which is pure." According to this tradition, the best introduction to the world of Torah study for children is precisely the subjects of Vayikra.

Why would the Book of Vayikra be the first section of Humash taught to children?

One explanation might be that the study of Vayikra sends a powerful message not to the children – but to their parents. Communities adopted this custom because they wanted the schoolchildren to return home and report to their parents that they learned about sacrifices. One of the critical foundations of Torah education is sacrifice. Parents must make enormous sacrifices to provide their children with a proper Torah education. Tuition expenses require parents to work long hours and to forego on luxuries. Without doubt, the cost of Jewish education causes many families to live on a much lower standard of living than they would otherwise enjoy. Appropriately, then, the very first subject children were taught was sacrifices – conveying to parents the message that they must be prepared to make significant sacrifices for the sake of their children's education.

The story is told of a family in early 20th-century Poland that was struggling to make ends meet. The father decided that the family should relocate to the United States where he could open a business and support the family more comfortably than he could in Poland. He sailed to the United States to open a business and get settled, planning to bring his family over after his initial arrangements were completed. Unfortunately, World War I erupted while he was in America, and international travel was brought to a halt. As a result of the war's upheavals, the family was separated for ten years. During this time, the wife worked very hard to support herself and her two children, and to pay for their Torah education. One day, she was notified that one of her sons was a child prodigy and has the potential to become a leading Torah scholar. The school informed the mother that the child's level far exceeded that of the other students, and she would have to hire private tutors to study with him so he could realize his potential. The mother promptly took on a nighttime job delivering milk. After a full day of work and caring for her children, when the children were in bed, she would go around town delivering milk in order to earn some extra money for her son's tutors.

Her efforts paid off. That boy grew to become Rav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, one of our generation's leading Torah sages. One can only wonder whether he would have attained this stature without the

monumental sacrifices made by his mother on behalf of his education.

In order to educate our children, we must be prepared to make significant sacrifices. Besides the financial sacrifices, we might have to forego on certain activities for the sake of our children's spiritual growth. Parents might enjoy watching television, but they need to consider the harmful effects a television could have on their children. Parents certainly deserve a luxurious family vacation, but many vacation spots must be labeled as off-limits because of what the children might be exposed to at these locations. We can't have our cake and eat it, too. If we want our children to grow to become committed, conscientious Jewish adults, we have no choice but to make sacrifices for their education.

The Torah says that as Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son at the Akeda, an angel called to him "from the heavens" and commanded him to withdraw his sword (Bereshit 22:11). Curiously, the angel did not descend to Abraham and speak to him on earth, but rather called to him from the heavens. Rav Moshe Siman-Tov explained that the area around Abraham Abinu at that moment was so sacred, that even the angels could not approach him. When a parent makes a great sacrifice for the sake of his or her children, this sacrifice generates intense Kedusha. Abraham was prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice, and thus he generated such a high level of sanctity that even the angels had to keep their distance. This is a crucial message that parents must remember at all times. Every time a parent writes out a check for the child's education, this creates Kedusha.

Every time parents decide against purchasing a luxury item so they can afford their tuition payments, they generate more holiness. And every time parents scratch an idea for vacation out of concern for their children's spiritual wellbeing, they produce sanctity.

This is one of the fundamental lessons of Vayikra. Torah education requires sacrifice. As parents, we must accept this basic truth and be prepared to make sacrifices for our children's growth. Indeed, education begins with Vayikra – with the awareness of the central role of sacrifice in the educational process.

**VICTOR BIBI  
SOD HAPARASHA**

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## **Rabbi Wein**

This year, as is true in most years of the Jewish calendar, the Torah reading of Tzav coincides with the Shabbat preceding Pesach – Shabbat Hagadol. Since on a deep level of understanding there are really no coincidences in Torah matters, the connection between Tzav and Shabbat Hagadol should be explored and explained.

The word "tzav" is one of a mandatory command. It does not present reasons or explanations and does not brook discussion or argument. It is representative of military discipline, of service to a higher purpose even if all of the participants in the project are not really aware of the workings of that higher purpose.

A necessary part of living in society is the mandatory obligations, which are part of everyone's life. If it were not for these rules, mores and practices imposed upon us, life would become so chaotic as to be unlivable. It is the "tzav" part of life that allows all of the other more freedom-of-choice opportunities to be present in our lives.

An ordered society demands that there be commands, not only recommendations or suggestions. There is an understandable reflex built into our emotional system that resists and resents commands from others. Any parent of a three-year old can easily testify to the truth of this observation. Nevertheless, the young child must eventually respond to commands in order to grow, mature and become a successful human being. So, "tzav" plays a vital role.

Perhaps there are no two areas of Jewish life and law that are as complexly intertwined with mandatory commands and laws, as are Shabbat and Pesach. The concepts behind these holy days and their observances represent noble values – serenity, leisure, freedom and independence. But noble ideas alone, without detailed instructions as to their realization, are useless in a practical sense.

The sons who appear in the Torah and the Haggadah all ask the same question – "What relevance do these laws have in our time?" Is it not sufficient that we honor the ideas that Shabbat and Pesach represent and then ignore all of the mandatory commandments that accompany these days, their values and ideals.

Without mandatory commandments no commemorative day, no matter how well meaning and well planned will stand the test of time and changing circumstances. It is the "tzav" component of

Shabbat and Pesach that make this Shabbat the Shabbat Hagadol – the great Shabbat that it is.

It is an historical fact that those movements and individuals that ignored or rejected mandatory observances associated with Shabbat or Pesach eventually slipped out of Jewish life and continuity entirely. Again, without “tzav” there can be no Shabbat Hagadol. This is the basic issue that divides much of the Jewish world today. The avoidance of mandatory commandments, attractive and popular as this idea may initially appear, is a sure recipe for Jewish extinction. Shabbat Hagadol comes to remind us of this lesson.

### **Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks Why Civilizations Die**

In her recent “The Watchman’s Rattle”, subtitled “Thinking our way out of extinction”, Rebecca Costa delivers a fascinating account of how civilisations die. Their problems become too complex. Societies reach what she calls a cognitive threshold. They simply can’t chart a path from the present to the future.

The example she gives is the Mayans. For a period of three and a half thousand years, between 2,600 BCE and 900 CE, they developed an extraordinary civilisation, spreading over what is today Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador and Belize with an estimated population of 15 million people.

Not only were they master potters, weavers, architects and farmers. They developed an intricate cylindrical calendar system, with celestial charts to track the movements of the stars and predict weather patterns. They had their own unique form of writing as well as an advanced mathematical system. Most impressively they developed a water-supply infrastructure involving a complex network of reservoirs, canals, dams and levees.

Then suddenly, for reasons we still don’t fully understand, the entire system collapsed. Sometime between the middle of the eighth and ninth century the majority of the Mayan people simply disappeared. There have been many theories as to why it happened. It may have been a prolonged drought, overpopulation, internecine wars, a devastating epidemic, food shortages, or a combination of these and other factors. One way or another, having survived for 35 centuries, Mayan civilisation failed and became extinct.

Rebecca Costa’s argument is that whatever the causes, the Mayan collapse, like the fall of the

Roman Empire, and the Khmer Empire of thirteenth century Cambodia, occurred because problems became too many and complicated for the people of that time and place to solve. There was cognitive overload, and systems broke down.

It can happen to any civilisation. It may, she says, be happening to ours. The first sign of breakdown is gridlock. Instead of dealing with what everyone can see are major problems, people continue as usual and simply pass their problems on to the next generation. The second sign is a retreat into irrationality. Since people can no longer cope with the facts, they take refuge in religious consolations. The Mayans took to offering sacrifices.

Archeologists have uncovered gruesome evidence of human sacrifice on a vast scale. It seems that, unable to solve their problems rationally, the Mayans focused on placating the gods by manically making offerings to them. So apparently did the Khmer.

Which makes the case of Jews and Judaism fascinating. They faced two centuries of crisis under Roman rule between Pompey’s conquest in 63 BCE and the collapse of the Bar Kochba rebellion in 135 CE. They were hopelessly factionalised. Long before the Great Rebellion against Rome and the destruction of the Second Temple, Jews were expecting some major cataclysm.

What is remarkable is that they did not focus obsessively on sacrifices, like the Mayans and the Khmer. Instead they focused on finding substitutes for sacrifice. One was gemillat chassadim, acts of kindness. Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai comforted Rabbi Joshua, who wondered how Israel would atone for its sins without sacrifices, with the words, “My son we have another atonement as effective as this: acts of kindness, as it is written (Hosea 6:6), ‘I desire kindness and not sacrifice’” (Avot deRabbi Natan 8).

Another was Torah study. The sages interpreted Malachi’s words (1:11), “In every place offerings are presented to My name,” to refer to scholars who study the laws of sacrifice. (Menachot 100a). “One who recites the order of sacrifices is as if he had brought them” (Taanit 27b).

Another was prayer. Hosea said, “Take words with you and return to the Lord . . . We will offer our lips as sacrifices of bulls” (Hos. 14:2-3), implying that words could take the place of sacrifice. “He who prays in the house of prayer is as if he brought a pure oblation.” (Yerushlami Berakhot 8d).

Yet another was teshuvah. The Psalm (51:19) says “the sacrifices of God are a contrite spirit.” From this the sages inferred that “if a person repents it is accounted to him as if he had gone up to Jerusalem and built the Temple and the altar and offered on it all the sacrifices ordained in the Torah” (Vayikra Rabbah 7:2).

A fifth was fasting. Since going without food diminished a person's fat and blood, it counted as a substitute for the fat and blood of a sacrifice (Berakhot 17a). A sixth was hospitality. “As long as the Temple stood, the altar atoned for Israel, but now a person's table atones for him” (Berakhot 55a). And so on.

What is striking in hindsight is how, rather than clinging obsessively to the past, sages like Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai thought forward to a worst-case-scenario future. The great question raised by Tzav, which is all about different kinds of sacrifice, is not “Why were sacrifices commanded in the first place?” but rather, given how central they were to the religious life of Israel in Temple times, how did Judaism survive without them?

The short answer is that overwhelmingly the prophets, the sages, and the Jewish thinkers of the Middle Ages realised that sacrifices were symbolic enactments of processes of mind, heart and deed that could be expressed in other ways as well. We can encounter the will of God by Torah study, engage in the service of God by prayer, make financial sacrifice by charity, create sacred fellowship by hospitality and so on.

Jews did not abandon the past. We still refer constantly to the sacrifices in our prayers. But they did not cling to the past. Nor did they take refuge in irrationality. They thought through the future and created institutions like the synagogue and house of study and school that could be built anywhere and sustain Jewish identity even in the most adverse conditions.

That is no small achievement. The world's greatest civilisations have all, in time, become extinct while Judaism has always survived. In one sense that was surely Divine Providence. But in another it was the foresight of people like Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai who resisted cognitive breakdown, created solutions today for the problems of tomorrow, who did not seek refuge in the irrational, and who quietly built the Jewish future.

Surely there is a lesson here for the Jewish people today: Plan generations ahead. Think at least 25

years into the future. Contemplate worst-case scenarios. Ask what we would do, if... What saved the Jewish people was their ability, despite their deep and abiding faith, never to let go of rational thought, and despite their loyalty to the past, to keep planning for the future.

### **Alex Clare's Impressive - Acts of Mesirat Nefesh By Jack E. Rahmey - with the Guidance and Teachings of Rabbi Amram Sananes**

Rabbi Fischel Schachter told a story about a musician named Alex Clare. Alex was born in 1985 and grew up in London with a totally secular background, without any Jewish education. He had a passion for music and was very talented. He played many instruments, sang and composed songs. He was determined to make music his career.

In 2007, at the age of 22, he began learning about Judaism and before long he felt very spiritually connected to his religion. He began keeping Kosher and then he committed to keeping Shabbat.

He eventually signed a contract with a major record label, Island Records. But he told them in advance that he would not perform on Shabbat. They were not happy about it, but they agreed because he was so talented.

He recorded his debut album with them, but he needed opportunities to promote it. As it happened, every event or appearance was scheduled for Friday night, and Alex turned them all down. Then, an excellent opportunity arose. He was offered the chance to do a world tour with the famous English singer, named Adele.

His producers told him, "This is it, the chance you've been waiting for." But Alex told them, "I'm sorry, it comes out on my holiday of Passover. I'm going to have to turn it down."

That summer his album was released, but did not receive much attention, due to his limited promotion. A few months later, right after Yom Kippur, Alex found a message on his phone from Island Records. "You're not going to believe this, but BBC Radio told us that they had a cancellation for one of their segments and they want you to play live. This will be in front of a national audience and broadcast throughout Europe.

"You will receive national coverage and gain thousands of listeners. This is what we need to promote your album. The best part of it is that it's on a Thursday night, so you can do it."

Alex couldn't believe the opportunity he was hearing about. Thursday night, however, was the first night of Succot. With a lot of courage, Alex called them and said he couldn't do it. This was the last straw. They told him, "If you turn this down, we are cutting your contract. This will result in you being

blacklisted and basically end your very short career."

At this time, Alex was penniless. He couldn't even make his next month's rent payment. But he began to think of the Piyut he had read that day, on Yom Kippur, about Rabbi Amnon who gave up his life for Judaism. With tremendous strength, he said to himself, "If Rabbi Amnon could give up his life I can give up my music."

He told his promoters that he would not play on his holiday under any circumstances, and indeed they cut his contract. All of his dreams were shattered in an instant. In need of Hizuk, Alex went to his Rabbi, Dovid Tugendhaft. He told him, "Rabbi, I don't understand. All I have ever done since I became religious is sacrifice for Judaism, and now I'm losing everything I ever dreamed of?"

His Rabbi told him, "This reminds me of the story of Avraham Avinu. He invested his whole life to change the world and spread the belief in One G-d, a loving and compassionate G-d who doesn't want people sacrificing their children to Idolatry. And then he was asked to sacrifice his own son, which would have made all of his teachings a mockery in the eyes of the world. He would have to give up on his lifelong mission, but he showed readiness to obey and became great as a result. That was one of the greatest moments in Jewish history."

The Rabbi continued, "Alex you are being asked to give up your dream for Hashem. It will make you great." A few hard months passed, until one day, he received a phone call from Microsoft. They wanted to use one of his tracks to launch their new version of Internet Explorer. Of course, he agreed, and the song was used in an ad in March 2012. The song was soon playing all over the world. It became the number one hit in Germany, number four in the UK singles chart and number seven in the U.S. His debut album now sold over six million copies.

Alex Clare became a multi-millionaire instantly. He did not lose from keeping Shabbat. But it's important to note that he didn't see any success arise from his sacrifice for a very long time. Week after week, he turned down jobs, and it kept getting worse. A person never loses from following Hashem, but we must be patient and stick to our convictions because rarely do we see immediate results. We also see from this that Hashem knows how to find a person and bring him success when He chooses to. Alex didn't have to go play in a hundred different places to gain recognition. It was one advertisement that did it. If a person follows Hashem, he will not always have immediate success, but he will be sure to have success somewhere down the road.

May we all realize that the sacrifices we make for Hashem and our Torah can be very difficult to go through, but we have to know that these hurdles or sacrifices that we face are all hand-picked

by Hashem for us to triumph over and to for us to grow our Emunah stronger and stronger in our devotion to Hashem which will ultimately be for our benefit! Amen!

Reprinted from the Parshas Vayikra email of Jack E. Rahmey via Daniel Keren's Shabbos Stories for Parshas Tzav

### **The 10 *Makkot*: Order, Structure, and Meaning Rabbi Meyer Laniado**

Ever wonder why there are ten '*makkot*,' why these specific '*makkot*,' or the reason for their sequence? These are questions we should be asking ourselves. When we recognize that our Humash is multilayered, filled with meaning and insight, we find ourselves searching to uncover these layers. The idea that our Torah is rich in significance below the surface stems from Moshe's description of the Torah. Moshe calls our Torah a *shira* [1], a poem, and just as each word in a poem is multi-faceted, and there is meaning in the structure and order, so too in our Torah [2].

The lessons expressed through the order, structure, and meaning of the *makkot* are the messages we strive to teach our children. They are the fundamentals we discuss and reenact during our Pesah seders. We must make sure that we understand these messages and transmit them generation to generation. The miracles were a one-time event with messages to perpetuate through relating these experiences to our children [3]. That is why there is such an emphasis on elaborating on the *makkot* during Pesah [4]. I do suggest reading this article along with a Humash. Use this writing as a guide to study and analyze the pesuqim.

A close reading of the *makkot*, known as the *otot umoftim* [5], the signs and wonders, performed in Egypt enlightens our eyes to the order, plan, and purpose of these *makkot*. There are three sets of three, with one that stands out above all of the rest, in a category of itself, *makkat bechorot*, the death of the firstborns [6].

The famous mnemonic of Ribbi Yehuda in our Hagada ע"ש באח"ב דצ"כ ע"ש באח"ב makes this point [7]:

Set 1: a) Blood, b) Frogs (Crocodiles) [8], c) Lice  
Set 2: a) Swarms, b) Epidemic, c) Boils  
Set 3: a) Hail, b) Locust, c) Darkness

Each set then has an internal pattern with the first, second, and third of each being differentiated. The first and second of each set has a warning, but for the third of each set, there is no warning. The first of



each set is a warning to Pharaoh in the morning at the Nile, and the second of each set is a warning that takes place later in the day, in front of Pharaoh and all his advisors, at his palace [9].

To see this clearly, take a look at the pesuqim, and note the following. The first of each set 1a) Blood [Shemot 7:15], 2a) Swarms [Shemot 8:16], and 3a) Hail [Shemot 9:13] all start with a similar phrase "*lekh el Pharaoh,*" go to Pharaoh, or "*lifnei Pharaoh,*" before Pharaoh. This indicates that Moshe met with Pharaoh privately by the Nile. For the second plague of each set, 1b) Frogs [Shemot 7:26], 2b) Epidemic [Shemot 9:1], and 3b) Locust [Shemot 10:1], Moshe went to the Palace to speak with Pharaoh before all of his advisors. The third set of each did not have a warning.

There is one more point to notice. Each set has a distinct purpose expressed by the first of each set. Note the following pesuqim which make the reason for each set clear. For the first set see Shemot 7:17, for the second, see Shemot 8:18, and for the third see Shemot 9:14. The first set is introduced with *bezot teda ki ani Hashem*, with this you shall know that I am God. The second set is introduced with *lema'an teda ki ani Hashem beqereb haAares*, so that you will know that I am God in the midst of the Earth. The third set is introduced with *ba'abur teda ki ein kamoni bekhhol haAres*, so that you will know that there is none like Me in all of the Earth.

These nine *makkot* progress from lesson to lesson in sets of three, with each of these lessons responding to a statement of Pharaoh [10]. The first lesson, that of *Dam* [Blood], *Sefardea* [Frogs], and *Kinim* [Biting Insects], was to teach about the existence of a single creator of the world. This concept is introduced with *bezot teda ki ani Hashem*, with this you shall know that I am God [11]. This was in direct response to Pharaoh's statement: *lo yadati et Hashem*, I do not know God. God, The Creator, is the cause of all that we experience as nature. The only reason that this world functions as it does is because God is causing it. There is no 'nature' besides for His will. It is God that allows for existence, it is Him that is the cause of all that we experience as 'nature.' If He did not cause the world to function as it does, it would not function separately from Him. It is God that constantly ensures that our world runs properly [12].

The second set, *Arob* [swarms], *Deber* [epidemic], and *Shehin* [boils] teach us about God's *hashgaha*, divine providence, His precise control over 'nature.' This is introduced with the phrase: *lema'an teda ki ani Hashem beqereb ha'ares*, so that you will know that I am God in the midst of the Earth. The lesson is that

God has precise control over each and every aspect of this world. He can create phenomena that only affect a part of the population, and thereby show He has very precise control over the world. Note that in the following *makkot* only the Egyptians were affected: *Arob* 8:18-19, *Deber* 9:4, *Shehin* 9:10. How incredible for a plague to differentiate between groups of people with no way to differentiate based on biology. How would a swarm, epidemic, or boils know which person was part of Benei Yisrael and who was Egyptian? The message is clear; God is involved in the land, *beqereb ha'ares* [13].

The third set, *Barad* [hail], *Arbe* [locust], and *Hoshekh* [darkness], educate us about God's unique power and is introduced by the phrase: *ba'abur teda, ki ein kamoni bekhhol ha'ares*, so that you will know that there is none like Me in all of the Earth. This is in response to Pharaoh's statement: *mi Hashem asher eshma beqolo*, who is this God that I should listen to his request? Pharaoh was making the point that even if there was a God of Benei Yisrael, He was not a power that needed to be heeded. The response by God directly addresses Pharaoh's statement with plagues that have never before been seen in Egypt [14]. Note that by both *barad* and *Arbe* the Torah states: *asher lo haya khamohu* that there was never anything like this, emphasizing that nothing like this has ever been seen in Egypt [15]. This expresses the unique power of God. Not only is God the Creator, and involved in the details of this world, He is also the greatest power, and there is nothing even comparable to Him. He is the master of the universe, and there is nothing that could restrict His will [16].

These three lessons that God is the Creator of the world, that He is involved in the world, and that He is the ultimate power, with nothing comparable to Him, are the fundamental ideas of Judaism. These are the ideas taught to us at the start of our nation that we must educate ourselves about and pass on to the next generation. It is a *misva* from the Torah to relate these messages to our children during our Pesah seder, as Rambam states: *misvat ase shel Torah lesaper benissim veniflaot shena'asu la'aboteinu bemisrayim*, it is a *misva* to recount the miracles and wonders that God did for us and for our forefathers in Egypt [17]. The *misva* is not just to relate the miracle itself, but to relate the messages, the fundamentals of Judaism.

Moadim leSimha,  
Rabbi Meyer Laniado

[1] Debarim 31:19. Some view this as referring to only Ha'azinu (Rashi, Ramban). Others view this as referring to the entire Torah. For example עמק דבר and נצי"ב:

העמק דבר הקדמתו ל" בראשית סעיף ג:  
בנדרים דף ל"ח העלו בפירוש המקרא "כתבו לכם את השירה" שהוא כל התורה... והרי לא נכתבה בלשון של שירה? אלא על כרחך יש בה טבע וסגולת השירה. כידוע לכל מבין דמשונה מליצת השירה מסיפור פרוזי... דבשיר אין הענין מבואר יפה כמו בספור פרוזי וצריך לעשות הערות מן הצד, דזה החרוז כוון לזה הספור וזה החרוז כוון לזה, ולא מקרי דרוש. אלא כך הוא טבע השיר, אפילו של הדייט ומושכל הוא עוד דמי שידוע בטוב עיניו שהביא לידי מליצה זו שנתחבר עליו, מתוק לו להתבונן אור לשון השיר ודקדוקה הרבה יותר מלאיש שאין לו ידיעה מתכונת הענין ורק בא להתבונן מן המליצה תוניה הענין, ומזה עלול הוא להשערות בדיוות, שלא להן כוון המשורר, - כך הוא טבע התורה, שאין הסיפור שבה מבואר יפה, אלא יש לעשות הערות ופרושים לדקדוקי הלשון, ולא נקרא דרוש, אלא כך הוא פשט המקרא

[2] Sanhedrein 34 "kepatish yefoses sela" Tbvli Berakhot 58, and the famous 70 facets of Torah, *shibim panim leTorah*

[3] Ramban: בעבור כי הקדוש ברוך הוא לא יעשה אות ומופת בכל דור לעיני ונעתיק לדבר אל בנינו, ובניהם לבניהם, ובניהם לדור אחרון.

[4] Mishne Torah Hilkhos Hames uMassa 7:1-2  
[5] One should note that the Torah never calls these wonders *makkot*, plagues. They are termed an *ot*, a sign, or a *mofet*, a wonder (Shemot 7:3 and 11:9-10). A sign, *ot*, is a symbol representing something; therefore, a lesson is meant to be learned, and the *makkot* are not solely meant to destroy. They are meant to teach. Note that the advisors of Pharaoh express wonder at the power of God and say *esba elokim hi*, this is the finger of God in Shemot 8:15. This was after *kinim*, lice, the third plague in the first set. (The term *nega* and *magefa* are used Shemot 9:14 and 11:1)

[6] *Makkat Bekhorot* may have been the only one to cause Pharaoh to send out the Benei Yisrael [Malbim Shemot 7:14] or may have been to punish, as opposed to deliver a message [Seforno 7:4]. Additionally, *makkat bekhorot* was done directly by God, without the utilization of his creations [*lo al yedei malakh, velo al yedei shaliah*]. Also see Seforno Shemot 4:23.

[7] Sifrei Debarim 301, Midrash Tanaim Debarim 26

[8] Rabbenu Hananel as seen in Rabbenu Bahye Shemot 10:19 and Abarbanel Shemot 7

[9] Ramban Shemot 8:15, Ibn Ezra Shemot 9:1

[10] Rabbenu Bahye Shemot 9:14 הזכיר משה כן לפרעה לפי שהיה פרעה ' וישגחתו, ויכלתו כופר בשלשתן במציאותו, והשגחתו, ויכלתו

[11] Shemot 7:17

[12] Abarbanel Shemot 7:17: ופרעה כחש לו מפני שהיה חושב שאלוהי העולם הוא הטבע ושהגורם השמימיים הוא היה מנהיג הטבע השפל ולכן כשאמר משה כה אמר ה' השיב פרעה לא ידעתי את ה' כלי' איני מודה במציאותו

ויעשה עמהם מופת בשנוי מנהגו של עולם וטבעו... Ramban Shemot 13:16: Rabbenu Bahye Shemot 9:14

[13] Ramban Shemot 13:16: כי לא עזב אותה למקרים כדעתם. Rabbenu Bahye Shemot 9:14: בתוך המדינה להיותו קרוב אל הקצוות: Abarbanel Shemot 7:17: משגיח על כל דרכי בני האדם לתת לאיש כדרכיו ' ופרעה כחש זה באמרו מי ה' For Malbim Shemot 7:14: כמו שנאמר ולא יכלו החרטומים לעמוד לפני: עקדת יצחק שער ל"א boils note ' משה כי היה השחין בחרטומים ובכל מצרים, ירצה, שלא עמד עוד בהם טעמם, ולא יכלו לכלכל דבריהם מפני המכה הזאת, שהיתה בחרטומים ובכל ארץ מצרים לבדם, שאם היו גם אהרן ומושה וכל ישראל מוכי שחין אך נבהלו מפניהם ולא יוכלו עמוד

[14] Shemot 10:7

[15] Shemot 9:17, 9:24, 10:7, 10:14, Note it also appears by *makkat bekhorot* Shemot 11:6

[16] Ramban Shemot 13:16: and Rabbenu Bahye Shemot 9:14

[17] Mishne Torah Hilkhos Hames uMassa 7:1

### The Bais HaLevi's Response To the Free-Thinker

There is an incident that occurred with the Bais HaLevi (1820-1892). It took place during an assembly of Rabbanim in Russia when they were gathered to discuss

the pressing issues of the day.

One of the free-thinking, wealthy, lay people posed a question, and asked the Rabbis to "ease the load of Mitzvos" on the people, arguing that many of the Mitzvos of the Torah were outdated.

The Bais HaLevi stood up and responded to this contemptuous individual with a Mashal. "There was once a businessman who succeeded in only one thing, and that was amassing very large debts. He would purchase large amounts of merchandise on credit and could not pay his bills. Understandably, his reputation was not very good.

One night, shortly after midnight, he knocked on the door of one of his biggest creditors, someone he owed 100,000 rubles to. He told the creditor that he was aware that he hadn't made any payments in years, and he wanted to make an exact accounting of the debt.

The creditor was not interested in meeting with this man at that time of the night, but the hope of collecting his debt motivated him to pull out his ledgers and go through the entire bill. They went over every detail and negotiated, until the debtor was able to adjust the debt to 50,000 rubles.

The creditor was very upset, but he realized that accepting half the amount owed to him was better than getting nothing at all, so he agreed to the compromise, expecting to receive a check immediately for the balance. We can only imagine his anger and disgust when the debtor wished him a good night and walked towards the door.

The creditor exclaimed, "You are not paying me now?!"

The debtor replied, "No, of course not. You know that I have no money." The man asked, "Why then did you bother to go through the entire bill, leading me on that you were going to do something about it?"

The debtor responded, "You don't understand. Every time I borrowed money, I felt bad that I was taking someone else's money, when I knew I would not be able to repay them. This feeling would lay like a stone on my heart, and I knew that I had to do something about it. That is why I came here tonight to go over the bills. True, I cannot pay you, but at least I feel better now. I no longer owe you 100,000 rubles, I only owe you 50,000, and this brings joy to my heart. You should feel better also, knowing that I don't owe you as much money anymore!" The Bais HaLevi concluded, "You are asking to have less of an obligation to Hashem, yet, you do not want to strengthen your service to Him. Even if you only had the Aseres HaDibros [the Ten Commandments] to observe, you would try to find a way out of keeping them.

"For people like you, no compromise will ever be good. You seek one thing and one thing only, and that is to abolish the Torah! You have no desire to pay your debt, you only want to allow yourself to feel better. The Torah cannot be changed. It is perfect and complete. You would do yourself a great service if you would accept the Torah in its entirety, with devotion and self-sacrifice— just as your ancestors have done, but you will never receive from us a compromised deal to diminish your holy debt to Hashem!"

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