

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

PARASHAT VAYIKRA/ZACHOR

Haftarah: Shemuel I 15:1-34

MARCH 18-19, 2016 9 ADAR II 5776

DEDICATIONS: Happy Birthday Ary

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Editors Notes

NOTE: As we approach Purim, one of the misvot is Matanot La'Evyonim. On asking how much one should give, The Rabbis tell us that one who is G-d-fearing should distribute Matanot La'Evyonim generously and joyfully and one's reward will be great indeed. Although the letter of the law dictates that there is no set amount for this gift and one fulfills his obligation by giving even a few cents per pauper, nevertheless, it is preferable to spend more on Matanot La'Evyonim than on the Purim feast or Mishloach Manot. One should preferably give enough so that the pauper will be able to make use of the sum for the Purim feast. The definition of Evyon is someone who really doesn't know where the next meal will be coming from. If you would like us to fulfill this misvah for you, please send us a check or go on line to: <http://www.benaiasher.org/donate-online/> and specify Matanot LaEvyonim.

Vayikra - An Aleph, small in stature but with huge meaning and presence!

This week's portion begins with the words Vayikra El Moshe, "And He called to Moses". We completed the book of Shemot last week which began with us as slaves in Egypt. We recalled the miracles and plagues in Egypt and the Exodus. We were reminded of the splitting of the sea and felt as we were there when the commandments were given at Sinai. We saw the tablets smashed in front of the Golden Calf. We awaited Moses' second return from Sinai with the second tablets. And when Moses announced the building of the Mishkan we felt as if we were contributing. We watched the craftsmen go to work and in ten weeks saw the ark, the alters, the menorah and the table along with the mishkan itself.

Now Hashem is calling Moses to enter the Tabernacle for the first time.

If one were to open the Torah scroll and look at where the book of Vayikra begins, one would notice that the first word is written in a strange fashion. The final letter of the word Vayikra is written with a small aleph. The Rabbis ask why.

The Baal HaTurim, in his commentary to this verse, states that Moses wrote this aleph smaller than the other letters, out of humility. Moses wished to use the word, Vayikar – and it happened to minimize his own importance especially in relation to other prophets. Hashem would not allow it. So a sort of compromise was reached. Hashem insisted on the word Vayikra, but Moses reduced the size of the alef.

Moses was singled out among all of the Children of Israel and chosen to directly communicate with G-d, yet always wanted to minimize his own importance. If one were to write a three word epitaph for Moses, one might chose to write, G-d's Humble Servant. Despite the fact that Moses was great in prophecy, Torah and wisdom, the trait that G-d found fit to mention in the Torah was his humility. The Torah itself testifies to the fact that Moses was the most humble person on the face of the earth.

We received a great deal of feedback on last week's newsletter and the article about Mickey Kairey. So many recalled their own memories of Mickey and a number of you told me that Mickey and my dad were cut from the same cloth. Both were humble servants. And it's true. I've often said that my dad was the most humble person I knew. Mickey was like that. He never took credit and always acknowledged what other people did. When complimented, he said that Hashem allows all of us to do something good.

One person told me that although Mickey and my dad were very similar in their humility and willingness to serve the community, their greatest skill was a skill so lacking today, it was the ability to listen. I was telling my wife about Mickey coming to collect the money from the a'pah. She asked what an a'pah was. It's the Sedaka Box or the pushka. I imagine the word a'pah is related to the word kuppah or communal charity box.

I recalled a lesson he taught me that I would never forget. I was perhaps seven years old. Mickey came up the steps and sat in the dining room. We asked

him if he wanted something to eat or drink. And I brought the box along with a small baggie. I was proud as the box was completely full and we had some dollars in the baggie as well. He lifted the full box and then opened his valise. He took out an empty box and handed it to me. He told me to shake the empty box and asked me what I heard. I shook it and it was silent. He asked me what other box is silent. I wasn't sure. He put three coins into the empty box and told me to shake it again. I did and it made lots of noise. Then he handed me back the full box and told me to shake it. I tried and there was no noise at all because it was so full.

He explained, "Pal, when someone knows nothing, they have nothing to say, like the empty box. And when someone really knows everything, they wait and listen and weigh what they hear and then they speak cautiously. But when someone knows a bit, he wants everyone to know that he knows something and makes lots of noise as if he knows everything. Three pennies in the box aren't worth much, but they make lots of noise, while the boxed filled with bills and coins, is silent." He told me that my father and grandfather and my uncle Nouri were men who said little and did much and that was the best path in life to take. And then he joked that he probably talked too much and could learn from the Bibis.

And finally there was the man who told me that the skill my dad and Mickey shared was based on the Mishna in Ethics of Our Fathers. Heveh Mekabel Et Kol Adam Besever Panim Yafot which loosely translates as, "Greet each person with a pleasant demeanor". There are certain people who walk into a room and make people smile. You are always happy to greet them. And they make everyone feel great. I told stories about my dad with everyone from the corner coffee vendor to the parking lot attendant and this was true for Mickey all the more so.

But when it came to Mickey, one had to think this was an anomaly.

Over the years I often heard stories about a man named Arama. As I understand, Arama was responsible for the Chevra Kaddisha during the early years of the Syrian Community. The Chevra is a bit different among Syrians. In many communities people buy plots in cemeteries. But by the Syrians, after 120, we get sent to Staten Island where the Chevra takes care of everything. So Mr. Arama took care of the bodies after a person passed away handling the purification and everything through the burial. The man was truly righteous living a life of chesed shel emet, true kindness for the dead who could never repay the favor. People can be

appreciative, but they are often superstitious. And so when Arama came down the block, people would cross to the other side. The superstitions were so bad that people were afraid to have Arama in their homes, to shake his hand and to speak with him. I hear the stories and want to cry for Arama.

Arama had a student. And his student took over the Chevra after him with all his responsibilities of taking care of those who passed, purifying their bodies and arranging for their burials. The student too might have also taken on the moniker of Dr. Death and with it, all the associated superstitions as foolish as they are. But when the student walked down the street, you crossed to greet him if you were on the opposite side of the street. You not only shook his hand, you hugged him, and stood still while he rubbed your back and massaged your shoulders. And you went out of your way to speak with this student because he always made you laugh. The student of Arama was Mickey and thus the anomaly.

And now you can begin to understand how special he was. Mickey was like that small Aleph. Small in stature perhaps, but huge in meaning and presence.

The secret of men like Mickey and my dad was their humility, service and how they received everyone with a kind face. We have lots to live up to.

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

Rabbi Shimon Cohen Z'L – A Legend of Legends

"I am sure he was the Gadol Hador in Ahavat Yisrael".

"He loved me like a father".

"The entire Yahadut of my family is only thanks to him".

These quotes are only a sampling of hundreds and hundreds of similar expressions of love and respect that the Flatbush Syrian community had for its late departed Rabbi and mentor of half a century, Rabbi Shimon Cohen zichrono livracha.

As we reach the end of the shivah period for our dear Rabbi, it behooves us to take the time and reflect on the enormous contribution that he made, and the critical role that he played in the spiritual renaissance of the community, and in the lives of his students. In sheer numbers it has been estimated that he had taught over five thousand students at Magen David Yeshivah. Of those, and aside from those, many thousands had also attended his Shabbat minyan at Cong. Bet Torah. The incredible chas hivut hatorah that he imparted in his amazing

sweet and encouraging way, influenced the overwhelming majority of these students to go on to live lives of Torah-true Jews. The peripheral effect that this had on the many families of these students is staggering, and boggles the mind as to the sheer numbers of lives the Rabbi impacted in his time with us. One woman at the Shivah exclaimed, "My husband learned by him. My son learned by him, and I was looking forward for my grandson to learn by him." A statement which holds true for many families. Rav Yisrael Salanter once explained that goal of a yeshivah is to build the self esteem of the students. Rabbi Cohen was the paragon of this virtue, as he went to endless lengths to connect to the essence of each child, bringing out their unique talents. Future teachers would come to observe his classes in order to discover the secret to his success. One fascinating story was shared at the Arayat by a former student-turned d-assistant-Rabbi in Rabbi Cohens minyan at Beit Torah.

He described the beginning of Rabbi Cohens career, which began by substituting for a particularly difficult class in Magen David. This boy was actually the "leader" of the troublemakers in that group, and resolved to make sure that the new sub would quickly move on. However after two weeks with Rabbi Cohen, the boys begrudgingly realized that they were enjoying his class and participating in the activities. In fact, the mother of this leader boy hired Rabbi Cohen to learn with him after class, after seeing the impact he had made on her sons class. At first this seemed like too much to handle. Rabbi Cohen as a Rabbi. Rabbi Cohen as a tutor. But after a somewhat bumpy start, Rabbi Cohen came up with the suggestion that for every ten minutes of tutoring, he would have to watch the boy play basketball for five minutes. And this is what they did. However this arrangement lasted for a grand total of three days. After that the boy mentioned that he feels that he can do twenty minute stretches as well. Then thirty, then forty, until eventually he did the entire hour in one go. This same boy would periodically come pray in the youth minyan at Bet Torah, and he would spend sometime outside talking. One Shabbat he noticed Rabbi Cohen coming his way, and braced himself for the encounter. "Rabbi", he said, "what do you want from me? I am coming", "Oh no!" said Rabbi Cohen, "I want you to become my assistant. I need you to get the guys to come and pray". Who? me? "And", the student continued, "for the next thirty years I was Rabbi Cohens assistant and I loved him with all my heart."

Rabbi Eli Mansour, a former student of Rabbi, described how Rabbi Cohen would have them read pesukim from the Torah, as he would stand behind

them massaging their backs in encouragement to build their self confidence. If they felt uncomfortable, he would whisper in their ear "continue you are doing great". This memory stayed with the boys for their entire life. It is no wonder that every student felt that he was Rabbi Cohens closest friend.

Many times he would tell the family to begin the Seudat Shabbat without him on Shabbat morning, since inevitably He would stop to greet every person along the way with his signature smile, and caring words. He would attend and stand under the Chuppah virtually at every wedding at the request of the couple, as each talmid was precious to him as his own child. His sense of self expanded to include all students no matter how different. In the words of his brother, Harav Gavriel Shlit"a, a dayan in Los Angeles, Rabbi Cohen viewed everyone as tcheilet, a beautiful color likened to the ocean blue. Although an ocean contains mud and stones underneath, nevertheless when viewed from afar, one only sees the beautiful blue waves, so too Rabbi Cohen only saw the good in people, a talent he honed to perfection.

The family itself was uniquely impacted by Rabbi and Mrs Batsheva Cohen's generosity, when -although newly married- they took on themselves to support all his siblings who had arrived on these shores. In what has become a family legend, they recall Rabbi Cohen's efforts to bring them over. Being a newcomer himself, he had no way to pay for passage for his siblings to come from Morocco. Someone suggested he approach the Satmar Rebbe, Rabbeinu Yoel Teitelbaum z"l. A shy young man by nature, and knowing the Rebbe only spoke Yiddish, young Shimon Cohen tried communicating in Hebrew. The Gabbai immediately censured him for addressing the Satmar Rav in "Ivrit" [a zionistic language in the opinion of the Rebbe], upon which the Rebbe himself interjected that in fact this was "Lashon Kodesh", as spoken by the Sefardim in their home country, as opposed to "Ivrit", an adapted language.

After explaining his desire to bring his siblings over, and offer them a Torah education, the Rebbe opened his drawer and used both hands to remove a huge pile of money and place it on the table. The Rebbe inquired if it was enough, and young Shimon Cohen, who had never seen so much money in his life, concurred that it definitely seemed sufficient. This eventually helped bring the family over, and provide for their needs as they began a new life on this continent.

After such an amazing life, one can begin to comprehend the moving story shared at the levaya, a

story of incredible sensitivity to the feelings of others, even a small child. One Sukkot Rabbi Cohen noticed a young boy holding an etrog and crying bitterly. Upon asking why he was crying, the boy explained that his pitom had broken off, something which can invalidate the etrog. Rabbi Cohen told him not to cry and promised him to bring him a kosher etrog the following day. The boy insisted and asked if it was possible to get it that night, to which Rabbi Cohen sensitively replied that he would try to bring him one that same night, something he set out to do. As Rabbi Cohen walked to the house of the boy he felt strong pains in his heart, and was forced to constantly sit down along the way, until he reached the boys home. Later that night Rabbi Cohen successfully underwent triple bypass surgery on his heart. After learning of its success he shared his conviction that it was only in the merit of the kindness he did with the young boy. The Etrog symbolizes the heart, and therefore Hakadosh Baruch Hu granted him a successful surgery on the heart.

As Rabbi Cohen lay in the nursing facility for the last two years of his life, hundreds of relatives, students and friends came to visit and to pray. Notebooks were kept at his bedside in which countless letters were penned. These emotion laden entries contain the yearning of the many students seeking their Rabbi again. Of the many children who seek their father again.

May Hakadosh Baruch Hu grant us in His great mercy, that Rabbi Shimon Cohen, our great Rabbi, teacher, father and friend, be returned to us one day soon in Tehiyat Hametim, along with the many generations of tzadikim among whom he has been laid to rest, and whose great work he has been instrumental in perpetuating.

Yehi Zichro Baruch.

Written by his brother Rabbi G Cohen and his nephew Rabbi Eliezer Cohen

Summary of the Perasha

Vayikra - Laws of various korbanot and how they are brought

This week we begin Sefer Vayikra. The sefer in general deals with the Kohanim and their service in the mishkan. Within the first half of Sefer Vayikra the first 2 parshiot deal with korbanot. The end of the 2nd parasha and the 3rd parasha deal with the inauguration of the mishkan and the 4th and 5th parasha deal with tsaraat.

1- Details regarding Korban Olah (when brought with cattle and with a sheep). Details include samach,

slaughtering, throwing blood, skinning, cutting, washing, cooking.

2- Korban Olah (when brought with a bird), Korban Mincha (the solet, oven baked, and pan baked meal offerings)

3- Korban Mincha (the deep pan offering). Korban minchat ha'omer.

4- Korban Shelamim (when brought with cattle, sheep, or a goat)

5- Korban Hatat (details depending on if the sinner is the Kohen gadol, a congregation, or ruler)

6- Korban Hatat (for a regular person who sinned), Korban Oleh Ve'yored

7- Korban Asham

FROM THE JERSEY SHORE NEWSLETTER

"That [Amalek] happened upon you on the way." (Debarim 25:18)

This week, the week before Purim, we read Parashat Zachor . On the above pasuk, Rashi comments that the word "karcha" derives from the root meaning "mikreh" – chance – indicating that Amalek's attack was totally unexpected, a surprise attack. Besides this, there is a destructive concept that things just happen by chance. When we believe that events in our daily lives are coincidental, we are entertaining a philosophy foreign to the Torah.

Often we experience an event, a particular person "coincidentally" showing up after many years; a refund check arriving in the mail in the precise amount of a recent unexpected bill. When we think this is coincidental, this is the philosophy of Amalek, and we have not done the misvah of eradicating Amalek. We believe that everything is under direct control of Hashem.

The Purim story is full of instances of Divine Providence. In the Megillah, Ahashverosh couldn't sleep. They then read to him that Mordechai had saved his life and that no reward was given to him. Haman just "happened" to appear in the king's chamber ready to seek permission to hang Mordechai. Rabbi Ephraim Shapiro explains, had Haman come earlier that night before the king read about Mordechai, Haman's plan would have been approved. Had Haman come later after Mordechai had been rewarded, the king might have been persuaded to approve Haman's plot. But, Hashem made it happen that he came at that precise moment. Not only was Haman humiliated, but the gallows that Haman prepared for Mordechai became the instrument of Haman's death.

Rabbi Ephraim Shapiro tells an amazing story of Divine Providence. In Hollywood, Florida, lived an extraordinary couple, Dr. & Mrs. Rosenblatt. The doctor is a renowned oncologist. One day the doctor's wife was driving on the highway. She

noticed a car on her side that had a for sale sign with a phone number. She doesn't know why she did this, but she dialed the number. She didn't need a used car. They both had new cars. She asked him why he was selling his car. He said they are from out of town and his wife is sick and he doesn't have enough money. He was told that the doctor that could help her is Dr. Rosenblatt. So he has to sell his car for cash to help pay the doctor. She was shocked. She told him that the doctor is her husband, and he doesn't have to sell his car. He should pick up his wife and she will call her husband. He will take her for a patient and treat her immediately. And that's exactly what happened.

Our daily lives are full of these instances. May we always be cognizant of the Divine Providence of Hashem in our lives. Shabbat Shalom. Rabbi Reuven Semah

The Gemara tells us that the Jewish people accepted the Torah under duress in the wilderness, and at the time of Purim, they re-accepted it willingly. How do we reconcile this with the fact that the Jews said, "gnabu vagb - We will do and we will listen," which symbolizes an acceptance of the Torah which is purely voluntary, without coercion?

The Midrash answers by saying that indeed the Jewish nation willingly accepted the Written Torah, but the Oral Torah was not accepted wholeheartedly until the story of Purim. The reason is fairly simple. If it says in the Torah that I have to do this, fine, that's the law. But if the Rabbis tell me this is good for me and this isn't, this I may do and this I cannot do, this is difficult to swallow. Who says the Sages know everything? Who says that I have to follow them? When the Jewish people saw that Mordechai was right for not bowing down to Haman, and he was also right when he said not to go to the party years back, they realized that Hashem was teaching a fundamental lesson. The salvation came through Mordechai and Esther because they are our spiritual leaders and listening to them is listening to Hashem. As we celebrate Purim, let us rededicate ourselves to the acceptance of the Oral Law and the guidance of our Sages so that we may merit salvation and redemption. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

DO UNTO OTHERS

Pride can prevent you from following the correct course of action. Forgiving someone who hurt you financially or emotionally is often prevented by ego. "Why should I give in to him? He was the one who hurt me!"

Some people may own up to a wrong and request forgiveness, and it still might be difficult to grant it. Then there are others who, although they are to blame, will not apologize because it will hurt

their pride, or because they simply lack the courage to do so. In such instances, you should initiate the conversation.

Our Sages teach that whoever forgives is forgiven. Keep that in mind when you get the urge to be tough in order to "prove" that you are right. Also, according to the Heavenly scales, the harder something is to accomplish, the more Heavenly reward is dished out for success. Since "giving in" is one of the most difficult human accomplishments – because it is contrary to nature – the reward is immeasurable.

When you get the urge to harden your position – because, of course, you are right! – change your course and give in! It only hurts for a minute, but it will get you forgiveness that you might not deserve.

Do good unto others, and the good you do will be done unto you. (One Minute With Yourself – Rabbi Raymond Beyda)

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

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Positive Peer Pressure

The Torah in Parashat Vayikra speaks about the procedure for offering sacrifices. Describing a person who brings a sacrifice to the Temple, the Torah uses the term "Yakrib Oto" ("He shall offer it" – 1:3), which Rashi (Rabbi Shelomo Yishaki of Troyes, France, 1040-1105) explains to mean that he brings it even against his will. Meaning, if a person is required to bring a sacrifice, but he refuses, the leaders force him to bring the offering. Yet, Rashi notes, the very next word in the Torah is "Li' rsono," which means "willfully." Right after requiring that the individual bring the sacrifice even if he refuses, the Torah then stipulates that sacrifices must be brought willfully, rather than under coercion. To reconcile this contradiction, Rashi explains, "Kofin Oto Ad She' yomar Roseh Ani" – "He is coerced until he says, 'I want'." In other words, the person is subjected to coercive measures until he decides to bring the sacrifice willfully.

What exactly does this mean? How can a person be forced to do something willfully? Is this not inherently contradictory?

The conventional explanation of Rashi's comment is that each person, deep down, wishes to do the right thing. At the innermost recesses of the soul each person experiences a genuine desire and longing to fulfill God's will. Our inclination to sin is external to our true, inner beings, the product of the Yeser Ha' ra (evil inclination) in all its many manifestations. When

a person is coerced to fulfill his obligations, what really happens is that the external pressures are removed so that his true, inner desire can be fulfilled. He is not forced to act against his wishes, but rather to eliminate the emotional blockades that have prevented him from fulfilling his true wishes.

The Hatam Sofer (Rabbi Moshe Sofer of Pressburg, 1762-1839) suggested a different explanation of Rashi's comments. We can easily imagine a farmer, for example, who commits a sin that requires offering a sacrifice, but is very reluctant to do so. He has a large agricultural enterprise to tend to, as well as family and communal obligations, and he is less than eager to take time off to journey to Jerusalem and invest in an expensive animal as a sacrifice. Plagued by guilt, he ambivalently purchases an animal and prepares for his trip. His townspeople, of course, hear about what he is doing, and mock him.

"Hey," they jeer, "you're going to Jerusalem? What do you expect to get out of it? So you made a mistake, what's the big deal?"

All along his trip, he meets people who poke fun at him for being "so religious" and bringing a sacrifice in the Mikdash. He actually shares their skepticism, and feels no desire whatsoever to make this trip. But he figures he might as well go through with it, and eventually, less than halfheartedly, the man arrives at the Bet Ha' mikdash with his animal.

But at the holy site of the Mikdash, his attitude suddenly changes. He looks up and sees the Kohanim, dressed in their magnificent attire, diligently tending to the sacrifices and other Temple rituals. He hears the beautiful, inspirational music of the Leviyim, and sees the Rabbis of the Sanhedrin, the greatest sages of the time, convening to discuss the most pressing and difficult Halachic issues. The sight of the Mikdash and the flurry of activity fills the visitor with awe. By now, he is no longer reluctant. He feels overjoyed that he came to the Mikdash, and happily gives the Kohen his sacrifice. And he even decides to extend his trip so he can spend more time soaking in the special Kedusha of Jerusalem and the Bet Ha' mikdash.

This is how a person can be coerced and yet bring his sacrifice willingly. He might require some coercion, but once he arrives at the Temple, he offers the sacrifice willingly, lovingly and joyously.

This insight of the Hatam Sofer underscores the critical importance of placing oneself in an atmosphere of positive peer pressure. As long as the farmer was in his hometown or on the road to Jerusalem, he was discouraged from doing the right

thing. But once he placed himself in the Bet Ha' mikdash, his entire perspective changed. Suddenly, fulfilling his religious duties was the natural thing to do. It was not even a question anymore. The encouraging and spiritual aura of the Temple aroused his heart and stirred him to lovingly fulfill his commitments as a religious Jew.

It is critical for every Jew to ensure that he is, at all times, in the right crowd, in the right community, in the right neighborhood and in the right surroundings. Peer pressure, as we all know, is a powerful force that exerts a very strong influence on a person and his behavior. It behooves us all to ensure that the peer pressure we are under is a positive peer pressure – one which pushes us to remain faithful to our tradition, to the study of Torah and observance of Mitzvot. We must place ourselves among peers who will encourage us to do the right thing, to live the way we are supposed to live. This is the peer pressure that we want – the pressure to live meaningful lives, lovingly committed to God and His Torah, and eager to fulfill all His Mitzvot.

Shabbat Zachor: Defeating Amalek

On Shabbat Zachor, we come to the synagogue to fulfill the obligation of remembering Amalek's attack on Beneh Yisrael, and remembering our obligation to wage an unrelenting battle against the wicked nation of Amalek. In the times of Mashiah, we will be shown who the people of Amalek are, and we will then be required to wage war against them.

But what significance does this Mitzva have in our time?

How do we fulfill the obligation to eradicate Amalek nowadays, when we do not know who the Amalekites are? The story of Amalek's attack on Beneh Yisrael is preceded by a different account, the incident of Masa U'meriva. Beneh Yisrael complained about the shortage of water in the desert, and questioned whether God was indeed accompanying them in their journeys. They asked, "Ha'yesh Hashem Be'kirbenu Im Ayin" – "Is God in our midst, or not?" (Shemot 17:7). And in the very next verse, the Torah writes, "Va'yabo Amalek" – Amalek came and waged war against Beneh Yisrael.

Rashi comments that God sent Amalek against Beneh Yisrael in response to their questioning His providence. God essentially told the people, "I took you from Egypt, split the sea for you, drowned the Egyptians, provided you with daily manna – and you ask whether I am with you?" He sent Amalek so that the people will then have no choice but to look to Him

for assistance. Indeed, the war against Amalek was a miraculous one, as Moshe stood atop the mountain overlooking the battlefield, and as long as he kept his hands high in the air, Beneh Yisrael were victorious. As long as they looked to the heavens, acknowledging God's presence and His providence, they were granted victory.

The war against Amalek is the war against doubts and questions surrounding our belief in God. In fact, the numerical value of the word Amalek, 240, is the same as the numerical value of the word "Safek"—doubt. Amalek's objective is to rattle our belief in God, to shake our Emuna (faith). And this is a goal that they continue to pursue even after their attack on Beneh Yisrael in the desert. We read in the Megila that when Mordechai saw Haman—a descendant of Amalek—he did not bow or even budge ("Lo Kam Ve'lo Za Mimenu"—5:9). Mordechai did not simply refuse to bow; he remained completely motionless. He did not even entertain the notion of bowing, as he was firmly resolute in his faith. And this aroused Haman's ire, and led him to seek to destroy the Jewish people. As a descendant of Amalek, Haman was committed to waging war against the faith of the Jews.

And this war is waged today, as well. Even those of us who consider ourselves "believers" have doubts. If we truly believed that God is standing before us as we pray, our prayers would be of a much different quality. We would take the time to prepare ourselves before praying, wear our finest clothing, and pray intently. Our prayers are often causal, rote and mechanical precisely because of a shortcoming in our Emuna, because we are not as resolute in our faith as we must be. Indeed, Amalek continues waging war against us even today.

How do we wage this battle against Amalek? What can we do to bolster our faith and resist the assaults against our beliefs?

The Mishna instructs in Pirkeh Abot, "Aseh Lecha Rav Ve'histalek Min Ha'safek"—"Make for yourself a Rabbi, and avoid uncertainty." The way to avoid "Safek", to foil Amalek's attempts to rattle our faith, is by having a Rabbi to whom we can turn for guidance and inspiration, particularly during times of crisis and uncertainty. A Rabbi is not paid simply to sit in a special seat in the synagogue and deliver a fifteen-minute speech. He is there for the people, to help guide them and help them remain secure in their faith, especially when their faith is threatened by life's challenges. Indeed, in response to Amalek's assault, Moshe appointed Yehoshua, his closest disciple, to lead the battle. The most qualified warrior to fight

against Amalek is the faithful student, one who is close to his Rabbi, consults with him, and loyally follows his guidance.

The ongoing struggle against Amalek must be fought today with no less vigor—and perhaps with even greater vigor—than in previous generations. It is the battle of faith against doubt, belief against skepticism. And we win this battle by seeking guidance from our Rabbis, and looking to them as sources of inspiration. They will help us "avoid uncertainty," and overcome Amalek's sinister ploys to destroy our resolute faith in the Almighty. And we will then be victorious over Amalek just as during the times of Mordechai and Ester, and, like in Shushan, we will be able to celebrate the defeat and downfall of all our enemies, including the most threatening enemy of all—the enemy of "Safek," of doubts and uncertainty.

VICTOR BIBI SOD HAPARASHA

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Rabbi Wein

The Torah in this week's parsha identifies human beings with the word nefesh. There is no exact translation of this word in English that captures the nuances associated with the word in its Hebrew form. The word certainly implies a much more spiritual, soulful, ethereal human being than the flesh and blood physical being that we usually associate with people.

The Torah seems to imply that it is not only the physical part of humans that commits sinful acts that require sacrificial forgiveness but it is really the inner, unseen, spiritual side of us that requires a pardon from our Creator. And that is true of our offerings of thankfulness and of generosity—it is the inside of the person, the nefesh, and not only the physical person which must be generous and grateful.

The Torah also uses other words for human beings—Adam, nassi, etc.—because in human terms the inner soul, important as it is, is insufficient alone. The physical body must also be involved in all matters of the spirit. The difficult alliance between body and soul, between intent and behavior, between nefesh and adam is probably the most vexing of all human challenges. A person can only be a whole human being if somehow the inside and the outside do not coincide and are properly aligned one with the other.

Most of the ritualistic laws regarding animal sacrifices, that form the basic spine of the parsha, apply to cases of unintentional transgressions. In effect, the Torah leaves it up to the individual's conscience to admit wrongdoing and to attempt to make amends. This process requires a review of one's past behavior and an honest self-analysis.

That certainly is the nefesh part of the equation, the connection between the inside and the outside, which is the keystone of true religious behavior. It is hypocrisy that is the deadly enemy of the religious community. Rabbi Menachem HaMeiri (fourteenth century Provencal Spain), in his monumental commentary to the Talmud, deals with such hypocrisy by stating: "There are people who wrap themselves in large tallitot (prayer shawls) with their tzitziyot showing on the outside of their clothes, but their hearts are far distant from their Father in Heaven..."

The outside may appear to be pious but the nefesh is not in tune with the external display. We are taught in the Talmud that Merciful heaven searches for our hearts. And to a great extent, this is the primary lesson that the subject of sacrifices teaches us, a lesson that is relevant and timely even now in an age when animal sacrifices no longer exist.

The Torah speaks to all generations and all circumstances. Every generation must find itself in the words of the Torah. So this week's parsha has great importance in teaching us that in all matters of faith and religion, it is the nefesh that must always be reckoned with

Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The Pursuit of Meaning

The American Declaration of Independence speaks of the inalienable rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Recently, following the pioneering work of Martin Seligman, founder of Positive Psychology, there have been hundreds of books on happiness. Yet there is something more fundamental still to the sense of a life well-lived, namely, meaning. The two seem similar. It's easy to suppose that people who find meaning are happy, and people who are happy have found meaning. But the two are not the same, nor do they always overlap.

Happiness is largely a matter of satisfying needs and wants. Meaning, by contrast, is about a sense of purpose in life, especially by making positive contributions to the lives of others. Happiness is largely about how you feel in the present. Meaning is about how you judge your life as a whole: past,

present and future.

Happiness is associated with taking, meaning with giving. Individuals who suffer stress, worry or anxiety are not happy, but they may be living lives rich with meaning. Past misfortunes reduce present happiness, but people often connect such moments with the discovery of meaning. Happiness is not unique to humans. Animals also experience contentment when their wants and needs are satisfied. But meaning is a distinctively human phenomenon. It has to do not with nature but with culture. It is not about what happens to us, but about how we interpret what happens to us. There can be happiness without meaning, and there can be meaning in the absence of happiness, even in the midst of darkness and pain.[1]

In a fascinating article in The Atlantic, 'There's more to life than being happy'[2], Emily Smith argued that the pursuit of happiness can result in a relatively shallow, self-absorbed, even selfish life. What makes the pursuit of meaning different is that it is about the search for something larger than the self.

No one did more to put the question of meaning into modern discourse than the late Viktor Frankl, who has figured prominently in this year's Covenant and Conversation essays on spirituality. In the three years he spent in Auschwitz, Frankl survived and helped others to survive by helping them to discover a purpose in life even in the midst of hell on earth. It was there that he formulated the ideas he later turned into a new type of psychotherapy based on what he called "man's search for meaning". His book of that title, written in the course of nine days in 1946, has sold more than ten million copies throughout the world, and ranks as one of the most influential works of the twentieth century.

Frankl knew that in the camps, those who lost the will to live died. He tells of how he helped two individuals to find a reason to survive. One, a woman, had a child waiting for her in another country. Another had written the first volumes of a series of travel books, and there were others yet to write. Both therefore had a reason to live.

Frankl used to say that the way to find meaning was not to ask what we want from life. Instead we should ask what life wants from us. We are each, he said, unique: in our gifts, our abilities, our skills and talents, and in the circumstances of our life. For each of us, then, there is a task only we can do. This does not mean that we are better than others. But if we believe we are here for a reason, then there is a tikkun, a mending, only we can perform, a fragment of light

only we can redeem, an act of kindness or courage or generosity or hospitality, even a word of encouragement or a smile, only we can perform, because we are here, in this place, at this time, facing this person at this moment in their lives.

"Life is a task", he used to say, and added, "The religious man differs from the apparently irreligious man only by experiencing his existence not simply as a task, but as a mission." He or she is aware of being summoned, called, by a Source. "For thousands of years that source has been called God." [3]

That is the significance of the word that gives our parsha, and the third book of the Torah, its name: Vayikra, "And He called." The precise meaning of this opening verse is difficult to understand. Literally translated it reads: "And He called to Moses, and God spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying ..." The first phrase seems to be redundant. If we are told that God spoke to Moses, why say in addition, "And He called"? Rashi explains as follows:

And He called to Moses: Every [time God communicated with Moses, whether signalled by the expression] "And He spoke", or "and He said", or "and He commanded", it was always preceded by [God] calling [to Moses by name]. [4] "Calling" is an expression of endearment. It is the expression employed by the ministering angels, as it says, "And one called to the other..." (Isa. 6:3).

Vayikra, Rashi is telling us, means to be called to a task in love. This is the source of one of the key ideas of Western thought, namely the concept of a vocation or a calling, that is, the choice of a career or way of life not just because you want to do it, or because it offers certain benefits, but because you feel summoned to it. You feel this is your meaning and mission in life. This is what you were placed on earth to do.

There are many such calls in Tanakh. There was the call Abraham heard to leave his land and family. There was the call to Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:4). There was the one experienced by Isaiah when he saw in a mystical vision God enthroned and surrounded by angels:

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:8)

One of the most touching is the story of the young Samuel, dedicated by his mother Hannah to serve in the sanctuary at Shiloh where he acted as an assistant to Eli the priest. In bed at night he heard a

voice calling his name. He assumed it was Eli. He ran to see what he wanted but Eli told him he had not called. This happened a second time and then a third, and by then Eli realised that it was God calling the child. He told Samuel that the next time the voice called his name, he should reply, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.' It did not occur to the child that it might be God summoning him to a mission, but it was. Thus began his career as a prophet, judge and anointer of Israel's first two kings, Saul and David (1 Samuel 3).

When we see a wrong to be righted, a sickness to be healed, a need to be met, and we feel it speaking to us, that is when we come as close as we can in a post-prophetic age to hearing Vayikra, God's call. And why does the word appear here, at the beginning of the third and central book of the Torah? Because the book of Vayikra is about sacrifices, and a vocation is about sacrifices. We are willing to make sacrifices when we feel they are part of the task we are called on to do.

From the perspective of eternity we may sometimes be overwhelmed by a sense of our own insignificance. We are no more than a wave in the ocean, a grain of sand on the sea shore, dust on the surface of infinity. Yet we are here because God wanted us to be, because there is a task He wants us to perform. The search for meaning is the quest for this task.

Each of us is unique. Even genetically identical twins are different. There are things only we can do, we who are what we are, in this time, this place and these circumstances. For each of us God has a task: work to perform, a kindness to show, a gift to give, love to share, loneliness to ease, pain to heal, or broken lives to help mend. Discerning that task, hearing Vayikra, God's call, is one of the great spiritual challenges for each of us.

How do we know what it is? Some years ago, in *To Heal a Fractured World*, I offered this as a guide, and it still seems to me to make sense: Where what we want to do meets what needs to be done, that is where God wants us to be.

[1] See Roy F. Baumeister, Kathleen D. Vohs, Jennifer Aaker, and Emily N. Garbinsky, 'Some Key Differences between a Happy Life and a Meaningful Life', *Journal of Positive Psychology* 2013, Vol. 8, Issue 6, Pages 505-516.

[2] Emily Smith, 'There's more to life than being happy', *The Atlantic*, 9 Jan. 2013.

[3] Viktor Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul: from Psychotherapy to Logotherapy*, New York: A.A. Knopf, 1965, 13.

[4] Rashi to Vayikra 1:1.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL
“A man when he offers” (1:2)

Adam denotes “one made of the soil” (‘adamah’). Not only the first man, but also every Adam comes from the soil which produced the food of which the body is composed. The first duty of an Adam is Gratitude to his Creator, and this Gratitude he must express most heartfully for the food of which he is composed and which maintains his existence.

The Korban that he offers to his Creator, whether of meat and blood or of flour or of wine, is fundamentally a demonstration of Thanksgiving to Hashem that created the miracle of food, and Who performed the miracle of creating the body from food, and the miracle of maintaining the body by means of food. This is the most obvious of the intentions of the offerings. But there are indeed more intentions which can be discerned, some of which we shall study.

Whatever intentions we may discover yet the basic attitude was that not “a man offers to Hashem” but a man declares that the offering belongs to Hashem the Creator. The bringing of the offering is a declaration that He is the Giver. This intention is the principle that underlies not only Korbanot and tithes, but also all the Mitzvot of the Torah: To declare Gratitude to the Giver – Hakarat Hatob.

Quoted from “A
Kingdom of Cohanim” by Rabbi Miller ZT'L

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