

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

VAYIKRA

MARCH 15-16, 2013

5 NISAN 5773

DEDICATIONS: In memory of Joseph David Bibi – Yosef ben Milo – 8th Nisan
Happy Birthday to Aryana Bibi – Our own Holy Rebbetzin and incredible teacher !

SEPHARDIC CONGREGATION OF LONG BEACH SCHEDULE
Candle Lighting - 6:43pm / Mincha / Kabbalat Shabbat - 6:40pm

Shabbat and Yom Tov mornings 8:30 please join us for classes in Hilchot Shabbat/Yom Tov for Sephardim

Shacharit Shabbat Morning - 9:00am Shabbat HaChodesh- Last Shemah 9:24

Babysitting with Leah Colish 11-12 downstairs in the Playroom.

We have Mr. and Mrs. Anonymous sponsoring this week's Kiddush
They sponsor it in honor of those who will step up and sponsor other kidushes

Girls Shabbat Oneg at the Colish's 3PM – 4:30PM (Grades 1-4):
Snacks, Games, Friends, Fun and Torah Stories

Boys Shabbat Sports and Learning at the Sephardic 5 PM:
Basketball, Football, Games, Snacks and Torah

Mincha Shabbat Day - 6:10 PM

Seudah Shelishi and a class 6:40

*We are thrilled to welcome back Rav Aharon Siegle who will be teaching a class at Seudah Shelishi
Arbit at 7:40 - Shabbat Ends - 7:44 pm*

Calling all Teens - Chesed Opportunity!
This Saturday Night come make Pesach packages for Tomchei Shabbos in Brooklyn.
Please contact Rabbi Colish if you would like to come.
Going out for Pizza when we're done. Room for 6 in the van.

Daily Services - Shacharit
Sunday at 8AM - Monday thru Friday - 7:00am SHARP

Class with Rabbi Yenay Monday night at 7PM –

Next Shabbat we are hoping that Rabbi Dr. Chaim Abittan will join us for Shabbat HaGadol

Last chance to reserve one of the remaining spots for the Seders.

The cost has been reduced to \$50/ adult, \$50/child. – Anyone needing a discount or anyone needing to be sponsored, please speak with Rebecca. Final call March 17.. Please respond by email to Rebecca at uft183@yahoo.com or by calling her at home at 432-5690. We must stress the need for volunteers. We also need sponsors for those who may need a reduced rate or who cannot pay. We are all obligated to have guests for Pesach – perhaps each family can sponsor, one or two people or an entire family for one or both nights, we don't want to turn anyone away.

To subscribe or to unsubscribe, please reply to
ShabbatShalomNewsletter@gmail.com

Daily Minyan Mon – Thurs at 979 Third Avenue, 17th
Floor, Artistic Frame at 4PM – Please join us! 212-
289-2100

Editors Notes

Gutman (Gil) Locks, who we have written about before has a very interesting job. He volunteers each day at the Tefilin stand by the Kotel in Jerusalem helping people who have not put on Tefilin, many for years, put on a pair and say a quick prayer. A few times each week, he sends out an image of someone he helped and tells their story. This week among others including an image of locusts at the wall awaiting Passover, he posted an image of an older tourist visiting the old city with his camera and wearing Tefilin at the Kotel.

Gil notes that the man told him, "My Grandfather gave me tefillin for my bar mitzvah, but I never put them on. I still have them in a drawer where I keep old things that I have." He just retired. He worked his entire life for the same company. He married a non-Jewish girl and has only non-Jewish children. He had never put on tefillin before I brought him in, not even the tefillin that his grandfather gave him on his bar mitzvah. He cried when he stood at the Kotel with the tefillin on.

How different his life would have been had his grandfather done more than just give him the tefillin?

"Rav Asi asked, 'Why do little school children begin their Chumash learning with Vayikra (Leviticus which we begin this week) and not with Bereshit (Genesis)? It is because little children are pure and unblemished, and the sacrifices are pure and unblemished. The pure ones begin their learning with the study of the pure.' Midrash Vayikra Rabbah (Parshas Tzav 7:3).

The Rebbe suggested that alternatively, Chumash Vayikra primarily discusses the different karbanot that the Jewish people were required to offer to Hashem. Teaching it to young children imparts a message to both parents and children.

Jewish parents are being told that they must make sacrifices so that their children may succeed in Torah study. They must forego lavish lifestyles to live in a way compatible with the Torah teachings their children are receiving, and they should be prepared to give up luxuries in order to pay tuition fees.

Jewish children must also know from the very beginning that sacrifice and dedication are a prerequisite for success in Torah studies. One cannot just sit back and expect to learn without effort. A Torah student must always bear in mind the words of our Sages (Megillah 6b): "If a person says, 'I have

tried hard and succeeded,' believe him." Only through diligent and assiduous study will one succeed.

Moreover, the youth is being told that throughout life as a Torah observant Jew he may encounter hardship and even persecution. Nevertheless, he should be ready to make sacrifices for Yiddishkeit, and ultimately he will realize that his life will be meaningful and rewarding.

Last night I picked up my son Moses after Mishmar and we went for a bite to eat afterwards. His school had career day where different parents, grandparents and friends came in to talk to the high school students about their careers. Moses told me that he realized from listening to these different people that he had been ignorant with the thought of what it cost to live. And we talked about average salaries and typical expenses. When he realized that sending one's children to Yeshiva could easily add \$100,000 a year to a family budget, he commented on the incredible sacrifice that a Jewish parent must make to cover that cost.

Years back my son Jonah wrote a report which dealt with intermarriage noting that the single greatest obstacle to that path is a Yeshiva education. If we sacrifice for Torah than the Torah protects us.

I was reminded of a story that Rabbi Abittan z'sl would tell from Moreshet Avot.

In the time of Rav Chaim, who founded the famous Volozhin Yeshiva, there was talk among the Jews of Lithuania of three Volozhin Yeshiva students who were all known for their outstanding qualities. One came from a very distinguished family which had produced seven generations of rabbanim; the second had superb manners and displayed beautiful middot - (ethical character traits); and the third had a sharp mind and had been very studious in his Torah learning.

These three students became caught up in the wave of the Berlin haskalah movement (so called "enlightenment," "education" from sekhel "intellect", "mind") which swept the Jewish world. They all left the yeshivah and pursued secular culture. Rav Chaim, their rav, was greatly pained over their actions, cried bitter tears and refused to be consoled.

Rav Chaim's rebbi, the Gr'a, appeared to him in a dream and told him: "So-and-so will the sword of the haskalah devour. The merit of their forefathers will not protect those who have become trapped in heresy, for all of Benei Yisrael have special yichus - lineage, distinguished birth, pedigree, since they are

the sons of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. Neither will good middot stand in the way of punishment, for good middot are not unique to Jews. Yet whoever learned Torah for its own sake once, whoever has tasted the sweetness of Torah, whoever has absorbed the smell of Torah I am certain that the Torah will stand up to protect him and save his soul from the lower pits. The Torah doesn't allow a Jew who has learned it to deny G-d and join another nation."

Many years later, when Rav Chaim inquired as to what had become of his former students, he found out that the first student, the one who had such impressive yichus, had forgotten his lineage and the glory of his family and intermarried; the second student, who was exceptional in his conduct, gave himself over to the wisdom of philosophy and became confused, to the point that he totally abandoned his faith and would expound on nonsensical matters. The third student, the masmid, had done very well in his university studies and his name had been praised far and wide by secular scholars, who sought him out and respected and flattered him. Eventually he was offered a professorship at the royal university. Since such a high position was not ordinarily given to a Jew, he was asked to renounce his faith. He managed to avoid doing this each time he was asked. Finally, the pressure grew stronger, and he requested three days in which to make a decision.

In those three days he relinquished all his honor and fled to Eretz Yisrael. On his way he made a detour to Volozhin to visit his former Rebbe and ask for his blessing.

Rav Chaim was overjoyed to see him and hugged him affectionately. After the student recounted what had happened to him, Rav Chaim asked him, "My son, who saved you from sin?"

"I happened to have passed my old neighborhood late one night," the student answered. "As I walked past a Jewish home, I heard the sound of Torah learning accompanied by a sad melody. I stopped where I was and listened. I imagined that the sounds of sorrow which echoed in my ears were those of the Torah itself, crying over the fact that I had abandoned it and was on the threshold of becoming a traitor. At that moment thoughts of teshuvah arose within me, and that is what saved me."

Rabbi Yisrael Pesach Feinhandler comments that the student who withstood the trial was the one who had toiled in Torah from an early age. We must learn from this to give our children strong, clear guidance when

they are young, so that they will have the strength to withstand the trials that they will inevitably face in their lives.

As we approach Passover when families will be getting together, whether at home or in their travels, let us take the opportunity to really fulfill, VeHigatedta "And you shall tell your child on that day". Let's not just hand them something to hide away in the back of a drawer. Let's instead give them a gift which they will use every day of their life.

Summary of The Weekly Torah Reading:

1st & 2nd & 3rd Aliyot: The instructions for offering a "Oleh" - burnt offering (fully consumed on the Alter) is detailed. This offering could be brought from a bull, or male sheep or goat. The less expensive "Oleh", using a Turtle Dove or common dove, is described. The Mincha, an offering made from baked, fried, or deep fried matzoh type crackers is detailed.

4th Aliya: The Korban Shlomim - the peace offering, brought from male or female cattle, sheep, and goats is described.

5th Aliya: This aliya describes this Korban Chatas - the sin offering. Three unique sin offerings are described:

1. When the High Priest sinned
2. If the King sinned
3. If the entire nation sinned because of a wrong ruling by the Sanhedrin - High Court. Note: A Korban Chatas could only be offered if the sin was unintentional.

6th & 7th Aliyot: The Korban Chatas of a commoner is detailed, as well as the specifics of the Korban Asham - the guilt offering. This Korban was offered in instances where intentional wrong doing was implicated; such as not fulfilling an assumed oath, or doing something questionable without first ascertaining the law. Additionally, a type of Asham was offered in instances of dishonesty and swearing falsely.

Yishayah 43-44

This week's Haftorah is from Yishayah, chapters 43 and 44. The Navi contrasts the idol worshipper with Yakov, the servant of G-d. By choosing Israel to be G-d's nation, we were afforded the unique opportunity of serving G-d in His own home.

The Haftorah begins with G-d's declaration that we were created for the purpose of proclaiming His

praises and mastery. The tools for doing so is nature itself in accordance with G-d's rules and dictates. After describing the foolishness of those who would replace Him with images fashioned by human hands, G-d reaffirms our selection as His Chosen People. He guarantees that so long as we return to the prescribed service of the Temple, we will be forgiven and redeemed.

EXCERPTS FROM THE JERSEY SHORE TORAH BULLETIN

“When a ruler sins and commits one from among all the commandments of Hashem.” (Vayikra 4:22)

The all-important laws of korbanot begin in this week's perashah. One korban is a hatat. This is a korban that is brought by someone who sins by mistake. There are different offerings for different types of people. One very interesting one is if a king (nasi) sins, he also must bring a korban. The above-quoted pasuk says, “When a ruler sins.” The word “when” in Hebrew is asher (אֲשֶׁר). Rashi cites a Midrash that associates the word “asher” with the word “ashrei,” praiseworthy, for “praiseworthy is the generation whose leader pays attention and seeks atonement for his iniquities.”

We are dealing with a person who is at the height of power. And yet, with all of his power, this king is ready to humiliate himself and come to the Bet Hamikdash and admit to a regular kohen who happens to be working there that day, that he has sinned. That is a very hard thing to do. If a nasi can rise above all societal and political pressure and not hide his mistakes, the generation he leads is indeed lucky.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein asks the following question. If it is so hard for a king (nasi) to be G-d-fearing and repentant on his sins, why do we need to have a king? You must conclude, he says, that Jewish society without a king is worse than having a king, who wants to rule truthfully but sometimes stumbles and doesn't want to admit it because of his ego. Even though a bad situation can arise as a result, but for most of the people they will benefit from having a king. From this we learn that when one has a choice of two paths in how to act, whether for the nation or for private individuals, and both paths have shortcomings, one should choose the path of lesser evil if no perfect path is available. This lesson we can learn from the holy Torah. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

“When a man among you brings an offering” (Vayikra 1:2)

When the Jews were instructed on the laws of sacrifices, they were told that even a non-Jew could bring a korban, sacrifice. The only difference between his korban and ours is that we are allowed to bring burnt offerings and peace offerings, shelamim and olah, whereas the gentile may only bring a burnt offering, olah. Indeed, even if he says he's sacrificing a peace offering, it can only be brought as an olah, burnt offering.

The lesson in this is that the non-Jewish view of religion differs from ours drastically. They understand religion to be only to G-d, only in a holy endeavor, not in the normal course of everyday life. They feel if one wants to be close to G-d, he cannot engage in the everyday pursuits such as eating or having children. Therefore, their sacrifice is a burnt offering, only for the altar. We, however, believe that one must sanctify his everyday living in line with Hashem. We eat and we make a berachah. We get reward because it's a misvah. In business we perform many commandments. Our duty is to take the mundane and make it spiritual. Therefore we can bring a shelamim, peace offering, where part goes on the altar and part is eaten by man. Our mission is to live life the fullest in the ways of Hashem. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

SETBACKS

“How are you?” asked the caring neighbor.

“I had a bad day,” replied the distraught businessman.

It happens to everyone. Sometimes you just have a day when everything seems to be working against your success. Your reaction to such a day is crucial to your overall performance.

Did you ever watch athletes? The best of them are a rare breed. In the heat of the game they remain focused on their goal. It may be called the goal line, home plate, or the net – but no matter what it is called, they know where they are aiming. Next time you watch a sporting event, focus on a player who has just suffered a setback. Maybe he was tackled; maybe he struck out; maybe he was tripped. What does he do? Cry? Quit? No! He picks himself up, dusts himself off, and runs to get back into the game. The next moment he is standing confidently, ready to fight for victory.

It is the same in life. In Michah (7:8) it is written: “My enemies do not rejoice. If I fall, I stand up; if I am in the dark, Hashem provides me with light.”

It is inevitable that you will sometimes fail to accomplish what you set out to do. Don't let it get you down. Don't focus on the temporary failure – focus on your ultimate goal. Look ahead for a window of opportunity rather than back at a door that slammed shut in your face. Such a change in direction will get you to the goal line of victory in the game of life. (One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR
**Visit DailyHalacha.com, DailyGemara.com,
MishnaBerura.com, LearnTorah.com**

“An Animal Carcass is Better Than Him”
 Parashat Vayikra begins with G-d calling to Moshe, inviting him into the Mishkan. Although Moshe had spent forty days together with G-d in the heavens, and oversaw the entire project of constructing the Mishkan, he did not enter the sacred site without being summoned by G-d. In his extraordinary humility and impeccable sense of propriety, Moshe understood that despite his unparalleled stature, it would be inappropriate for him to enter the Mishkan before being summoned by the Almighty.

The Midrash notes Moshe's conduct and the vital lesson of proper Middot that it teaches us, and then comments, “Any Torah scholar who does not have Da'at [knowledge] – an animal carcass is better than him.” What exactly do the Sages mean by the term “Da'at,” and why did they employ such drastic language, stating that a scholar without Da'at is on a lower level than an animal carcass?

Rav Yishak Hutner (1906-1980) explained the term Da'at by noting the opposite ways in which it is used. The Torah in Parashat Bereshit uses this term in reference to intimacy – “Ve'ha'adam Yada Et Hava Ishto” (“Adam 'knew' his wife Hava”), indicating that it refers to closeness. However, on Mosa'eh Shabbat, we insert the paragraph of Habdala in the Beracha of “Ata Honen,” which speaks about wisdom, because we need wisdom to distinguish between sacred and mundane. Here, “Da'at” refers to distinction and separating between two ideas. Rav Hutner thus explained that “Da'at” means the ability to determine the appropriate time to draw close and the appropriate time to keep a distance. Moshe understood that on this occasion, after the construction of the Mishkan, it was appropriate for him to keep a distance, to remain outside the Mishkan, until he was called. This was indeed “Da'at,” a reflection of Moshe's refined character and ability to discern the appropriate mode of conduct in any given context.

The Midrash comments that a Torah scholar without “Da'at” is worse than a “Nebela” – the carcass of an animal that died without proper Shehita. Rav Hutner explains that such an animal is forbidden for consumption, yet, interestingly enough, its hide may be used as parchment for a Sefer Torah. As long as the animal belongs to a kosher species, its skin may be used for a Sefer Torah, even though it did not undergo proper Shehita and thus its meat is forbidden for consumption. It turns out, then, that even a Nebela has the possibility of being elevated. Although the meat is forbidden and is considered Tameh (ritually impure), it nevertheless can be raised to great heights of Kedusha by being turned into a Sefer Torah.

And in this sense, a Nebela is on a higher level than a Torah scholar without “Da'at.” If one studied Torah and amassed significant amounts of knowledge, but the Torah did not affect his character as it is meant to do, and he does not become elevated, refined, more ethical and more courteous through his learning, than he is worse than a Nebela. He has shown that he is incapable of elevation, that even through serious engagement in holiness he cannot be changed and uplifted.

We should try to be, at very least, no worse than the Nebela, and display the openness and ability to be raised and inspired by the Torah we learn, and ensure that it leads us to higher ethical and moral standards and to become more refined, noble people.

Rabbi Wein

The problem with common sense is that it is none too common. In fact, one could characterize it as a rare commodity or even as an endangered species. Does not common sense tell us that Shas, United Torah Judaism and Bayit Hayehudi, all of whom proclaim their loyalty to Torah, should form one bloc in order to influence the country and its government?

Yet we are witness to terribly vicious and damaging infighting between them that can only weaken their influence and erode the respect for Torah amongst the general population. Bayit Hayehudi needlessly excluded Shas and United Torah Judaism when forming its coalition cabinet. In turn, parts of the Haredi sector publicly declare they will boycott products from the settlements in Judea and Samaria.

Europe, are you listening? Is there a greater insanity than this? Self-inflicted wounds go deepest and are the most painful of all blows. Of course Bayit Hayehudi is exacting revenge for the passive attitude (and sometimes active support of the Rabin and

Sharon governments) during the debates on the Oslo Accords and later with regard to the destruction of Gush Katif.

Anger against the Haredim may be justified for their past mistakes and policies but common sense should be able to overcome inner anger. Tearing the religious world in Israel asunder will accomplish little for any of the antagonists and nothing positive for the society as a whole. Believing one's own political rhetoric is a sign of the lack of common sense.

Common sense also tells us that sanctions and diplomacy are not likely to deter Iran from pursuing its decades-long goal of possessing nuclear weapons of mass destruction. For over a half century the world has tried to control North Korea in this fashion. As the current situation indicates, these policies have in no way deterred the mad leaders of North Korea from pursuing their risky game of atomic chicken.

Common sense and history, past and recent, has taught us that megalomaniac dictators can never really be appeased. Sooner or later they have to be confronted and usually the sooner is better. Common sense teaches us that there is good and evil, right and wrong, aggressor and victims in the world. *Common sense excludes concepts of moral equivalency and the thinking that everybody is okay no matter what.*

Common sense impels nations and individuals to defend themselves against unwarranted assaults and terror. Common sense prohibits relinquishing the existing tangible assets for intangible promises of the future. Munich and Oslo are pretty good examples of the lack of common sense. Churchill famously said that at Munich, Chamberlain sacrificed honor in order to avoid war - but that he then had both dishonor and war. And so it was.

The reason that common sense is so often ignored is that it usually leaves one with a painful decision to make. Human nature abhors having to make painful decisions. Hence, common sense is relegated to one's subconscious and reappears as regret and attempted repentance.

It is interesting to note that Judaism and Jewish tradition placed great emphasis on common sense. The two books of the Bible authored by King Solomon, Kohelet and Mishlei, are books of common sense – with their universal qualities and practical views of life and the world. My teachers in the yeshiva would often refute some ingenious answer that I would come up with to answer a difficult Talmudic conundrum by simply saying that it did not

fit the common sense of the subject under discussion.

Basically they taught that if it does not make sense then it is not Torah true. In Judaism, faith and the unknown is balanced by logic and good common sense. Even rigorous scholarship has to be tempered by common sense. In Mishlei, King Solomon's main object of scorn is not so much the sinner – for who does not sin at some point of life – but the fool, the one who lacks common sense.

In King Solomon's view, as expressed in this immortal book, the lack of common sense will inevitably lead to profound error and eventual disaster. No one sets out to make disastrous errors or foolish judgments. Yet if one's thought processes are not distilled through the instinctive common sense that exists within all of us, grave mistakes of judgment will continually plague us. Judaism believes in a collective common sense in society as a whole. "See what the people think" is a common refrain in the Talmud, We should strive to make common sense more common in our daily personal and national life.

**Sir Jonathan Sacks
Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations
of the Commonwealth**

The third book of the Torah is known in English as "Leviticus", a word deriving from Greek and Latin, meaning, "pertaining to the Levites". This reflects the fact that in Judaism the priests - descendants of Aaron - were from the tribe of Levi, and that the ancient rabbinic name for the book was Torat Cohanim, "the law of the priests". It is an appropriate title. Whereas Shemot and Bamidbar are shot through with narrative, the book between them is largely about sacrifices and the rituals associated, first with the Tabernacle and later with the Temple in Jerusalem. It is, as the name Torat Cohanim implies, about the priests and their function as guardians of the sacred.

By contrast, the traditional name Vayikra, "And He called", seems merely accidental. Vayikra just happens to be the first word of the book, and there is no connection between it and the subjects with which it deals. The truth, I will argue here, is otherwise. There is a deep connection between the word Vayikra and the underlying message of the book as a whole.

To understand this we must note that there is something unusual about the way the word appears in a sefer Torah. Its last letter, an aleph, is written

small - almost as if it barely existed. The standard-size letters spell out the word vayikar, meaning, "he encountered, he chanced upon." Unlike vayikra, which refers to a call, a summons, a meeting by request, vayikar suggests an accidental meeting, a mere happening.

With their sensitivity to nuance, the sages noted the difference between the call to Moses with which the book begins, and G-d's appearance to the pagan prophet Bilaam. This is how the midrash puts it:

What is the difference between the prophets of Israel and the prophets of the pagan nations of the world? . . . R. Hama ben Hanina said: The Holy One blessed be He reveals himself to the pagan nations by an incomplete form of address, as it is said, "And the Lord appeared to Bilaam", whereas to the prophets of Israel He appears in a complete form of address, as it is said, "And He called to Moses."

Rashi is more explicit:

All [G-d's] communications [to Moses], whether they use the words "speak" or "say" or "command" were preceded by a call [keri'ah] which is a term of endearment, used by the angels when they address one another, as it is said "And one called to the other" [vekara zeh el zeh, Isaiah 6:3). However, to the prophets of the nations of the world, His appearance is described by an expression signifying a casual encounter and uncleanness, as it says, "And the Lord appeared to Bilaam."

The Baal HaTurim goes one stage further, commenting on the small aleph:

Moses was both great and humble, and wanted only to write Vayikar, signifying "chance", as if the Holy One blessed be He appeared to him only in a dream, as it says of Bilaam [vayikar, without an aleph] - suggesting that G-d appeared to him by mere chance. However, G-d told him to write the word with an aleph. Moses then said to Him, because of his extreme humility, that he would only write an aleph that was smaller than the other alephs in the Torah, and he did indeed write it small.

Something of great significance is being hinted at here, but before taking it further, let us turn to the end of the book. Just before the end, in the sedra of Bechukotai, there occurs one of the two most terrifying passages in the Torah. It is known as the tokhachah (the other appears in Devarim 28), and it details the terrible fate that will befall the Jewish people if it fails to keep its covenant with G-d:

I will bring such insecurity upon those of you who survive in your enemies' land that the sound of a driven leaf will make them flee from the sword. They will fall with no one chasing them . . . The land of your enemies will consume you. (26: 36-38)

Yet despite the shocking nature of the forewarning, the passage ends with a note of consolation:

I will remember My covenant with Jacob, as well as My covenant with Isaac and My covenant with Abraham. I will remember the land . . . Even when they are in their enemies' land, I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking My covenant with them. I am the Lord their G-d. But for their sake I will remember the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their G-d, I am the Lord. (26: 42, 44)

The key-word of the passage is the word kerī. It appears exactly seven times in the tokhachah - a sure sign of significance. Here are two of them by way of example:

"If in spite of this you still do not listen to Me but continue to be hostile towards Me, then in My anger I will be hostile towards you, and I myself will punish you seven times for your sins." (26: 27-28) What does the word kerī mean? I have translated it here as "hostile". There are other suggestions. The Targum reads it as "harden yourselves", Rashbam as "refuse", Ibn Ezra as "overconfident", Saadia as "rebellious".

However, Rambam gives it a completely different interpretation, and does so in a halakic context:

A positive scriptural command prescribes prayer and the sounding of the alarm with trumpets whenever trouble befalls the community. For when Scripture says, "Against the adversary that oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets" the meaning is: Cry out in prayer and sound an alarm . . . This is one of the paths to repentance, for when the community cries out in prayer and sounds an alarm when threatened by trouble, everyone realises that evil has come on them as a result of their own wrongdoing . . . and that repentance will cause the trouble to be removed.

If, however, the people do not cry out in prayer and do not sound an alarm but merely say that it is the way of the world for such a thing to happen to them, and that their trouble is a matter of pure chance, they have chosen a cruel path which will cause them to continue in their wrongdoing, and thus bring

additional troubles on them. For when Scripture says, "If you continue to be kerī towards Me, then in My anger I will be kerī towards you", it means: If, when I bring trouble upon you in order to cause you to repent, you say that the trouble is purely accidental, then I will add to your trouble the anger of being-left-to-chance. (Mishneh Torah, Taaniyot, 1:1-3)

Rambam understands kerī to be related to the word mikreh, meaning "chance". The curses, in his interpretation, are not Divine retribution as such. It will not be G-d who makes Israel suffer: it will be other human beings. What will happen is simply that G-d will withdraw His protection. Israel will have to face the world alone, without the sheltering presence of G-d. This, for Rambam, is simple, inescapable measure-for-measure (middah kenegged middah). If Israel believe in Divine providence, they will be blessed by Divine providence. If they see history as mere chance - what Joseph Heller, author of Catch-22, called "a trashbag of random coincidences blown open by the wind" - then indeed they will be left to chance. Being a small, vulnerable nation, chance will not be kind to them.

We are now in a position to understand the remarkable proposition linking the beginning of Vayikra to the end - and one of the most profound of all spiritual truths. The difference between mikra and mikreh - between history as G-d's call and history as one event after another with no underlying purpose or meaning - is, in the Hebrew language, almost imperceptible. The words sound the same. The only difference is that the former has an aleph while the latter does not (the significance of the aleph is obvious: the first letter of the alphabet, the first letter of the Ten Commandments, the "I" of G-d).

The letter aleph is almost inaudible. Its appearance in a sefer Torah at the beginning of Vayikra (the "small aleph") is almost invisible. Do not expect - the Torah is intimating - that the presence of G-d in history will always be as clear and unambiguous as it was during the exodus from Egypt and the division of the Red Sea. For much of the time it will depend on your own sensitivity. For those who look, it will be visible. For those who listen, it can be heard. But first you have to look and listen. If you choose not to see or hear, then Vayikra will become Vayikar. The call will be inaudible. History will seem mere chance. There is nothing incoherent about such an idea. Those who believe it will have much to justify it. Indeed, says G-d in the tokhachah: if you believe that history is chance, then it will become so. But in truth it is not so. The history of the Jewish people - as even non-Jews such as Pascal, Rousseau and Tolstoy eloquently stated - testifies to the presence of G-d in their midst. Only

thus could such a small, vulnerable, relatively powerless people survive, and still say today - after the Holocaust - am yisrael chai, the Jewish people lives. And just as Jewish history is not mere chance, so it is no mere coincidence that the first word of the central book of the Torah is Vayikra, "And He called". To be a Jew is to believe that what happens to us as a people is G-d's call to us - to become "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL

The most basic idea of Passover is that Hashem took Us, His Nation, out of 210 years of bondage in Egypt. As the pasuk states "Asher hotzetecha me'erezt mitzrayim".

However the pasuk continues "lehiyot lachem Lelokim", which means, in order that you will serve Me. From this we see clearly that Hashem took us out of slavery from Egypt in order to serve Him.

The primary lesson and yesod (foundation) which manifests itself on Pesach and on which our Torah is built is Gratitude, Hakarat Hatov. Recognizing and acknowledging all of the tremendous gifts of kindness that Hashem is bestowing upon us and our families.

This underlying principle is realized right in the first of the Ten Commandments which was heard by our Nation directly from Hashem. "I am Hashem your G-d that took you forth from Egypt from the house of slaves."

The question is asked, why didn't Hashem introduce Himself as "the Creator of heaven and earth"? Because the Bnei Yisrael did not witness the Creation of the Universe. We did experience slavery and brutal treatment at the hands of the Egyptians for 210 years. The scars were still fresh on our backs and on our children.

It is for these reasons, and in order to teach us the great principle of feeling Gratitude to the Benefactor who has redeemed us, that Hashem connects the time of the birth of our Nation and our redemption from Egypt to the First Commandment.

Hakarat Hatov, Gratitude, is at the root of all true service of Hashem.

Just keep in mind that your body, your mind, your parents & children & wife, all of your possessions, the ability to make a living and your soul/life have all been given to you as a gift from Hashem. For the purpose of recognizing these special gifts, scrutinizing them as you would any diamond. Now you are ready to Thank Hashem every day for 120 years in many ways, the minimum being through observance of His Torah & Mitzvot.