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Yeshiva University Torah MiTzion Beit Midrash Zichron Dov

Parshat Shemini/Parah

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לזכר נשמת אבינו מורינור ר' משה בן דוד שלמה ז"ל

The Holiness of the Mundane

Rabbi Jonathan Ziring

After the tragic deaths of Nadav and Avihu, the children of Aharon, G-d issues a command to Aharon: "Do not drink wine, nor intoxicating drink (alt. wine which is intoxicating, see Keritut 13b), you or your children, when you enter the Tent of Meeting, so you do not die; this is an eternal decree throughout your generations. To distinguish between the sacred and non-sacred, and between the impure and the pure. And [so] you may instruct the Children of Israel in all the decrees that G-d has spoken through Moshe." (Vayikra 10:9-11)

It is not immediately clear why this law is presented here. Rashi (ibid. 10:2, see also Vayikra Rabbah 12:1) cites the position of Rabbi Yishmael, who suggests that the sin of Nadav and Avihu was that they were drunk when they entered the Mishkan. Even if this was not their sin, their deaths do highlight the seriousness of service in the Mishkan, an idea captured by the law that one must not serve when one's mind has been clouded by alcohol, or one has even had a *revi'it* of wine.

While the former half of this text is clear, the latter half is not. What does "distinguish between the sacred and non-sacred" and "instruct the Children of Israel" refer to? Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra suggests that these verses also refer to roles of Aharon, the Kohen Gadol. As part of serving in the Mishkan, he must be able to distinguish between the holy places and non-holy places, holy days and non-holy days, what events make one impure and require sacrifices, and the

like. The final verse refers to the priests' role in defining people as having *tzaraat*, which requires a detailed process of purification culminating in the Temple. (Devarim 24:8)

Most commentators (see Rashi, Rashbam, Ramban, for example), however, follow the Talmud (Keritut 12a-14a) in seeing a second command in these verses – a prohibition against making halachic rulings while inebriated. Though serving in the Mishkan or Beit HaMikdash while drunk carries the death penalty, and issuing legal rulings while drunk does not, the Talmud still understands the two violations as stemming from the same principle. Rambam (Lo Taaseh 73) and Sefer haChinuch (152) include them within the same biblical mitzvah.

What is the connection between the two commands? Sefer haChinuch argues that "the root of this commandment is known. For it is not proper to be involved in precious things, the epitome of preciousness, such as issues of the Temple or words of Torah, except at a time when a person's mind is collected and he is directed in all his deeds." Though Sefer haChinuch writes "there is no need to write at length about things which are obvious," his words do reveal something which is not apparent. There is a temptation to think of life in the Temple as holy, and daily life, even a life filled with Torah and mitzvot, as mundane. However, this mitzvah teaches that even learning about the smallest minutia of halachah is, at some level, as holy as the bringing a sacrifice in the House of G-d. Specifically, the process of *p'sak*, of

deciding how G-d's word should be understood and implemented in this world, demands no less attention than serving G-d in the Temple. Our sages even claim that "from the day the Temple was destroyed, the Holy one Blessed be He only has in this world the four cubits of halachah alone." (Berachot 8a) While the ideal is to have the Temple as well as our daily lives of halachah, when necessary, the latter can fill the place of the former.

Some authorities thought that only certain types of law, such as ritual law or the adjudication of capital offenses were rarified enough to be included in the same category as service in the Temple, and the prohibition against ruling while intoxicated. (Tosafot Sanhedrin 42a s.v. *ha'oskim*, cited as possibility in Shulchan Aruch Choshen Mishpat 7:5) However, others either excluded civil law only due to a technicality (Netivot HaMishpat 7:6), or didn't mention any exclusion at all (Rama Yoreh Deah 242:13), or explicitly rejected such an exclusion (Shut HaBach 41). For these authorities, the study, adjudication, or practice of every detail of halachah, from the most major to the most minute, is imbued with the highest level of sanctity and importance.

As we live in a generation without the Temple, remembering that G-d's presence can and should be found in our lives lived according to His will is a most comforting thought - but one that demands that we not shirk our responsibilities.

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We are grateful to
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As If We Were There
Rabbi Gidon Rothstein
Kodesh Press Publications, 2016

Note: We received a free reviewer's copy.

About the author

Rabbi Gidon Rothstein is an alumnus of Yeshivat Har Etzion and received his rabbinic ordination from Yeshiva University, followed by a Ph.D. in Medieval Jewish History from Harvard University. The author of several books, Rabbi Rothstein is a regular contributor to torahmusings.com, with columns discussing *Derashot HaRan* and the thought of Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein.

The goal

Rabbi Rothstein opens the book by explaining his goal in writing it. Every year at the Pesach Seder we invoke a mishnah (Pesachim 10:5) that teaches the requirement to see *ourselves* as though we've just left Egypt. It is Rabbi Rothstein's hope that this book will aid in proactively working toward attaining that personal experience at the Seder.

The structure

The book is divided into two key sections. The first section is comprised of 21 daily readings for each day of Nisan, from Rosh Chodesh through the completion of Pesach. This is followed

by an additional 16 daily readings, from Rosh Chodesh through the second day of Yom Tov, that are memories of the Sedarim that Rabbi Rothstein's father led.

The content

In the first section, Rabbi Rothstein purposely doesn't follow a typical narrative, be it the Haggadah or the Torah's description of the Exodus. Rather, he isolates important figures in Shemot and critically explores their presumed or suggested thoughts and actions throughout the story. Woven throughout is the question: What would we have done, were we in their shoes? Asking this question allows the reader to think about the figures of the story and their choices in a deeply human sense, something that can be hard given the tremendous miracles that we describe in connection with the Exodus. Rabbi Rothstein cites a number of classic commentators who develop similar themes in their works, and uses their ideas to further expound upon the concepts at hand. Not all of Rabbi Rothstein's explorations are limited to the Pesach Seder or to the Haggadah. In one chapter, he points to numerous *mitzvot* that are predicated upon

remembering the Exodus, and wonders: how are these linked to the Exodus? How is our nation's past woven into our present?

The second section focuses on memories of experiences Rabbi Rothstein had as a child at his family's Pesach seder, with suggestions of how to learn and build from them. For example, he describes that the section expounding *Arami oveid avi* would often get minimal attention, due to time constraints. However, now that he himself is the leader of the Seder, Rabbi Rothstein has the opportunity to add his unique contributions to his father's legacy and elaborate on it.

An interesting read

All in all, *As If We Were There* is an interesting read. Rabbi Rothstein's analysis of the Exodus from Egypt and the themes that emerge from it provide thoughtful perspectives on ideas that may have become dusty with the passing of time, as well as ideas that may be altogether novel to the reader. The daily structure and straightforward writing style make this book a worthy preparation for someone looking to better engage with Pesach this year.

613 Mitzvot: 504-505: Levites, Land and Loot

Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner

As part of Moshe's instructions regarding the roles of Jewish leadership, Devarim 18:1 declares, "The kohanim, the Levites, the entire tribe of Levi shall have neither portion [*chelek*] nor lot [*nachalah*] with Israel. The fires [offerings] of G-d, and His lot, they shall eat."

A midrash explains the apparent redundancy of "portion" and "lot": "Portion" denies Levi a share in the spoils of war, and "Lot" denies Levi a share in the land of Israel. (Sifri Shoftim 163) *Sefer haChinuch* records these as separate mitzvot; the 504th mitzvah prohibits them from holding tribal lands, and the 505th mitzvah prohibits them from partaking of the spoils of war.

Owning land

The prohibition against assigning land to Levi could have been understood as a punishment, fulfilling the curse of Yaakov to Shimon and Levi, "I will divide them among Yaakov, and I will scatter them in Israel." (Bereishit 49:7) However, the law is traditionally viewed in a positive light; as *Sefer haChinuch* (#504) writes, it is "so that the entire business of this tribe will be service of G-d, and they will not need to work the land."

As we have seen (Mitzvah 342 and 408), the tribe of Levi is meant to live in cities contributed by each of the tribes. This system offers several benefits:

- On the most basic level, it supports the landless Levites. As *Sefer haChinuch* (#408) explains, "The tribe of Levi is the choicest of the tribes, prepared for service in the House of G-d. It has no portion with Israel in the fields and

vineyards – but the Levites needed cities in which to dwell, for their children and babies and beasts."

- On a deeper level, dedicating cities throughout the tribes for Levites guarantees that each tribe will have Levites available to teach Torah to their members. As *Sefer haChinuch* writes (#342), "Because wisdom is in their midst, all Israel was to be continually involved with them."
- Further, this arrangement assures that the Cities of Refuge for accidental murderers will be centrally located, since those cities are selected from the Levite cities. *Sefer haChinuch* (#408) suggests that the goal of placing the murderers within the cities of the Levites was that "perhaps the sacred land of the Levites would atone for them." Additionally, it would protect the murderers: "Because the Levites are thoughtful people, versed in the levels of character and honoured wisdom, it is known that they will not reject this murderer who will take refuge there, and they will not harm him."

Taking spoils

One might view the prohibition against taking spoils as a trade: since the nation is charged with supporting the Levites with tithes and gifts (see Mitzvah 450), the Levites cede their claim to any spoils of war. However, *Sefer haChinuch* (#505) offers a higher moral lesson: "For they are servants of G-d, and it would be unseemly for them to use implements taken from others. All that enters the House of G-d should be that which comes via peace, righteousness and faith, and nothing that causes worry for a man or woman."

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Biography

The Ba'al Shem Tov

Rabbi David Ely Grundland

Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer, more commonly referred to as the Ba'al Shem Tov, was born in Okup, Poland circa 1700. The European Jewish world was in a time of much turmoil, facing many pogroms and having recently endured the false messianism of Shabbetai Tzvi. Shabbetai Tzvi had based many of his teachings on kabbalistic concepts and, in his wake, many kabbalists were driven underground, from a fear of a repeat occurrence. It is said that Rabbi Israel's parents were among this group.

Rabbi Israel's father passed away when Rabbi Israel was a young boy, but it is reported that he imparted three primary messages: Hashem is always with you; diligently study Torah, though never presenting yourself as more than a simpleton; and love every single Jew, regardless of who or what he or she is.

After his father's death, Rabbi Israel spent much time in forests. His students report that he learned Torah with hidden kabbalistic sages, and he was eventually appointed the leader of the "hidden tzaddikim", striving to help others and bettering the world through acts of kindness, though ensuring to never take credit or even be recognized for what he was doing. He worked as an elementary school teacher, and eventually also as a slaughterer.

At the age of 36, Rabbi Israel started to teach and preach publically, though in a very non-traditional way. Instead of teaching in the classic style, Rabbi Israel would tell many parables and sing songs to inspire the uninspired and downtrodden Jews of his day. One of his primary teachings was regarding the ability of a simple Jew to serve Hashem on a high level, regardless of Torah knowledge. He also publically taught kabbalah, describing kabbalistic "worlds" within the human psyche.

Rabbi Israel developed a large following, including many sages of the day, although he also encountered staunch opposition from the more traditional Torah schools who opposed his methods and teachings. His followers claimed that he was close with Rabbi Yechezkel Landau (a.k.a. Noda B'Yehudah), although they disagreed on many issues.

The Ba'al Shem Tov died in 1760, and all of his known teachings were recorded posthumously by students. Tzava'at HaRivash, translated here, is the first of those collections, published in 1793.

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Torah and Translation

Service of G-d

The Ethical Will of the Baal Shem Tov

Translated by Rabbi David Ely Grundland

”שויית ד’ לנגדי תמיד.” (תהילים טז: ח)
”שויית” לשון השתוות. בכל דבר המאורע,
הכל שוה אצלו, בין בענין שמשבחי בני אדם
אותו או מבזין אותו, וכן בכל שאר דברים,
וכן בכל המאכלות בין שאוכל מעדנים בין
שאוכל שאר דברים, הכל ישוה בעיניו כיון
שהוסר היצר הרע ממנו מכל וכל. וכל דבר
שיארע יאמר ”הלא זה הוא מאתו ית’, ואם
בעיני הגון וכו’” וכל כונתו לשם שמים, אבל
מצד עצמו אין חילוק. וזה מדרגה גדולה
מאד.

וכל האדם צריך לעבוד השי”ת בכל כחו,
שהכל הוא צורך, מפני שהשי”ת רוצה שיעבדו
אותו בכל האופנים. והכוונה כי לפעמים אדם
הולך ומדבר עם בני אדם ואז אינו יכול
ללמוד, וצריך להיות דבוק בהשי”ת וליחד
יחידים, וכן כשהאדם הולך בדרך ואינו יכול
להתפלל וללמוד כדרכו וצריך לעבוד איתו
באופנים אחרים, אל יצער את עצמו בזה כי
השי”ת רוצה שיעבדוהו בכל האופנים, פעמים
באופן זה ופעמים באופן זה. לכך הזדמן לפניו
לילך לדרך או לדבר עם בני אדם, בכדי לעבוד
אותו באופן הזה. כלל גדול ”גול על ד’
מעשיך, ויכונו מחשבותיך” (משלי טז: ג), שכל
דבר שיזדמן יחשוב שהוא מאתו ית’.

ויראה שיבקש מהשי”ת שיזמין לו תמיד מה
שהשי”ת יודע שהוא לטובתו, ולא מה שנראה
לבני אדם על פי שכלו, כי אפשר מה שבעיניו
טוב הוא רע לו. רק ישליך הכל, כל עניניו
וצרכיו, עליו ית’.

“I place (*shiviti*) Hashem before me, always.” (Tehillim 16:8) *Shiviti* is an expression of equating. That is, every matter that arises before a person must be considered as equal. This is true when others praise or denigrate someone, and so too with all other matters. Similarly, regarding food, whether eating delicacies or anything else, all should be equal in one's eyes, because the evil inclination has been removed from him entirely. Whatever arises, a person must declare, “This too is from Hashem, and if it is proper in His eyes, etc.,” and all of a person's actions should be for the sake of Heaven, although from the individual's perspective there is no difference [between good and bad events] at all. This is a very high level.

Every person must serve Hashem with all their strength, for it is all necessity, for Hashem desires that people serve Him in every way. Meaning: there are times when a person engages in conversation and is unable to learn Torah. At these times, a person must maintain focus on Hashem and perform [Kabbalistic] *yichudim*. And when a person is going on the way and is unable to pray or learn as usual, and one must find other ways in which to serve Hashem, one must never be distraught about these things. Hashem wishes to be served in many ways, and therefore He grants the opportunity to travel or converse in order to serve Hashem in that way. “Commit your deeds to Hashem, and your thoughts will be established.” (Mishlei 16:3) Everything that occurs, a person should think that it is from Him.

It is appropriate for one to ask Hashem to always grant what Hashem knows to be in one's best interest, and not what a person thinks based on their own mind. It is possible that what is good in one's eyes could be detrimental. As such one should cast everything, all of one's matters and needs, upon Hashem.

This Week in Israeli History: 27 Adar II 5739 (Mar. 26 1979)

Rabbi Baruch Weintraub

The Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty

27 Adar II is Wednesday

The young State of Israel offered in its Declaration of Independence “peace and unity to all the neighbouring states and their peoples,” but the latter responded with fire. Leading them was Egypt, whose president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, declared prior to the Six Day War, “Our basic objective will be the destruction of Israel.”

Egypt’s severe defeat in the 1967 Six Day War, and its inability to build on initial success in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, led some Egyptian leaders to rethink their strategy. At the same time, the Yom Kippur War had led the Israeli government to reconsider Defense Minister Moshe Dayan’s 1971 position of, “Better to hold Sharm El-sheikh without peace, than peace without this area.”

These changing winds, together with the change of leadership in the two states, paved the way to peace talks. These became publicly known with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat’s visit to PM Menachem Begin’s Israel in November of 1977. This visit was followed by sixteen months of intensive negotiations, culminating first in the Camp David Accords, and eventually in the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty, signed in Washington DC on 27 Adar II 5739 (March 26, 1979).

As part of the agreement, Israel committed to withdraw from the entire Sinai Peninsula, while Egypt agreed to stop all hostile activities. This seemed unjust to many Israelis, and served as a precedent for future Arab-Israeli agreements, which are still subjects of deep dispute in Israeli society.

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Weekly Highlights: Apr. 2 – Apr. 8 / 23 Adar II – 29 Adar II

Time	Speaker	Topic	Location	Special Notes
שבת Apr. 1-2				
After Hashkamah	R' Jonathan Ziring	Paskening Drunk	BAYT	
After Hashkamah	R' David Ely Grundland	Giving Up One's Life for G-d	Shaarei Shomayim	
After Hashkamah	R' Yisroel M. Rosenzweig	Midrash Rabbah	Clanton Park	
Before minchah	R' Jonathan Ziring	Daf Yomi	BAYT	
After minchah	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Avodah Zarah: The Trilithon	BAYT	Simcha Suite
Sun. Apr. 3				
8:45 AM	R' Jonathan Ziring	Responsa	BAYT	Hebrew
8:45 AM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Medical Halachah Stress in Jewish Law	BAYT	CME Approved Laypeople welcome
9:15 AM	R' Shalom Krell	The Book of Shemuel	Associated (North)	Hebrew
8:15 PM	Haggadah Night at BAYT, in the Simcha Suite R' David E. Grundland, R' Yisroel M. Rosenzweig, R' Mordechai Torczyner, R' Jonathan Ziring			
Mon. Apr. 4				
9:30 AM	Mrs. Ora Ziring	Women's Beit Midrash	Ulpanat Orot	University Students
8:15 PM	Haggadah Night at Shaarei Shomayim R' Cheses, R' Diamond, R' Grundland, R' Strauchler, R' Torczyner			
Tue. Apr. 5				
9:30 AM	R' Jonathan Ziring	Chabura: נותן טעם לפגם	Yeshivat Or Chaim	University Chaverim
10:00 AM	Mrs. Ora Ziring	Women's Beit Midrash	Ulpanat Orot	
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Iyov: Elihu's Conclusion	Shaarei Shomayim	
8:00 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Shai Agnon's לבית אבא on Erev Pesach	Location: Contact info@torontotorah.com	
Wed. Apr. 6				
11:15 AM	R' Jonathan Ziring	Customs of the Seder 2	Beth Emeth	nancywallack@gmail.com
12:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Ethical Bargaining	Miller Bernstein 5000 Yonge St.	Lunch served; RSVP cchoi@millerbernstein.com
2:30 PM	R' Jonathan Ziring	Narratives of the Exodus	Location: Contact carollesser@rogers.com	For women
8:15 PM	"The Science of Chametz" Netivot haTorah Middle School Hack-a-Thon			
Thu. Apr. 7				
1:30 PM	R' Mordechai Torczyner	Shoftim: An Early Rebuke	49 Michael Ct.	For women