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| **Volume 30, Issue 25** | **Shabbat Parashat Tzav - Parah** | **5784 B”H**  |

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**Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z”l**

**Understanding Sacrifice**

One of the most difficult elements of the Torah and the way of life it prescribes is the phenomenon of animal sacrifices – for obvious reasons. First, Jews and Judaism have survived without them for almost two thousand years. Second, virtually all the prophets were critical of them, not least Jeremiah in this week’s haftarah.[1] None of the prophets sought to abolish sacrifices, but they were severely critical of those who offered them while at the same time oppressing or exploiting their fellow human beings. What disturbed them – what disturbed God in whose name they spoke – was that evidently some people thought of sacrifices as a kind of bribe: if we make a generous enough gift to God then He may overlook our crimes and misdemeanours. This is an idea radically incompatible with Judaism.

Then again, along with monarchy, sacrifices were among the least distinctive features of Judaism in ancient times. Every ancient religion in those days, every cult and sect, had its altars and sacrifices. Finally, it remains remarkable how simply and smoothly the Sages were able to construct substitutes for sacrifice, three in particular: prayer, study, and tzedakah. Prayer, particularly Shacharit, Minchah, and Musaf, took the place of the regular offerings. One who studies the laws of sacrifice is as if he had brought a sacrifice. And one who gives to charity brings, as it were, a financial sacrifice, acknowledging that all we have we owe to God.

So, though we pray daily for the rebuilding of the Temple and the restoration of sacrifices, the principle of sacrifice itself remains hard to understand. Many theories have been advanced by anthropologists, psychologists and Bible scholars as to what the sacrifices represented, but most are based on the questionable assumption that sacrifice is essentially the same act across cultures. This is poor scholarship. Always seek to understand a practice in terms of the distinctive beliefs of the culture in which it takes place. What could sacrifice possibly mean in a religion in which God is the creator and owner of all?

What, then, was sacrifice in Judaism and why does it remain important, at least as an idea, even today? The simplest answer – though it does not explain the details of the different kinds of offering – is this: We love what we are willing to make sacrifices for. That is why, when they were a nation of farmers and shepherds, the Israelites demonstrated their love of God by bringing Him a symbolic gift of their flocks and herds, their grain and fruit; that is, their livelihood. To love is to thank. To love is to want to bring an offering to the Beloved. To love is to give.[2] Sacrifice is the choreography of love.

This is true in many aspects of life. A happily married couple is constantly making sacrifices for one another. Parents make huge sacrifices for their children. People drawn to a calling – to heal the sick, or care for the poor, or fight for justice for the weak against the strong – often sacrifice remunerative careers for the sake of their ideals. In ages of patriotism, people make sacrifices for their country. In strong communities people make sacrifices for one another when someone is in distress or needs help. Sacrifice is the superglue of relationship. It bonds us to one another.

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That is why, in the biblical age, sacrifices were so important – not as they were in other faiths but precisely because at the beating heart of Judaism is love: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” In other faiths the driving motive behind sacrifice was fear: fear of the anger and power of the gods. In Judaism it was love.

We see this in the Hebrew word for sacrifice itself: the noun korban, and the verb lehakriv, which mean, “to come, or bring close”. The name of God invariably used in connection with the sacrifices is Hashem, God in his aspect of love and compassion, never Elokim, God as justice and distance. The word Elokim occurs only five times in the whole of the book of Vayikra, and always in the context of other nations. The word Hashem appears 209 times. And as we saw last week, the very name of the book, Vayikra, means to summon in love. Where there is love, there is sacrifice.

Once we realise this we begin to understand how deeply relevant the concept of sacrifice is in the twenty-first century. The major institutions of the modern world – the liberal democratic state and the free-market economy – were predicated on the model of the rational actor, that is, one who acts to maximise the benefits to him- or herself.

Hobbes’ account of the social contract was that it is in the interests of each of us to hand over some of our rights to a central power charged with ensuring the rule of law and the defence of the realm. Adam Smith’s insight into the market economy was that if we each act to maximise our own advantage, the result is the growth of the common-wealth. Modern politics and economics were built on the foundation of the rational pursuit of self-interest.

There was nothing wrong with this. It was done for the highest of motives. It was an attempt to create peace in a Europe that had for centuries been ravaged by war. The democratic state and the market economy were serious attempts to harness the power of self-interest to combat the destructive passions that led to violence.[3] The fact that politics and economics were based on self-interest did not negate the possibility that families and communities were sustained by altruism. It was a good system, not a bad one.

Now, however, after several centuries, the idea of love-as-sacrifice has grown thin in many areas of life. We see this specifically in relationships. Throughout the West, fewer people are getting married, they are getting married later, and almost half of marriages end in divorce. Throughout Europe, indigenous populations are in decline. To have a stable population, a country must have an average birth rate of 2.1 children per female. In 2015 the average birth-rate throughout the European Union was 1.55. In Spain it was 1.27. Germany has the lowest birth-rate of any country in the world.[4] That is why the population of Europe is today rendered stable only on the basis of unprecedented rates of immigration.

Lose the concept of sacrifice within a society, and sooner or later marriage falters, parenthood declines, and the society slowly ages and dies. My late predecessor, Lord Jakobovits, had a lovely way of putting this. The Talmud says that when a man divorces his first wife, “the altar sheds tears” (Gittin 90b). What is the connection between the altar and a marriage? Both, he said, are about sacrifices. Marriages fail when the partners are unwilling to make sacrifices for one another.

Jews and Judaism survived despite the many sacrifices people had to make for it. In the eleventh century Judah Halevi expressed something closer to awe at the fact that Jews stayed Jewish despite the fact that “with a word lightly spoken” they could have converted to the majority faith and lived a life of relative ease (Kuzari 4:23) Equally possible though is that Judaism survived because of those sacrifices. Where people make sacrifices for their ideals, the ideals stay strong. Sacrifice is an expression of love.

Not all sacrifice is holy. Today’s suicide bombers sacrifice their lives and those of their victims in a way I have argued (in Not In God’s Name) is sacrilege. Indeed the very existence of animal sacrifice in the Torah may have been a way of preventing people from offering human sacrifice in the form of violence and war. But the principle of sacrifice remains. It is the gift we bring to what and whom we love.

[1] Jeremiah 7:22, “When I freed your fathers from the land of Egypt, I did not speak with them or command them concerning burnt offerings or sacrifice” – a remarkable statement. See Rashi and Radak ad loc., and especially Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed, III: 32.

[2] The verb “to love” – a-h-v – is related to the verbs h-v-h, h-v-v and y-h-v, all of which have the sense of giving, bringing, or offering.

[3] The classic text is A. O. Hirschman, The Passions and the Interests, Princeton University Press, 1977.

[4] The Observer, 23 August 2015.

**Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin**

**Maimonides on Sacrifices, Revisited**

“And the Lord spoke to Moses saying: ‘Command Aaron and his sons, saying, this is the law of the burnt offering…’” (Leviticus 6:1-2)

When we first encountered the concept of animal sacrifices in the book of Leviticus, we explored in depth the views of Maimonides and Nahmanides. Maimonides, in his classic work, Guide for the Perplexed, explained that the purpose of these sacrifices was in order to distance the Jewish people from idolatry.

After all, having just emerged from Egypt, it was natural that their spirits remained chained to an idolatrous system of sacrificial worship. Hence, Maimonides argues that the Israelites were so accustomed to the practice of animal sacrifices and the burning of incense that when the time arrived to create a new model of worship, out of necessity God based it on the Egyptian system which they had known.

“Because it is impossible to move suddenly from one extreme to the other… divine wisdom… could not command that [the Israelites] leave all of those ways of worship, depart from them and nullify them. For such [a demand] would have been something that no human mind could expect, given the nature of the human being who is always drawn to that to which he is accustomed. Therefore God retained the sacrificial acts, but transformed them into means rather than ends, declaring that they must become the implements for directing all such energies and activities into the worship of the one true God of the Universe.” (Guide for the Perplexed, Part iii, Chap. 32)

Perhaps another way of interpreting the Maimonidean position can be extracted from a striking Talmudic passage in Tractate Yoma. There we are told how the Jewish people complain to the Almighty that the inclination of idolatry has destroyed the Temple, burned down the Sanctuary, killed all the righteous, exiled the Israelites from their land, and – to add insult to injury – “…it is still dancing amongst us.” They request that it be vanquished. The Almighty accedes to their desire, and after a fast of three days and three nights, God allows them to destroy the evil inclination towards idolatry. And what is the object they destroyed?

“He came forth in the image of a lion of fire emerging from the Holy of Holies.” (Yoma 69b)

What a strange description for the evil inclination of idolatry, “a lion of fire emerging from the Holy of Holies!” The famous interpreter of Aggadot (Talmudic legends) Rabbi Shmuel Eidels (1555–1631), known as the Maharsha, apparently troubled by what appears to be such a positive image of evil idolatry, explains that this refers to the zodiac sign Leo (the lion), which rules the heavens during the Hebrew month of Av, when the holy Temple was destroyed. And indeed, the first Temple was destroyed largely because of the idolatrous practices of the Israelites.

The Hassidic master Rabbi Zadok Hakohen of Lublin is likewise surprised by the Talmudic description. After all, the lion is a most respected Jewish symbol, representing the majesty of Judah who is thrice identified with a lion in Jacob’s blessings:

“Judah is a lion’s whelp; from the prey, my son, thou art gone up. He stooped down, he crouched as a lion, and as a lioness; who shall raise him?” (Genesis 49:9)

The lion is also an aspect of the divine merkava (chariot) in the vision of Ezekiel, and is generally depicted on the ark curtains (parokhet) guarding the Torah. Moreover, the Holy of Holies would hardly be a proper home for the evil inclination of idolatry.

And so he suggests that the message of the Talmudic passage is that every aspect of creation – including idolatry – has its roots in sanctity. When we reflect upon the various gods of the ancient world – the Sun and the Moon, Herculean strength, Zeusian power and Aphroditian beauty – they are all aspects of the physical world and the instinctive drives which are fundamental to the world around us even today.

One response to these physical and human drives is the ascetic option, denigrating and attempting to root out all physicality because of the dangers which can follow from uncontrolled addiction to their urges. This, however, has never been the Jewish response.

After all, the Almighty did not create us as disembodied spirits or ethereal intellects. The physical side of our beings must have value if it was created by God. The challenge is to direct – or sublimate – our instinctive drives properly, to see them as means and not ends, not to deny them but to ennoble them, and to utilize them in the service of the divine.

This may well be the true meaning of Maimonides’ words.

When the Jews left Egypt, they still carried with them the imprint of Egyptian idolatries, the myriad of gods including manifestations of nature (the sun) and beasts, which they held up as ideals. According to Maimonides, Leviticus is the history of how God redirected these idolatrous energies, teaching the Jews to build a Sanctuary as a means toward divine service, to sanctify sexual energy within the context of marriage and family, to utilize strength and power in order to recreate society in the divine kingship.

The fact of the matter is that what was true at the time when the Jews left Egypt has not necessarily changed to this day, and quite likely may never change. And therefore the Maimonidean position regarding the animal sacrifices – to wean the Israelites away from their previous Egyptian passions – is not a temporary solution for a particular generation; we are still in need of the directed discipline which will enable us to direct and ennoble our drives and passions to the service of the God of compassion and justice.

Textual evidence for this can be found at the end of the Talmudic passage we quoted earlier. The prophet cleverly warns the Israelites, after the evil instinct was given over into their hands: “Remember, if you kill him, the world will be destroyed” (Ibid). And so we read how they imprisoned the evil desire, and after three days not one egg could be found in the Land of Israel; apparently, without the sexual attraction between male and female, creation cannot exist. Indeed, the evil instinct is a “lion of fire” which can destroy or purify, depending upon how this natural force is utilized.

It may very well be that what Maimonides understood about the generation which left Egypt may turn out to be an eternal law of human nature: Our passions are not to be destroyed but are to be directed, are not to be consumed but are to be consecrated.

**Yeshivat Har Etzion: Virtual Bet Midrash**

**Priest and Prophet
Harav Aharon Lichtenstein**

The second half of this week's parasha (chapter 8) describes the seven day Milu'im (consecration) process throughout which Moshe performed the Avoda, the priestly service. At the end of the parasha, Rashi (8:28 s.v. Va-yakter) quotes an intriguing gemara (Avoda Zara 34a) which says that Moshe did not perform this Avoda while wearing the regular priestly vestments, but rather in a plain white robe. Tosafot there (s.v. Ba-meh) explain that Moshe had the status of a Kohen (priest) when he performed the Avoda, but did not wear the priestly vestments because they were not yet consecrated. According to Tosafot's understanding, Moshe in fact was considered one of the priests, in addition to Aharon and his sons. However, Aharon and his sons, as well as the priestly vestments, needed the seven day Milu'im before they could begin to serve. Thus, only Moshe was able to perform the Avoda during these seven days, as he was the one Kohen who was already prepared for the task (presumably due to the time he spent upon Har Sinai).

On the eighth day of that period, described in chapter 9, the transfer of Kehuna (priestly duty) was made to Aharon and his sons. After that transfer, the roles of Moshe and Aharon diverged. Moshe was primarily the prophet, and Aharon was primarily the Kohen. While Moshe did serve as a Kohen, and Aharon was also a prophet, their primary roles were clearly set. As their traditional names indicate, "Moshe Rabbenu" - Moshe was the prophet and teacher, and "Aharon Ha-kohen" - Aharon served as the priest. Moshe was the one who both received Divine messages and relayed them to the people. Aharon was charged with conducting the Avoda in the Mishkan, according to the guidelines which God had commanded Moshe.

This split between the roles of prophet and Kohen, and the conflict between them, comes up often throughout Tanakh. One issue which the prophets often reprimand is the lack of religious sincerity in the Avoda, the Divine ritual. One example is the story in Shemuel I (chapter 15), where King Shaul spared Amalek's animals, against God's command to totally destroy them. Shaul then explained to Shemuel that he left the animals of Amalek alive so they could be offered as sacrifices. Shemuel responded (15:22): "Does God want offerings as much as He wants you to heed His command?! Obeying is better than an offering!" God desires that you fulfill His command, even at the expense of losing the opportunity to offer sacrifices. In other words, the prophet often has to remind people that the sacrificial ritual must be put into perspective with other forms of Divine service. The prophecies of Yeshayahu (see 1:10-17) and Yirmiyahu (see chapter 7) also reflect a constant strife between the prophet and the Kohanim, those who perform the ritual service in the Temple.

This conflict stems from a fundamental difference in their roles. The Kohen's role is to guard the rituals fastidiously, to perform the Avoda according to a given rule-book. The guiding principle of his service is routine and regularity, loyalty to the system and its proper functioning. In contrast, the prophet's primary role is to bring down fiery new messages from Above. His goal is to induce change. He is a vibrant character, infusing spiritual meaning into people's lives and new vitality into their Divine service. Due to the differences between these roles, it is understandable that there has been so much conflict between their respective representatives.

It is precisely because of this deeply rooted schism between the positions of Kohen and prophet that there was a special need for Moshe's participation in the Milu'im process. When the routine and ritual of the Mishkan were being initiated, it was necessary for the greatest of all prophets (as clearly stated in Bemidbar 12:6-8, Devarim 34:10, and cited as the seventh principle of faith in Rambam's listing) to infuse that ritual with Divine fire. Subsequently, these roles would be split, and Aharon would succeed Moshe as the Kohen. However, Aharon would hopefully maintain Moshe's spirit. Aharon would be performing the Avoda while infused with that same Divine guidance and spiritual balance which was apparent when Moshe performed it. It was in order to emphasize this ideal, the unity of these two roles, that Moshe himself had to be the one performing the Avoda in its initial stage.

In our lives, it is important that each person infuse his own personal Mikdash, the sanctuary which is his own self, with these two elements. It is very significant that a person have a routine rich in religious activity. Like a Kohen, he must take part in constant actions and rituals which will maintain his connection to Judaism and the world of Halakha. He must make sure that all the actions which Halakha requires of him are fulfilled. Beyond that, however, a person must supplement this rich routine, the "Kohen" aspect, with the "prophet" aspect that is within him. He has to develop the deep connection to God which is to lie behind the fulfillment of the seemingly ritualistic acts which he performs. He has to feel the spiritual connection which is supposed to come as a result of the fulfillment of rituals.

If one has the opportunity to spend some time in an environment such as a yeshiva, this goal may be temporarily attainable without too much difficulty. The real challenge is one which everyone must face at any point at which he or she lives and works in an environment which is not entirely Torah-filled and spiritually charged. That challenge is to maintain this deep commitment while involved in "everyday life." Even though only a small percentage of a person's time may be devoted to actions which are narrowly defined as ritualistic (whether learning, praying, or other mitzvot), it is of the utmost importance that he infuse these activities with prophetic vitality and passion. In this way, he will truly be a worthy successor to the prophets. *Summarized by Dov Karoll*

**Torah.Org: Rabbi Yissocher Frand**

**Don’t Let It Go to Your Head!**

This week’s parsha begins with the mitzvah of the Korban Olah. Aharon and his children are given the tremendous responsibility of the avodah in the Bais Hamikdash, but after the Torah introduces the Korbon Olah, the first thing Aharon is instructed is, “And the kohen shall put on his linen garment and his linen pants shall he wear on his flesh, and take up the ashes, which the fire had consumed the elevating-offering on the altar, and lay them down at the side of the mizbayach” (Vayikra 6:3). This is the mitzvah d’Oraysa of “Terumas HaDeshen.” Every morning, as part of the avodah, the kohen removed the ashes of the wood and offerings that had burnt the previous night.

The Chovos HaLevovos, one of the classic works on ethics and Jewish philosophy, written by Rav Bachye ben Yosef Ibn Paqda, says that the rationale behind Terumas HaDeshen is that the Torah is particularly careful that people should not become ba’alei gayvah (haughty people).

The kohen may think that he is something special—and in fact, he is something special. He is among the select few who were chosen to do the avodas hamikdash. Nevertheless, the Torah instructs him, “Take out the ashes!” The Torah is very sensitive to human emotions. Lest Aharon come to think too much of himself, the Torah tells him to begin his day with the lowly task of taking out the ashes.

A number of years ago, I realized that the last thing I do on Erev Yom Kippur is take out the garbage. Erev Yom Kippur is a very special day. We eat the Seuda Hamafsekes (last meal before the fast). We bless our children. But the last thing before going to shul on Erev Yom Kippur is taking out the garbage.

I was struck by two thoughts: First of all, this really represents what we all try to do on Erev Yom Kippur—take out the garbage in our lives. Secondly, when someone walks into Shul on Yom Kippur wearing his kittel, he may be tempted to think of the loftiness of his station, entering into Yom Kippur enveloped in kedusha. However, a person should always remember that he still needs to deal with such things as garbage bags. He remains a very human type of being. He should never forget that he needs to take out the garbage. He must eat, drink and sleep, and yes, he must still take out the garbage. If a person thinks in those terms, he will not let things go to his head and become a ba’al gayvah.

**A Person’s Honor Has Value**

On one hand, as we explained, the Torah is concerned that the Kohen Gadol should not become a ba’al gayvah. On the other hand, the Torah is very particular about the honor of the less fortunate – that a poor person should not become depressed and broken.

There is an interesting gemara in Bava Kama (92a). The wealthy people brought their Bikurim (first fruit offerings) in gold and silver baskets. The poor people could not afford gold or silver baskets, so they carried their fruits to the kohen in baskets made out of reeds.

The Gemara says that the kohanim returned the gold and silver baskets to the wealthy people because they did not have the right to keep those precious utensils as a fringe benefit along with receiving the first fruits. However, the kohanim did keep the reed baskets that they received from the poor people. The poor person “lost” the basket in the deal as well. Rava applies to this the old rule “basar anyah azla aniyusa,” which means, loosely translated, “the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.”

It is ironic. The rich fellow gets his basket back, while the poor person, who can ill afford it, does not get his basket back. This always bothered me. Why does the kohen keep the poor fellow’s basket?

I once read that the reason why the Torah takes the basket of the poor person is to bolster his ego. The fruit looks like a more substantial gift when it is in the basket. The Torah says to let the kohen keep the basket and let the poor person suffer the financial loss, but let him at least keep his pride intact. It is better for the poor person to lose the basket in order to give the Bikurim a plentiful appearance, rather than to return the basket and make the person swallow his pride. The Torah goes to great lengths to protect a person’s honor.

I remember someone asking me about raising money for hachnosas kallah. A person was marrying off his daughter and he needed financial help. The fellow who approached me wanted to raise money on the other person’s behalf, in order to pay for the wedding.

His question was as follows. If he told people for whom he was raising the money, there was no question that he could raise a lot of money. (The person was well-known and well-respected in the community.) On the other hand, if he kept it anonymous, he would not be able to raise as much, because these kinds of requests occur a half dozen times a week.

At that time, I asked this question to the Rosh Yeshiva (Rav Yaakov Ruderman zt”l): Should he mention the name and raise more money, or keep it anonymous and raise less money? Without batting an eyelash or the slightest hesitation, the Rosh Yeshiva said it should be anonymous — “A mensch’s kavod is vert asach.” (A person’s pride is worth a whole lot.)

That is what we learn from the baskets. A person’s respect and honor are worth a lot. It is even worth losing money over them. Money can always be replaced, but kavod habriyos and pride are much harder to replace.

**Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah**

**Routine or Rejuvenation during Shlichut?
Rabbi Avichai Apel**

Every so often, or maybe even regularly, we have to face the question posed above – routine or rejuvenation? – and do some soul-searching.  Is what we are doing as shlichim really important to us?  How much are we willing to give of ourselves?  What are our priorities?

Every person knows himself best and must prioritize in every aspect of his life in accordance with his abilities and strengths.  Not everything can take center stage.  However, there are some things that become meaningless if not prioritized.

There is nothing more permanent than the temporary.  This phrase turns the default into the desirable.  Not because of an informed decision, or the desire to fulfill an aspiration.  Rather, there is always a pulling towards routine, even in situations that are temporary by definition.  How did this happen?  Perhaps it is the understanding that one has the need to feel connected to something.  People naturally feel that the things that seem to be marginal and trivial, those requiring little attention, are ultimately the most important and cherished, physically or even emotionally, and become the most permanent and stable components of our daily routine.

It is the regular and the routine that leave a long-lasting impression.  Any experience which is part and parcel of a routine becomes engraved in one’s consciousness for longer.  It goes without saying that even that which is fixed for now, will one day cease to be.  Distractions are ever so human; hence, even permanence is prone to be absent at certain points in time.  Notwithstanding the above, the impression left by any form of routine or stability helps one endure periods of instability.  Even when one’s sense of routine is somewhat blurred or weakened, it is still permanently ingrained within, at all times.

The concept of permanence or regularity has a number of definitions, to which one can attach varying implications and meanings.  Routine may turn into habit, which denotes actions that are repeated regularly, almost absentmindedly.  In such case, actions turned into habit may become somewhat bland and dull.  Much like food eaten regularly which often loses its special flavor and becomes almost tasteless.  We keep eating the same food again and again, not because of its taste, but because of our need for nourishment.  It becomes an action done out of necessity rather than desire.

The positive aspect of routine is that it becomes a central component of our lives, something we can always fall back on.   It is, therefore, only natural that we constantly attempt to rejuvenate our routine by adding hues and colors to it, thus making it more attractive and appealing.  The routine component of our lives is important to us; we invest in it because it is an integral part of who we are.

After the preparations for the erection of the Mishkan come to an end, all the vessels and priestly garments completed, and after having received all the commandments pertaining to the sacrifices and their particulars – come the days of the miluim, the seven-day inauguration ceremony of the kohanim and the altar.  These days began on the 23rd of the month of Adar and continued until the first of the month of Nissan, during which time Moshe erected and dismantled the Mishkan each day anew.  Furthermore, during the course of these days the kohanim were trained for their sacred service, avodat hakodesh, and they sacrificed the ram of the miluim, the ram of consecration (see Shemot 22).

Ahead of these days of consecration, the kohanim were given a unique commandment:  “And you shall not go out from the door of the Tent of Meeting seven days, until the days of your consecration be fulfilled; for He shall consecrate you seven days” (Vayikra 8:33).  Is it possible that the kohanim sat inside the Tent of the Meeting all these days without emerging at all?  What was the purpose of this?

The sacred service which takes place in the Beit HaMikdash is a central component of the Temple’s routine.  This avodat kodesh requires the kohanim‘s full attention and they are therefore not permitted to leave the premises.  Although the commandment of the avodat hakodesh was given for all generations, says the Ramban (Vayikra 5:35), the days of miluim were exceptional and happened once only.  During these days the kohanim had their “practicum” in preparation of the avodah and were not allowed to leave the Mishkan during the day hours, only at night, unless it was for their personal bodily needs.  However, never during the sacred service itself (Ibn Ezra on Vayikra 8:33).

These days of miluim play a very important spiritual role in preparing the kohanim for the avodat hakodesh, their sacred service.  To ensure that the kohanim are indeed worthy in character to enter the sanctuary regularly and serve the People by offering sacrifices and preforming other acts of atonement, it is vital to instill in them a sense of integral connection to the House of God and a constant desire to be one with God.  Different verses teach us of this aspiration. For example, the verse “Happy are they who dwell in Thy house” (Tehillim 84:5) is an eternal call of praise to those who engage in the study of Torah and the worship of God, and is meant to inspire all of us to do the same.

Another verse from Tehillim (27:4) – “One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life” – may be misinterpreted as the extreme aspiration to live a life of asceticism.  However, in light of what was said earlier, this verse must be seen as the positive desire to be close to God at all times.  Hence the verse goes on to say – “to behold the graciousness of the Lord, and to visit early in His temple” (ibid.).  Similarly, the kohanim‘s residing in the Tent of the Meeting for a period of seven days was meant to achieve the following: the kohanim absorbed a great abundance of spiritual insight which impacted both their consciousness as well as their desires, and this took place by their sitting inside the sanctuary in the Tent of the Meeting.  The essence of the sacred service was preserving these very insights and this lofty consciousness.  By sitting at the entrance to Ohel Mo’ed, the kohanim prepared themselves for this sacred service.” (Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch on Vayikra 8:35)

These noble aspirations are equally relevant to the life of every individual.  For also the individual must “enter the Tent”, as it were, and transform Torah study, prayer and acts of kindness into routine, turning these into the central axis of one’s life.  “A righteous person must never leave Ohel Mo’ed, i.e., must always be in a mindset of avodat Hashem.”  Avodat Hashem, the worship of God, must become the most permanent thing in our lives.  Not a permanence turned into tasteless habit; rather, a blessed routine that always aspires to rejuvenate itself, the constant desire for personal growth.  So much so, that when a person completes his “seven days of miluim” – which may symbolize the seven decades of one’s adult life during which time one paves for himself the road upon which one treads – God will be able to attest to the fact that this person had never left His ways (Torat Moshe – the Chatam Sofer).

The life of an emissary is filled with constant renewal and rejuvenation.  Every day presents new opportunities such as making new acquaintances or bonding with new people.  Each such opportunity should be exploited to the fullest, because one never knows if such opportunities will recur.  It is the role of the shaliach to be in a permanent state of shlichut.  To be filled with ceaseless energy so that he might reach out to each and every Jew, no matter the circumstances, and escort them into the House of God.  So deeply ingrained must this desire be, that the permanent mindset is one of “One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life”.

The Jewish community of Frankfurt boasts a tradition of Torah learning and Torah scholars of more than a millennium – which came to an abrupt end during the devastating Holocaust.  Great Torah figures like the Yalkut Shimoni, the Shelah HaKadosh, the Ba’al Hafla’a, the Pnei Yehoshua, the Chatam Sofer, Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch and many others learned and taught Torah in Frankfurt, and headed their respective communities in this city.

The Jews of Frankfurt contributed greatly to the development of the city, both economically as well as academically. The Rothschild family, Erich Fromm, Franz Rosenzweig, to name but a few, were among the many Jewish Frankfurters who had left their mark.  Anne Frank, who had a great impact on Holocaust awareness around the world, is also a native of the city.

After the Holocaust, a new Jewish community started forming, and currently comprises about 7000 Jews who are active in both the public and private sectors.  There are five different synagogues in the city, an elementary and high school (first grade through 12th grade), two kindergartens, retirement homes for seniors and many activities aimed at the local Jewish public as well as Jews visiting from out of town.

**Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org**

**Rabbi Daniel Stein
Connecting with the Avos**

In Judaism the number fifteen is ubiquitous. The Mishnah (Middos 2:5) records that there were fifteen steps that led up from the Ezras Nashim to the Israelite Courtyard upon which the leviim would sing the fifteen chapters in Tehillim that begin with the words, "Shir Hamaalos" - "Song of Ascent". Rav Shimon Schwab suggests that since our daily prayers are patterned after the sacrifices in the Beis Hamikdash (Berachos 26b), it is appropriate to enter davening every day with fifteen Birchos Hashachar. Those blessings precede Pesukei Dezimrah which then concludes with the fifteen praises of Yishtabach. Yishtabach in turn introduces Birchos Keriyas Shema which culminates with the fifteen laudable attributes mentioned in Emes Veyatziv, setting the stage for the Amidah. In addition, the Pesach seder is held on the fifteenth day of Nissan during which we read the Haggadah, which has fifteen parts, punctuated by Dayenu, the popular song of gratitude with its fifteen stanzas.

What is the significance and message of all these fifteens?

The Gemara (Bava Metziah 85a) attests that "anyone who is a talmid chacham, and whose son is a talmid chacham, and whose grandson is a talmid chacham, the Torah will never again cease from his descendants ... from this point forward, after three generations, the Torah returns to its lodging." When three consecutive generations study Torah intensively and sincerely the Torah becomes indelibly entrenched in the identity of the family such that it is unlikely to ever be dislodged, as the pasuk states, "a three-stranded cord is not readily broken" (Koheles 4:12). However, Tosfos (Bava Basra 59a) restrict the Gemara's guarantee to the scenario where all three generations coincide and study Torah together. It is not the consistency of Torah study per say that ensures its continuity, but rather the intergenerational conversation and shared experience of a grandfather studying together with his son and grandson.

The Chida (Midbar Kedeimos) calculates that if Yitzchak was seventy-five years old when Avraham died, and sixty years old when Yaakov was born, it emerges that the intersection of all three Avos studying Torah together lasted for a period of fifteen years. Those fifteen formative years forged the bedrock of our mesorah which is passed from generation to generation on the fifteenth of Nissan through the fifteen stages of the Haggadah. This foundation also constitutes the essence of birchas kohanim, which consists of three pesukim with a total of fifteen words, corresponding to the three Avos and the fifteen years that they overlapped. Every Friday night, when this blessing is conferred upon children, it is with the intention that they develop into the next link in the chain of the mesorah that was established by virtue of the fifteen years that the three Avos interacted and learned Torah together.

Similarly, all three Avos are represented in the Mishkan. The acacia wood was taken from trees originally planted by Avraham in Beer Sheva (Breishis 21:33) and subsequently transported down to Mitzrayim by Yaakov (Breishis 46, 1 and Midrash Rabbah, Vayigash 94:4). The inauguration of the Mishkan was deliberately delayed until the first of Nissan, the birthday of Yitzchak (Midrash Rabbah, Pekudei 52:2). Indeed, according to the Ramban (Introduction to Sefer Shemos), the whole purpose of the Mishkan was to replicate and institutionalize the atmosphere of the ancestral home of the Avos. Therefore, fifteen different items were collected and used in the construction of the Mishkan (Shemos 25:3-7), to reflect that the transcendent and perpetual holiness created by the Avos was predicated upon the fifteen years during which they toiled in Torah together.

Just like the Mishkan was destined to become a dwelling place for Hashem in this world, as the pasuk states, "And they shall make Me a sanctuary and I will dwell in their midst" (Shemos 25:8), so too every Jewish home strives to be worthy of this distinction. To that end, the Gemara (Sotah 17a) teaches, "If a man and woman merit - the Divine Presence rests between them. But if they do not merit - fire consumes them." The words "man" - "ish" and "woman" - "isha" both contain the letters aleph and shin. The difference between them lies in the middle letter yud in "ish" and the final letter heh in "isha." These two letters can be joined to form the name of Hashem, yud-heh, but in their absence all that remains is the aleph and shin which spells "aish" - "fire." If the pair conducts their marriage properly their home can become the seat of the Shechinah, but if they fail, a destructive fire can consume them. It is instructive that the name of Hashem which the Jewish home aspires to embody is spelled yud-heh, which also has the numerical value of fifteen. In order to welcome the Shechinah into their home, the couple must conduct their relationship in a manner that is faithful to the legacy of the previous generations which was cemented by the Avos over a span of fifteen years.

At the time of Keriyas Yam Suf, all those who were present, even the maidservants, personally witnessed the Divine hand and proclaimed aloud, "This is my God and I will enshrine Him" (Shemos 15:2). However, only the Jewish people continued further and declared, "The God of my father and I will exalt Him." Rav Elya Meir Bloch (Peninei Daas) observes that for the maidservants the events of Keriyas Yam Suf were powerful but fleeting. They were maidservants before and they remained such afterwards. Only the Jewish people, who were the beneficiaries of a historical framework and tradition through which they could process and internalize the experience became permanently transformed. It was the recognition that "my God" is also "the God of my father" that perpetuated and preserved the euphoric jolt of emunah.

At the seder, as we attempt to reexperience the geulah ourselves and deepen our sense of emunah, we should simultaneously be cognizant that this is not only our story but we are connecting to "the God of our fathers." We do not approach Hashem as individuals but rather as the next link in a long and illustrious mesorah that has survived and endured for generations. Every day the kohen began the avodah in the Beis Hamikdash with the mitzvah of terumas hadeshen. He first removed the ash from the previous day's korbanos, which he then placed in a visible spot adjacent to the mizbeach, before commencing with the duties of the day. Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch explains that this is because every day presents an opportunity for a fresh start but we do so while being mindful of the sacrifices of the past. It is precisely because we invest and engage in the historical mission of the Avos that we will hopefully be equipped to write the next chapter in our collective story and address the challenges of tomorrow.

**Rabbi Dr. Norman J. Lamm’s
Derashot Ledorot**

**Antiseptic Religion**

 We read this morning of the strange rite of the Parah adumah, the ashes of the red heifer which were used to purify one who had contracted levitical impurity by contact with a dead body, but which ceremony at the same time defiles the priest in charge of the act of purification. Parah adumah has thus always been accepted as a mystery, a hukah or incomprehensible law that defies reason in its paradoxicality. It is therefore an annual reminder that important as reason is in the life of religion, it is not the totality of religion. If man understood all that religion and God demand of him, he would not need Divine revelation; indeed, man would displace God as the center of life, and all authentic religion would thus come to an end.

 Parah adumah therefore tells us that intelligent as man is, and as much as he must endeavor at all times to exercise that intelligence, his intellect nonetheless remains limited. God, as Creator and Source of all intelligence, transcends human intellect. Life conceived only in terms of reason or logic is shallow. It is even monstrous, like a man with an oversized head and an undersized heart.

 The idea that pure reason is a sufficient guide for man through life is sophomoric, it is an index of intellectual adolescence. One might even describe it with that worst of modern epithets: it is non-modern, medieval. Modern science emerged only when it denied the omnipotence of reason, when it cut itself off from the tyranny of pure reason. Natural science does ont at all come to its conclusion on the basis of logic, but on the basis of empirical evidence: testing, experimenting, investigating. Indeed, one of the greatest theories of modern physics, concerning the nature of light, embodies a logical contradiction, it violates the principle of reason that a thing cannot be two opposites at the same time.

 This does not mean to say that science affirms faith and religion. It does mean that shallow rationalism is a thing of the past. The Rabbis told us that the law of parah adumah was a source of vexation for Jews in their confrontation with the non-Jewish world: umot ha-olam monin et Yisrael, the nations of the world would taunt and deride the Jews because of the apparently unreasonable nature of parah adumah. Today, such tauntings sound silly indeed.

 However, we must be prepared for the challenge in response to such an assertion: “Is this not an instance of blind faith?” Most Orthodox Jews, rabbis and laymen, have had to put up with such reproach, at one time or another, when trying to explain that we observe even if we do not understand the reason for every observance. What do we answer to this charge of “blind faith?”

First, let us always remember that such pejorative and emotion-laden terms always confuse, rarely clarify. Who is to say which faith is blind and which not? Usually, what is one man’s blind faith is another’s fearless determination; what I believe is far-sighted vision, and what the other one believes is silly superstition...

 Of course, faith can be blind– but it also can be luminous and enlightening and insightful. The emunah that transcends reason, as symbolized by parah adumah, is founded on a sense of confidence in the Divine intellect, on trust that God, in His infinite wisdom, knows what I in my limitations can never know. Thus, the first time I send a child away from home, I do so on a basis which is usually irrelevant to reason. Is this blind faith– or is it confidence? Or, I submit to a medical doctor for a very serious and delicate operation, though I know almost nothing about the technicalities of surgery and medicine. Is this blind faith or confidence? It is blind faith if I only project my own wishes irrespective of the objective situation. It is confidence if I use a wise intuition, an overview which integrates all the nuances of the situation, and hence is more than merely the facts and reason. Ezehu hakham, ha-roeh et ha-nolad, our Rabbis taught: “Who is the wise man? – one who sees the consequences that will be born from the present situation.” A computer cannot do this; only a wise man can.

 Certainly, then, man does not live by reason alone, even though reason helps to make order and sense out of life’s experiences. Love, hate, fear, ambition, sentiment, friendship, passion, desire, suffering– these are not matters of reason, yet they are the stuff of real life. Similarly, man possesses a religious dimension to his personality, one that cannot be reduced merely to reason or to psychology. This is what Rabbi Shneour Zalman, founder of HaBaD Hasidism, called ahavah tiv’it u-mesuteret, the natural but concealed love for God that inheres in man, and what the great German-Jewish thinker, Isaac Breuer, referred to as ha-tzad ha-hazoni, the prophetic dimension of human personality. And parah adumah reminds us that this religious or spiritual or any other aspect of personality; it is separate, independant, and autonomous as a feature of human life. Without it, we deny man his very humanity and reduce man to nothing more than a biological computer. And religion as such, if it is based only on reason, becomes antiseptic and lacking in drama and depth. Furthermore, it is the kind of religion that cannot really survive a crisis. The great author of “Ore ha-Hayyim” has told us, from his personal experience, that when Spanish Jewry was expelled in the fifteenth century, those Jews who observed the Torah and the mitzvot out of faith alone, the simple Jews, were able to demonstrate remarkable heroism and prefer exile and banishment to baptism, whereas the sophisticated Jews, who prided themselves on their knowledge of philosophy and their use of “pure reason” instead of “blind faith,” were the first ones to submit to Christian pressure to kiss the cross.

 But if so, we face a direct and troubling challenge: does this mean that reason has no role in Judaism? Obviously it does. Furthermore, what of the Jewish rationalists, such as Saadia and Maimonides? Did they not insist that Judaism not only can but should make use of shekel, reason? In fact, the saintly Rabbi Bachya maintained that if a man has the capacity to use reason and philosophy in his religious thinking and does not do so, he commits a sin in the eyes of Torah. How shall we fit this emphasis on reason into the context of a Judaism which proclaims a law of parah adumah, which speaks of the importance of hukah, which declares the autonomy of emunah?

 The answer is that no Jewish thinker ever believed that man can fully understand God and Torah by reason alone, without any assistance from revelation. Parah adumah is the corrective for this, giving man the capacity for intellectual embarrassment, teaching him intellectual modesty. Hasidism used to say that that is why a man should cover his head. Clothing is worn for one of two reasons: either to keep one warm or because of modesty. Our heads are covered not because we fear the climate, but because it is an act of modesty: we cover the cranium to show that no matter how brilliant we are, our intellect nevertheless remains sorely limited before Him, the God of infinite wisdom. Parah adumah similarly teaches us this kind of modesty and prevents us from indulging in intellectual arrogance.

 But if we cannot reach God by reason alone, why did the great Sages of Israel in the middle ages devise the classical proofs for God’s existence? These proofs, truth to tell, were not potent enough to convince the agnostics,and they were essentially unnecessary for one who already believed– as did these same Sages of Israel. Why then did they offer them? Why did they emphasize the role of shekel, of reason?

 The answer that I wish to commend to your attention is one that touches the very foundations of Judaism itself. It is an insight provided to us by the foremost disciples of the late Rav Kook, Rabbi Yaakov Mosheh Charlop, of blessed memory. He teaches us that man has many dimensions to his personality: amongst them, emotion, actions, ethical bent, intellect. Our sacred duty is to reveal God’s presence, to make Him manifest, to bring Him into this world on every level and every manner. Man’s purpose is: le’galot et ha-nistar, to take the potentialities for being aware of God–potentialities and possibilities which inhere in every atom of matter and in every moment of life and in every aspect of personality– and actualize them, expose them, reveal them, bring God to our awareness and to the consciousness of every human being. That is why we must use all dimensions of life to reach Him. We ought to experience Him with our emotions; we ought to act practically so as to build the malkhut shamayim, the Kingdom of Heaven, actualizing the will of God for man and his society; and so too we must understand Him rationally and therefore demonstrate His existence through the use of intellect and philosophy. None of these alone is sufficient; all of them together constitute the human paean of praise to the God of all perfection.

This is what parah adumah does for us: by telling us that there is something beyond our reason, it challenges us to reach God by all means, by exercising every aspect and fibre of human personality. It does not deny the value of reason at all; but it tells us that it is not enough to feel Jewish, or to think Jewishly, or to act Jewishly; rather, we must do all three– and even more; it reminds us that the human personality is infinitely rich and multifaceted, and all of it must rise in one great spiraling symphony of devotion to God. Kol atzmotai tomarna, all my bones, each and every aspect of my life and my energy and my time and my personality, must proclaim, “Who is like unto Thee, O Lord?”

 The great Rabbi of Kotzk once said: “Frum iz shlecht,” to be pious is sometimes to be cruel, for a man of piety is liable to the weakness of self-righteousness which results in insensitivity to the feelings of others. “Gut iz ni’uf,” excessive goodness and generosity can lead to immorality, for in goodness I may try to satisfy the whims and passions of another without regard to moral restraint. And, “Klug iz krum,” to be bright is often to be crooked, for brilliance frequently degenerates to mere shrewdness or craftiness. Any one of these virtues by itself can prove exceedingly damaging. However, he added, “Uber frum un gut un klug– dos iz a Yid!”--but to be pious and good and bright–that constitutes a Jew! No one aspect of personality should be overdeveloped at the expense of any other; all together must rise to the Creator of the world.

 Parah adumah is thus not a doctrine of the denial of reason, not a proposition basing faith on absurdity. It appears now in a new meaning, teaching us the inadequacy of any single explanation of man, any single mode of life, any single way of reaching the Almighty. Parah adumah confirms man’s marvelous complexity, it affirms the mystery of his personality, it assures us of a religion which is not flat and antiseptic but varied and colorful and deep and comprehensive, and even mysterious. It tells us that man and God meet on many levels, indeed on all levels. Therefore, no person is ever cut off from God because he was born inadequate in any one aspect of his personality. Some people may be impoverished in their intellect, some in their emotions, some in their ability practically to implement the Divine design for the world; but every one has some opportunity to reach out to Heaven.

 It has been asked: should not our special portion of this morning begin with the words zot hukat ha-parah, this is the law of the parah adumah, even as we read elsewhere zot hukat ha-pesah, this is the law of Passover? Why does our portion begin with the word zot hukat ha-torah, this is the hukah, or law, of all the Torah? I suggest that this is the beauty of Torah itself, that it includes preeminently hukah, the integrating element, the principle that no one aspect of life or character is sufficient, but that all together are required and demanded of us.

 A Jew is not a disembodied intellect who does nothing but philosophize: not an ecstatic and ascetic, monastic mystic; not one who believes, and believes that his belief alone will bring him salvation; not an obsessive observer of ritual or ethics who does what he does without feeling or understanding. None of these alone is enough; we need all, and even more than all of these. Zot hukat ha-torah– when we have a Torah, we have the principle of hukah,

 Along with hokhmah and maaseh and reggesh, reason and action and emotion. And when we have these, we have then achieved wholeness as well as holiness, for both holiness and wholeness are the goal of Torah. Torat ha-Shem temimah, the Torah of the Lord is whole, it is perfect and comprehensive. And through our study and observance of Torah we can achieve this wholeness and thus we will discover that Torah is also meshivat nefesh, it restores wholeness to the human soul and personality.

Having understood and experienced this, we shall then learn to appreciate the remainder of that verse: Pikudei ha-Shem yesharim, mesamhei lev, the laws of the Lord are straight, they are meant for the ultimate benefit of man even if man does not understand them at the present, and they make the heart– and the mind and the soul and society– glad and happy.