

Toronto Torah

Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Acharei Mot/Hagadol

12 Nissan, 5771/April 16, 2011

Vol.2 Num. 22

The Freedom to Achieve

Dovid Zirkind

Yetziat Mitzraim (the Exodus from Egypt) plays a prominent role in much of Jewish practice, from daily prayer to the message of tefillin to Shabbat kiddush to our annual celebration of Pesach. In particular, in each evening's Maariv we praise G-d, "Who took out His nation Israel from within them to eternal freedom". The message this prayer conveys is that the freedom we so often mention was more than just a specific historical event; rather, it was the beginning of a new status that would be maintained forever.

R' Zalman Sorotzkin notes that it seems such a prophetic statement can be proven false if we simply look back at our history. True, the Jewish people have experienced freedom and great heights since the Exodus, but we surely have not been completely free ever since. Jews have suffered, struggled and wandered the four corners of the earth time and time again, and yet somehow we celebrate that same very freedom as our forefathers did in Egypt. How are we to see ourselves as eternally free?

Further: The Torah mentions multiple times that the Exodus took place in the spring (*chodesh ha'aviv*); indeed, the Gemara (Rosh haShanah 21a) deduces from this that the Jewish calendar must be structured so that Pesach will occur in the spring. The Mechilta suggests that by highlighting the timing of *Yetziat Mitzraim*

we come to appreciate that G-d took us out when the weather was ideal – but given the biblical and calendar focus on the spring, is there something deeper involved than just the good weather?

Understanding the meaning of the freedom we achieved on Pesach may give us answers to these two questions.

The term *cheirut* (freedom), suggests Rav Sorotzkin, implies something greater and longer-lasting than escape from bondage. Commenting on the verse, "The writing was the writing of G-d, engraved (*charut*) upon the tablets" (Shemot 32:16) the Gemara shows that the word *charut* can also be read as *cheirut* (freedom), teaching that true freedom can only be brought about through the study of Torah. The Talmud teaches that G-d created the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) to challenge man, and He created the Torah as its antidote. This is the freedom we celebrate on Pesach, as it was the first step in bringing the Jewish nation together and to the foot of Mt. Sinai. We were given the word of G-d and the mission of growing in our relationship with him; to follow his commands and expose ourselves to the holiness of His teachings.

The difference between the word of G-d being 'written' and being 'engraved' (as described in the verse above) is that while writing can be removed by scratching it from the surface of the paper,

engraving is part of the stone forever. The same is true with these two models of freedom. Man can escape his taskmaster and experience a physical freedom, but when a new master takes power and servitude starts again, that freedom is completely gone. However, the mission of the Jewish people as given by G-d is above any of the physical circumstances we may find ourselves in. No matter where a Jew is, no matter how bound up he is physically, he is constantly in service of Hashem. Man is free to serve G-d, and that freedom is the eternal freedom we celebrate.

Similarly, freedom presents man with two options. When a slave is free from his master he can relinquish *all* work, or he can become his own master and begin to build a life of his own. This may be the metaphor of leaving in the spring. Winter binds nature and it binds mankind. The cold and the snow make the fields seem desolate and keep us cooped up in our homes. From this perspective, spring presents as the season of freedom. As the snow melts and the temperature rises man is given the freedom to choose how he will spend his time outside the home. He can sit in the fields and enjoy the weather which was absent for so many months, but nothing will come of that enjoyment. Alternatively, man can roll up his sleeves and begin the harvest that ensures his security and the well-being of his family. In the spring, man is free to achieve.

Year after year, when Pesach comes around we look back at the Exodus story as eternally relevant, as a true *cheirut olam*. We see ourselves and our children as having exited Egypt and as having been given the freedom to choose our own path. May we merit this year to enjoy the warmth of spring and the freedom of Pesach and may we succeed in maximizing our *freedom* as individuals and as a people.

dzirkind@torontotorah.com

Parshah Questions

- When is the process described to enter the Holy of Holies performed? (Rashi, Gra to 16:3)
- Is *azazel* a person, place, or thing? (Rashi, Ramban, and Ba'al HaTurim to Vayikra 16:8)
- What causes the atonement of Yom Kippur? (Rashi Shavuot 13a, Ibn Ezra, Seforno to 16:30)
- What is the mitzvah of *kedoshim tihyu*? (Rashi, Ramban, Ralbag, Da'at Zekeinim Miba'alei HaTosafot, Ba'al HaTurim, Siftei Chachamim, Netziv, Ohr HaChaim, and R' S.R. Hirsch to Vayikra 19:2)

To sponsor a Toronto Torah in memory or in honour of a loved one for \$180, please email sponsorship@torontotorah.com or call 416-781-1777.

Throughout the prayer service on Yom Kippur we focus on *teshuvah* (repentance) and *taharah* (purity). We confess our sins and renew our commitment to Torah and *mitzvot*. But the Yom Kippur service in the *Beit ha-Mikdash*, as recounted in this week's Torah-portion, seems quite different. The Torah describes an elaborate sacrificial service, culminating with the *sh'nei ha-se'irim* (the two goats, one designated as the *sa'ir la-Hashem* and sacrificed to God, and the other, the *sa'ir la'azazel*, invested with the sins of the nation and killed), which does not appear to have anything to do with the *teshuvah* process. How did this sacrificial service enable us to accomplish the goal of Yom Kippur, of "purifying ourselves before God"?

To understand the Yom Kippur service in the *Beit ha-Mikdash*, let us analyze the events that preceded and culminated in the first Yom Kippur, when the Jews wandered in the desert after leaving Egypt. Eighty days before the first Yom Kippur, the Jews assembled at the foot of Sinai to receive the Torah. The Talmud (Shabbat 88a) states that God lifted Mount Sinai above the Jewish people and warned them that if they accepted the Torah everything would be good for them, but if they did not accept the Torah

they would be buried under the mountain. It was made clear to the Jews that their personal lives and their existence as a nation were entirely dependent upon accepting the Torah.

Although the Jews were given this warning before they received the Torah, they did not understand its true lesson until forty days later, after having committed the *chet ha-eigel* (the sin of the Golden Calf). God told Moshe that the Jews had demonstrated that they were unwilling to live up to their original commitment to accept the Torah, and so the entire nation would be destroyed. It thus became clear that the original warning still applied, and that the original consequence of not accepting the Torah could still be fulfilled. "*Sham tehei kevratchem*," Hashem told Moshe; the entire nation would perish at Sinai.

Moshe Rabbeinu interceded on behalf of the Jews, and God decided to give them a second chance. God decreed that a second covenant would be made, and a second set of the *luchot* (Ten Commandments) would be given. The day for this renewal would be Yom Kippur. The Jews understood, as they reaccepted the Torah on the first Yom Kippur, that henceforth they would always live in the shadow of Sinai, and that

life as a Jew cannot exist without Torah.

The two goats which were brought into the *Beit Ha-Mikdash* every Yom Kippur would remind the watching Jews of the first Yom Kippur and of its message, that life without Torah is death. The goats were physically identical, as the *halachah* requires (Yoma 62a), yet each would embark on a path radically different from that of its partner. One would be sacrificed to God in the holiness of the *Beit ha-Mikdash*, while the other would, symbolically, bear the sins of the entire Jewish nation. The one sacrificed to God would have its blood brought into the Holy of Holies, while the other would meet its end on the barren desert stones. The watching people would remember that, by accepting Torah and *mitzvot*, each Jew can become a *sa'ir la-Hashem*, devoted to holiness. But it would also be clear that without Torah and *mitzvot*, we will become weighted down with sins, and will be represented by the *sa'ir la'azazel*. Our lives would be empty, and meaningless as death.

These lessons would be made doubly clear to the *Kohein Gadol*, as he represented the Jewish nation on Yom Kippur. He would stand before the *aron* in the Holy of Holies, and would offer the *ketoret* (incense). Only when its smoke formed a cloud could he proceed with the service. Why? Because while the cloud of incense would form, and God's holiness would begin to manifest in it, the *Kohein Gadol* would remember the first Yom Kippur, when God also "descended in a cloud" ("*va-yeired Hashem be-anan*," Shemot 34:5). The *Kohein Gadol* would stand in front of the *aron* knowing that there are only two things within it: the broken pieces of the first set of *luchot* and the whole second set, resting side by side. The broken set would evoke the memory of the failed first *kabalat ha-Torah*, of the Golden Calf, and the near-destruction of the Jewish nation.

Continued on the back page

613 Mitzvot: Mitzvah 89, 90

The Timeframe for Bringing the Korban Pesach

The *Sefer haChinuch* points out that *mitzvot* are marked as significant if they have an allotted time period of their own, during which their rituals must be performed and into which nothing foreign is permitted to intrude. In keeping with this theme, the Torah instructs us to eliminate all *chametz* before midday on the fourteenth of Nisan (Mitzvah 89), and only afterward may we

bring the *korban pesach*.

At the other end of the *mitzvah*, we are instructed (Mitzvah 90) to ensure that all of the fats of the *korban pesach* which are meant for the *mizbeiach* are burned by morning. This is separate from our obligation (Mitzvah 8) to ensure that the meat of the *korban pesach* is not left over until the next morning.

torczyner@torontotorah.com

Ha'Am V'Ha'Aretz

R' Asher Ben Yechiel — Rosh

David Teller

Kfar Darom

Torah in Translation

Why We Eat Matza at the End of the Seder

Piskei haRosh Pesachim 10:34

Rav Yosef said in the name of Rav Yehuda who said in the name of Shmuel, "You do not conclude the (meal)-after the matzah-with afikoman."

The Rashbam explained: "One needs to eat matzah at the end of the meal as a remembrance for the matzah that was eaten together with the korban pesach in a sandwich. This is the split matzah that we eat at the end for the sake of our biblical obligation. Nonetheless, we recite the blessing of "upon consumption of matzah" at the beginning of the meal even though that matzah is not obligatory, as Rav Chisda said regarding marror, 'How can we fill our belly with it and only bless afterwards?' Therefore we bless on both consumptions of matzah at the beginning, and at the end we eat the matzah for the mitzvah. And after that matzah we may not conclude with eating anything else, so as not to lose its taste."

However: According to this it seems that we should need to eat marror and charoset with the matzah, since it commemorates the matzah that was consumed with the korban pesach in a sandwich! Upon them it would be fitting to bless "al achilat matzah," had one not already filled his belly with it (matzah)! He should act like in the times of the mikdash where they would consume these components all together; Hillel and his assembly and even the Rabbanan ruled that the mitzvah is to consume them together! (Beit Yosef explains that the Rosh means one after the other - DT) According to this approach, I do not understand why we make a korech sandwich in the beginning; we should suffice with korech at the end as a remembrance of the mikdash.

Therefore, it appears to me that this matzah (at the end of the seder) is not for the mitzvah of matzah. Rather, it is eaten as a remembrance for the korban pesach that was consumed when one was full, at the end of the meal. Since it is a remembrance for the korban pesach, we apply the laws of korban pesach, so that you can't eat after consuming it. This is also why we do not need marror and charoset with it.

Rabbeinu Asher ben Yechiel (1250 or 1259-1327) was a renowned rabbi and talmudist, known primarily for his commentary on the Babylonian Talmud, which appears as the first commentary in the back of most standardized editions of the Talmud. This work often skips the back-and-forth legal discussions of the talmud, and instead focuses on the practical halachah that emerges. He often cites some of the earlier Rishonim, along with his analysis and eventual decision. He omits areas of law limited to Eretz Yisrael (such as agricultural and sacrificial laws), as well as the aggadic portions of the Talmud. Rabbeinu Asher's commentary on the Talmud became such an important work in Jewish law that Rav Yosef Karo, in compiling the Shulchan Aruch, considered it as one of his three principle legal sources, alongside the work of the Rif and the Rambam.

Rabbeinu Asher was born in Western Germany into a prominent family of Torah scholars. He had eight children, including Rabbi Yaakov who would go on to organize a halachic code designed in four columns (turim, hence the colloquial name "Tur" for his work). Rav Yaakov ben Asher's code divided the halachah into four sections: Orach Chaim, Yoreh Deah, Even HaEzer and Choshen Mishpat, the structure later employed by Rav Yosef Karo in his Shulchan Aruch and, essentially, all major legal authorities since.

Rabbeinu Asher's primary teacher was Rabbi Meir of Rothenburg. In 1286, as Emperor Rudolf I began persecuting Jews, Rabbi Meir attempted to escape to Germany but was captured and imprisoned. The Rosh raised a ransom for his release, but Rabbi Meir famously refused it for fear that this would encourage the imprisonment of others. The Rosh took over his teacher's community of Worms until he was forced to flee (the exact reasons why are unknown). After leaving Germany, the Rosh first settled in southern France and then in Toledo, Spain, where he became the rabbi on the recommendation of Rabbi Shlomo ben Aderet (Rashba). Rabbeinu Asher passed away in Toledo on the 9th of Cheshvan 5088 (1327 CE).

Kfar Darom was founded on 250 dunams of land first purchased in 1930 by Tuvia Miller for a fruit orchard. The land was on the site of an ancient Jewish settlement of the same name, mentioned in the Talmud. Following the 1936-1939 Arab revolt against the British in then-Palestine, Miller sold his land to the Jewish National Fund. A community was then established on the land at the close of Yom Kippur on the 5th and 6th of October 1946, by Hapoel HaMizrachi's kibbutz movement, as part of the "11 points in the Negev" settlement plan.

The plan of establishing eleven "points" of Jewish settlement in the Negev was devised in order to assure a Jewish presence in the area prior to the partition of Palestine. This followed the publication of the Morrison-Grady partition proposal, in which the Negev was excluded from the Jewish state and settlement there would be prohibited. Together, the Jewish National Fund, the Jewish Agency, the Haganah and the Mekorot water company launched a drive to settle the Negev and hopefully retain it as part of a Jewish state.

In the summer of 1948, after numerous battles, and a three month siege by the Egyptian army during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, the community of Kfar Darom was abandoned.

Following Israel's victory in the Six-Day War in 1967, and its subsequent control of the Gaza Strip, a Nahal military outpost was established at Kfar Darom in 1970. In 1989, this was converted to a civilian community by the Israeli national unity government of Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Shamir.

At the point of the disengagement plan, there were about sixty families, totaling about 330 people, who earned their living from the free working professions, agriculture, and a central packing center for the world renowned insect-free vegetables produced by Gaza's Jewish communities. The village also had an elementary school, a kollel, and the "Torah and Land" Institute for research into religious laws relating to agriculture in Israel. The visitor center contained the Garden of Commandments Museum, which illustrated commandments relating to the Land of Israel.

When is the process described to enter the Holy of Holies performed?

- **Rashi**, R' Shlomo Yitzchaki (1040-1105, Troyes, France), explains that although the Torah describes this as a general ceremony for every entrance, ("you shall not freely enter... with this you shall enter"), it is only performed on the 10th of Tishrei, Yom Kippur.
- The **Vilna Gaon**, R' Elijah ben Shlomo Zalman Kramer of Vilna (1720-1797), had a different take. According to this foremost leader of non-Chassidic Jewry of the past few centuries, this ceremony was not reserved solely for Yom Kippur; rather, any time the *Kohen Gadol* was required to enter the *Kodesh haKodashim*, the Holy of Holies, the procedure mandated in Chapter 16 was followed.

Is azazel a person, place, or thing?

Rashi relates that *azazel* was a place, a specific steep cliff.

- Alternatively, the **Ramban**, R' Moshe ben Nachman (1194-1270), explains that *azazel* is not a specific place, but a specific *type* of steep cliff. According to this understanding, **any** steep cliff may be used.
- Finally, the **Ba'al haTurim**, R' Yaakov ben Asher (1269-1343, son of the this week's "Ha'Am" on page 3), in his commentary that was allegedly written overnight, writes that *azazel* may refer to Haman.

What causes the atonement of Yom Kippur?

- According to **Rashi**, there is a degree of atonement that is granted by the day itself.
- According to the **Ibn Ezra**, R' Avraham ben Ezra (1089-1164, Spain), it was the service of the *Kohen Gadol* on Yom Kippur that conferred expiation on the nation. This grammarian, poet, and son-in-law of Yehuda haLevi (author of the *Kuzari*) did not see the verses as describing a day of atonement, but a day on which the service of atonement was performed.
- The **Seforno**, R' Ovadiah ben Yaakov Siporno (1475-1550, Italy) qualifies Rashi's understanding. He, who in addition to being a first class Rabbi and biblical commentator was a doctor, philosopher, and dedicated his commentary on *Kohelet* to King Henry II of France, relays that the day only grants atonement to those who had previously repented.

What is the mitzvah of *kedoshim tihyu*, "You shall be holy"?

- **Rashi** explicates that this commandment is the requirement to separate oneself from the commandments at the end of the previous chapter, from licentiousness and sins in general.
- Along the same lines, the **Or haChaim**, R' Chaim ben Attar (1696, Morocco-1743, Jerusalem) explains that this commandment is given to ensure that one has violated both a positive commandment and a prohibition

when he or she sins through licentiousness.

- The **Ramban**, disagreeing with Rashi in one of his most famous comments in his expansive work on Chumash, describes the Torah-mandated lifestyle. Not only should we separate ourselves from that which is forbidden, but we must separate ourselves from that which is technically permitted, but inappropriate, improper, and unsuitable for one who is commanded to "be holy for I am Holy".
- Alternatively, **Da'at Zekenim**, a compendium of Torah commentaries originating with the Tosafists of the 13th century, shares that the commandment to be holy is connected to the later commandment (19:4), "Do not turn to the idols". When is holy by not turning to idols, even for ostensibly valid reasons.
- **Siftei Chachamin**, R' Shabtai Bass (1641, Poland-1718, Prague) suggests the holiness can only be manifested in positive commandments – through positive actions – and not through separation from the forbidden. R' Bass received his name since he was the bass singer in the Prague Alteneue Shul. In addition to his famous supercommentary on Rashi, is considered the father of Jewish bibliography.
- The **Ba'al haTurim** proposes that if one guards himself from sin, he will be guarded from sinning from above.

rlevy@torontotorah.com

Mazal tov to Dovid and Ariella Zirkind, on the birth of Chana Amira!

Continued from page 2

The second set, still whole, represents the second, unconditional acceptance of the Torah, the source of life. The goal of the sacrificial service of Yom Kippur is to impress us with our sometimes tragic history, to inspire us to choose the path of life, and to remind us that sin can only result in death.

Today, this goal has been encapsulated in the *ne'ilah* services, whose themes are the seriousness of Yom Kippur and the consequences of our choices. We remind ourselves that Hashem wants our *teshuvah*, not our death. We pray that we be inscribed in the book of life, and that we attain true repentance.

The *ba'alei mussar* tell us that when we read *parshat Acharei Mot* during the year, we should try to remember how we feel when we read it on Yom Kippur. Let us try to rededicate ourselves to the message of the *luchot*, and to the ideal represented by the *sa'ir la-Hashem*, so that we can all merit true life.