

LAMPLIGHTER

28 Nissan
Parshas Acharei
Mos/Shabbos
Mevarchim Iyar

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LIVING WITH THE TIMES

This week's Torah reading, Acharei Mos, describes the sacrificial worship carried out in the Temple on Yom Kippur, but it prefaces that description with an allusion to the death of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Avihu.

Why did Nadab and Avihu die? The Torah relates previously that they entered the Holy of Holies with "a strange fire that G-d did not command them [to bring]."

Now on Yom Kippur, the High Priest would enter the same sacred place, the Holy of Holies. And so, the Torah warns him not to repeat the error made by Aaron's sons.

What was the mistake of Aaron's sons? They sought closeness to G-d and were willing to give up everything, even their lives, to achieve that. The Or HaChayim, one of the classic commentaries on the Torah, explains that their death did not come as a punishment. Instead, their souls appreciated the G-dly light manifest in the Holy of Holies and clung to it. Their desire for G-dliness was so great that their souls simply expired.

This was the error that the High Priest was to avoid on Yom Kippur. Although he would enter the Holy of Holies and come face to face with the Divine Presence, he was warned to keep in focus that the intent of his service was life in this world, not a bond with G-d in the spiritual realms. Rather than seek out closeness with G-d, his purpose in entering was to evoke atonement and blessing for the Jewish people as they exist in this material realm.

What is the core of the issue? Aaron's sons sought their own spiritual satisfaction; what was gratifying for them. The High Priest, on the other hand, is a servant, carrying out G-d's will, aware that what G-d desires is not a bond with Him in the spiritual realms, but rather the observance of His will and His mitzvot (commandments) in this material world.

Similar concepts apply with regard to the ultimate, desired state of existence. Maimonides maintains that the ultimate is the spiritual world of souls, the afterlife. All material existence, even the heights to be reached in the era of the Redemption and the era of the Resurrection, he maintains, is secondary to the G-dliness to be experienced when the soul leaves the body.

The Sages of the Kabala, the Jewish mystic tradition, differ and maintain that the ultimate state will be the Resurrection of the Dead. Souls that have enjoyed spiritual bliss in the afterlife for thousands of years will descend and live again in a material body. For G-d's essence is invested in this material world, and it is through life in this world that the most encompassing bond with Him can be established.

Towards a Successful Revolution

By Tali Loewenthal

How will we celebrate Pesach in the time of the Messiah?

Hopefully we will all manage to squeeze into the old city of Jerusalem for the Seder Night. The fact that large numbers of people managed to do so two millennia ago was considered miraculous. Now we are rather more numerous and an even more obvious miracle will be required. The Seder will be conducted much as described in the Haggadah, with the key addition of the Paschal Lamb instead of the shank bone on the Seder Plate, and a Festive Offering instead of the Egg.

The advent of the Messiah will mean real freedom, for us and for every human being. Yet the memory and celebration of the Exodus from Egypt will still be significant. Our liberation from Egypt more than 3,300 years ago, celebrated at our Seder nights and the Pesach festival, set the pattern for the future: the ability to break free from a state of limitation and exile, to reach for and to achieve freedom.

In historical terms, we can see a number of later instances when the Jewish people were in exile, suffering subjugation in some form, and then we broke free. Yet there is also a constantly repeated personal and psychological process. The Hebrew word for Egypt, Mitzrayim, has the same letters as the word metzarim, meaning "limitations." Each day is potentially an "Egypt", from which we might go free in a fulfilled and joyful Exodus; then that new freedom is again seen to be limited compared with the possibility of greater and deeper freedom.

Might this not sound rather dangerous and chaotic? Perhaps here we can take a message from the parshah read this Shabbat, which mentions the tragic death of the two sons of Aaron, described earlier in Leviticus 10:1-7. They too, were seeking "freedom" from the limitations of worldliness and materiality. They were seeking closeness with the Infinite, trying to enter the Holy of Holies, but in a dangerous and uncontrolled way.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe comments that indeed there is a paradoxical demand for each individual. Each one of us has to seek the highest level of freedom, including the ultimate of spiritual freedom and closeness to the Divine. At the same time, we have to be able to keep our feet on the ground and remain part of this physical and normal world.

It may seem that this paradox is not sustainable. The revolutionary attempt to break out of limitations without self-destructing is doomed for failure. Consequently, one might feel, do not try, it is too risky. Just keep your head down and go on making bricks for Pharaoh, meaning one's personal Pharaoh in one's personal Egypt.

However, the Rebbe comments, the teaching of our parshah is that it is possible. There is a way for Aaron to accomplish what his sons failed to achieve, as described in the parshah: on Yom Kippur he leaves worldly limitations, enters the Holy of Holies, and safely returns.

The Rebbe explains that each one of us can do this too, in an appropriate way, through observance of Jewish law and dedication to Jewish ideals. The teachings of the Torah and the chain of Torah leaders and teachers through the generations are there precisely in order to help each person achieve this successful revolution in his or her personal life, simultaneously reaching for the Infinite and keeping one's feet on the ground. With the advent of the Messiah this will be achieved by the entire Jewish people, bringing wholesome freedom to all humanity.

Slice of LIFE

“Why Do You Care If My Boyfriend Is Not Jewish?”

By Bracha Goetz

“But I don’t get it, Mom! Didn’t you raise me to love all people? So, why does it matter if Brian isn’t Jewish?”

“I want to live my life—not someone else’s limited view of how I should be. I want to be free to be me.”

“The Bible stories just seem like a bunch of fairy tales.”

These are thoughts and feelings I express as I travel through young adulthood. My first boyfriend in college is a WASP, then I date a Catholic Jesuit, then a Southern Baptist. I see this as another achievement—breaking through unnecessary limitations. Jewish guys seem too nice and boring—and the world is such an exciting place to explore!

There is something else going on though, too—a yearning I can’t explain. I try many different types of spiritual experiences, and study different branches of Buddhism and Christianity, and I find important pieces of truth. Still, a deep part of me continues to feel like something essential is missing.

At the beach with one of my non-Jewish boyfriends, I read a book of Hasidic tales, and he reads an introductory book about Judaism. He seems even more interested in learning about Judaism than I am. I learn a lot of interesting things from his book, too.

My mom suggests that I go to Israel during my summer break from med school to volunteer at Hadassah Hospital.

I volunteer in the oncology department, visiting patients who are dying. I also come face to face with the fact that I don’t know why life is worth living. Although my life appears to be headed in a great direction, I feel more and more like I am getting lost.

An old friend takes me to a school in Jerusalem where young adults are first

learning about the depth of the Torah. I am skeptical—and I love it too. It feels like the core of my being is celebrating. Even though I don’t understand some of the Hebrew words that the teachers and students are using, the atmosphere of humility and growth and caring reaches a very deep place within me. I don’t understand what is going on inside of me, but I feel like I have wanted this forever.

While I listen to the classes, I am surprised to see that I am doodling pictures of creatures jumping up and down in a beautiful world, shouting, “Yay!” I also realize with astonishment that a lot of the research studies I have worked on in the psychology department at Harvard aren’t needed—I find the answers I was seeking here, in these ancient texts. Who knew?

I go for a walk with a teacher, and I ask my constantly itching question, because I feel I can ask anything here: “So, what is the meaning to life?” And something wonderful happens. The teacher asks me what I think the answer is! I am baffled, and I can’t think of one intelligent thing to say. Finally I just say, “To be good?” And the wise teacher says, “Well, one thing I can tell you is that Judaism gives more details about how to be good than other religions.”

What a boring answer! And yet it has an effect on me, because I have studied a number of other religions and I know that this makes plain, simple and non-bombastic sense. Just from the few days I’ve been studying Judaism in depth, there certainly do seem to be more details in Judaism than in other religions about “how to be good.” But I’m a big-picture kind of person—and I don’t even like details! So, why does this very non-dramatic statement intrigue me and strengthen my interest in wanting to study more?

I linger and learn.

I begin to wonder if I can dismiss all these Bible stories as fairy tales once I start finding out about their many, many layers of underlying meaning. I discover that even each letter in the Torah has amazing wisdom to teach. The Hebrew letters and words all turn out to be interrelated: if I change one letter of an

object’s name, I find a word with a close but slightly different meaning, and that slight difference has an important message about the essence of that exact entity. I can learn about life just from studying the Hebrew alphabet—and for sure from studying its words!

I don’t like restrictions, but I find them somewhat welcome now, since my morals dwindled before I got here. I am honestly craving some absolute truth, as just about everything has become relative to me by this point, and I am not sure if there is much else I can believe in anymore.

I try on a few of the restrictive guidelines each day, kind of like an experiment. After a while, my favorite is Shabbat. I have liked the idea for years, but who could follow through with such a thing if not in a supportive community setting? The Shabbat restrictions free me to be spiritual, like with ballet, as I get each awkward step down better and the dance begins to flow. I start appreciating the funny modest dress code, too. It frees me to be seen by others—and myself—as a spiritual being.

While I was dating non-Jews, sometimes people would bring up the importance of Jewish continuity. That didn’t mean much to me, because I genuinely didn’t understand why Judaism was valuable and worth continuing. I did think there was something unique about the tiny Jewish nation that made us continue to persist—and make a disproportionate positive impact on the world—despite the fact that we have been invariably sought out for annihilation throughout the ages. But it is not until I get this chance to study earnestly with sincere, observant Jews that I begin to glimpse why our continuity matters.

My soul feels like it’s rejoicing, as the pure form of Judaism I am studying fits within me like a long-lost puzzle piece. The other religions I explored have helped me to appreciate my own more fully. In Judaism, both the mystical and practical ways work together to unearth a Jewish soul. I see how I need the mitzvot to both tie me to earth and let me fly.

I’m remembering who I am. And I’m in a constant state of becoming, with more and more wondrous levels to be revealed.

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INSIGHTS

LETTERS BY THE LUBAVITCHER REBBE

The spiritual counterpart of the prohibition against wearing shoes on Tishah BeAv and Yom Kippur

This letter was addressed to R. Efraim Eliezer HaKohen Yolles, one of the leading Rabbis in Philadelphia.

1 Menachem Av, 5711,
Brooklyn.

Greetings and blessings,

I received your letter of 28 Tammuz a brief time before I went to the gravesite of my revered father-in-law, the Rebbe. I mentioned you and all the members of your household for everything they need as you requested in your letter. The "tzaddik who has departed [and who] is to be found in all the worlds more than during his lifetime" will certainly arouse abundant mercies for success in material and spiritual matters.

As per your request, the donation that you sent in connection with your revered father's yahrzeit was conveyed [to the intended recipients]. Enclosed is the receipt.

In the Kuntreis Eichah that was recently published — most, indeed almost all, of the material is published now for the first time from manuscripts — there is a description on p. 44 of the equivalence between Yom Kippur and Tishah BeAv, [including the concept that] on both days, we do not wear leather shoes. As stated there, [in these two cases,] the motivating rationales [for this practice] are opposite. It is, nevertheless, well known that the most profound heights are connected with the most profound depths. From this, it is understood that even on Tishah BeAv — may it be transformed into a day of gladness and rejoicing in our times — the fact that we are [required to] remove our shoes indicates that one is [essentially] above the concept of shoes. I see that this year, the yahrzeit of your father is commemorated on a date on which it is forbidden to wear shoes. Certainly, everything is controlled by Divine providence, particularly those matters concerning people who are connected to the Torah and its mitzvos. As is well known, a yahrzeit is a day of ascent [for the soul]. [The concept of spiritual ascent] is also the reason for the prohibition against wearing shoes on Yom Kippur and thus, [in an inner sense,] this applies also on Tishah BeAv. This year this concept applies on 10 Av.

May it be G-d's will that we soon see with eyes of flesh the fulfillment of the prophecy "I will transform your mourning into joy." [At that time,] all the concepts mentioned in the scroll of Eichah will be explained as levels of ascent as explained in the above-mentioned Kuntreis Eichah.

With blessing,

QUESTIONS FOR THE RABBI

Going Green

By Tzvi Freeman

Question: What Is the Jewish Approach to Conservation and the Environment?

Answer: Concerning sustainability of natural environments: this is an issue addressed by the Torah—but it is not just a Jewish issue, but an issue for all of humanity. The Torah teaches that the human being is meant to be a steward of planet Earth, "to work it and to protect it." We are told that everything G-d created, "He saw that it was good." "The world and all that is in it is G-d's." You can't get a clearer message than that.

Both the Bible and the Mishnah provide environmental legislation. The Jewish nation in Israel felt an eternal bond to the Land of Israel, and therefore a responsibility to protect their environment. This serves as a precedent for humanity today, as we begin to realize that humanity as a whole has an eternal bond to the most beautiful planet we have yet to discover, planet Earth.

Some of the environmental legislation of the Torah:

A city must have a greenbelt surrounding it, thus limiting urban sprawl.

A fruit tree cannot be destroyed when setting siege to a city. Our tradition extended this to include any wanton destruction of nature that could be avoided.

The rabbis severely limited the grazing of goats and sheep in parts of Israel where they caused environmental damage. It is well known today that much of the desert in the Middle East was caused by the grazing of these animals.

King Solomon appointed a minister to limit the harvesting of wood in the forests of Israel.

The Mishnah deals with laws of water and air pollution, limiting the rights of both rural and civic residents.

There are many more such examples. Thankfully, there are many Jewish organizations that are working today to build awareness of the Torah's message concerning our responsibility to the environment.

A WORD

from the Director

"Why are we kept back, that we may not offer the offering of the L-rd in its appointed season among the children of Israel?" This question was posed to Moses and Aaron when some of the Jewish people were unable to offer the Passover sacrifice together with the other Jews.

These Jews had become ritually impure in their desert travels, and thus were not permitted to bring the special Pascal sacrifice.

They could have left well enough alone. After all, our Sages have taught, "If a person intended to perform a mitzva and circumstances prevented him from it, it is regarded as if he had performed it!" Since they were forcibly kept from performing the mitzva, the reward for the mitzva was not denied them.

But that wasn't enough for them. And because of their protest and great desire to fulfill this mitzva to its fullest potential, they and all future generations were rewarded with "Pesach Sheini." Pesach Sheini, celebrated this week on Wednesday, means the "Second Passover," and is observed one month after the first Passover. Until the destruction of the Holy Temple, any Jew unable to bring the Passover sacrifice on the 14th of Nisan—either because he was ritually impure, in a distant place, was prevented by unavoidable circumstances, or even if he intentionally did not bring it—could bring it on the 14th of Iyar.

One of the primary lessons of Pesach Sheini is that it is never too late. We can always make up for a past misdeed, omission or failing through sincere desire and making amends.

In addition, the complaint of the Jews to Moses and Aaron, "Why are we kept back..." teaches us an important lesson in how we are to approach those mitzvot that we can currently not perform because we are still in exile.

Why, G-d, are we kept back from offering the sacrifices in their right time?

Why are we kept back from seeing Your glory revealed?

Why are we kept back from performing each mitzva to its optimum, for each mitzva is incomplete while we are in exile?

Let us also not be content with the words of our Sages, that if we desire to perform these mitzvot it is enough. Like the Jews in the desert, let us rally together and cry out to G-d, "Why are we kept back...bring the true and ultimate Redemption which You promised us!"

And may G-d immediately heed our heartfelt cries as He did those of our ancestors.

J. I. Gutterman

IT HAPPENED *Once...*

The Seven-Day Wonder

By Yerachmiel Tilles

Yankel was a successful farmer, and as wise as could be in the ways of his craft; but in the vast sea of Torah he could swim hardly a stroke. For his sons, however, he wanted better. He sent them to a nearby town which had a good yeshiva, and the two boys learned assiduously until they became known as the brightest students of the school.

One day, they happened to hear Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov speak; from that time they became great adherents of his and went to the Baal Shem Tov's court in Mezibuzh whenever they could steal away. Their father couldn't understand what they found so interesting there. "We want to hear the words of the famous Baal Shem Tov," they would reply.

Finally, Yankel's curiosity compelled him to visit Mezibuzh himself. When he arrived, he quizzed the chassidic master on his knowledge of farming, and when he seemed to know all the correct answers, the farmer was satisfied that the Baal Shem Tov was, indeed, a wise man. Over the course of time, Yankel also became a great admirer of the Baal Shem Tov and he traveled often to Mezibuzh to seek advice.

Years passed, and Yankel's daughter reached marriageable age. He decided to consult the Baal Shem Tov about finding an appropriate mate. "Send your sons to me, and I will send them home with the proper husband for your daughter," the Baal Shem Tov advised him.

When the farmer's two sons arrived in Mezibuzh, the Baal Shem Tov took them with him to a distant town, where he started making inquiries about a certain young man named Shmerel. But this Shmerel was nowhere to be found. Then, on the eve of the new month, when the townspeople had gathered at a festive banquet in honor of their distinguished guest, a wild-looking young man entered the hall. His manners were most uncouth; he ran in, grabbed some food, and ran out just as quickly. It turned out that this youth was the very "Shmerel" whom the Baal Shem Tov had been seeking! Although Yankel's two sons couldn't understand what their rebbe could have possibly wanted with such a character, they duly informed him that they had found the boy.

The Baal Shem Tov was delighted, and gave instructions that the boy be cleaned up, dressed properly and then brought before him. Shmerel was given the place of honor next to the Baal Shem Tov. During the meal, the Baal Shem Tov passed his handkerchief over the boy's face and commanded, "Tell us some words of Torah" To the shock of all those present, Shmerel began speaking, and expounded gems of Torah for the next few hours. The two brothers were very pleased with what they saw and heard, and set off for home with the yokel in tow.

The wedding was held immediately, and throughout the entire week of the sheva brachot celebrations that follow a Jewish

wedding, the groom delivered marvelously impressive Torah discourses to the assembled guests. The brothers couldn't wait until the days of rejoicing were over and they could sit together with him and learn from his seemingly inexhaustible fountain of wisdom. However, they were to be profoundly disappointed.

At first, when he failed to show up in the study hall, their sister replied only, "My husband is sleeping," or "My husband is very tired." The brothers then began to observe him closely and found that he didn't observe even the most basic Jewish laws and customs. They had to remind him to make a blessing when he ate, and he always forgot to wash his hands before partaking of bread. Something was very wrong.

They left for Mezibuzh and told their master what had transpired. "Let me explain," said the Baal Shem Tov. "You see, there are celestial matchmakers as well as their earthly counterparts. It was determined in heaven that Shmerel was to be your sister's husband. But this was a difficult match to arrange. How would a girl from a well-to-do family with such scholarly brothers agree to marry a man like Shmerel?"

"But when two souls are matched in heaven, then one way or the other it is made to come to be. At first it was proposed to make her deranged, but with her family fortune, she would still be able to make a good match in spite of the illness. Then it was suggested that the girl be deranged and her father lose his fortune and die, leaving her a penniless orphan. It was then that I made my suggestion. I would take it upon myself to assure that the match be made. The only way to achieve my goal was to open the young man's mind to Torah wisdom, and in that way, endear him to you.

"If Shmerel had been worthy of the knowledge he was gifted, it would have remained with him; but alas, he was not. The Torah I put into him lasted only the seven days of blessing of the marriage, then it was lost. But there is nothing to be done about it, for Shmerel is the mate who was destined for her from Above. Tell your sister to remain married to him, and I will guarantee her fine children. As for you, continue to teach him and he will slowly improve and learn."

This story was often related by the Apter Rebbe, who would then add that many great and righteous men and women were the descendants of this match, among them some of his closest disciples.

PARSHAH IN A NUTSHELL

Following the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, G-d warns against unauthorized entry "into the holy." Only one person, the kohen gadol ("high priest"), may, but once a year, on Yom Kippur, enter the innermost chamber in the Sanctuary to offer the sacred ketoret to G-d.

Another feature of the Day of Atonement service is the casting of lots over two goats, to determine which should be offered to G-d and which should be dispatched to carry off the sins of Israel to the wilderness.

The Parshah of Acharei also warns against bringing korbanot (animal or meal offerings) anywhere but in the Holy Temple, forbids the consumption of blood, and details the laws prohibiting incest and other deviant sexual relations.

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PARSHAS ACHAREI MOS/SHABBOS MEVARCHIM IYAR • 28 NISSAN • 3 MAY

| | | |
|----------------------|---|---|
| FRIDAY NIGHT: | MINCHA KABBOLAS SHABBOS | 5:20 PM 5:50 PM |
| SHABBOS DAY: | TEHILLIM LATEST TIME TO SAY SHEMA SHACHARIS MOLAD: SHABBOS MINCHA SHABBOS ENDS | 8:30 AM 9:39 AM 10:00 AM 2:10 PM 5:05 PM 6:11 PM |
| WEEKDAYS: | SHACHARIS MINCHA MAARIV | 8.00/9.15/10.00 AM 5:15 PM 6:05 PM |

CANDLE LIGHTING



| | Shabbos 3 - 4 May | |
|------------|-------------------|------|
| | Begins | Ends |
| Melbourne | 5:13 | 6:11 |
| Adelaide | 5:14 | 6:10 |
| Brisbane | 4:57 | 5:50 |
| Darwin | 6:15 | 7:05 |
| Gold Coast | 4:55 | 5:48 |
| Perth | 5:20 | 6:14 |
| Sydney | 4:55 | 5:51 |
| Canberra | 5:01 | 5:57 |
| Launceston | 4:58 | 5:58 |
| Auckland | 5:16 | 6:13 |
| Wellington | 5:08 | 6:07 |
| Hobart | 4:54 | 5:55 |
| Byron Bay | 4:53 | 5:47 |