

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Shemini

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רפואה שלמה פעסל בת גאלדא / לזכות חילינו

PEACEFUL RECEPTIVENESS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“And it was on the eighth day that Moshe summoned Aharon and his sons, and the Elders of Israel.” (9:1)

Due to the limitations of our finite human minds, we cannot attain ultimate Divine consciousness on our own. G-d therefore revealed Divinity in such a way that we can grasp it, by giving us the Torah. Once this had been accomplished, the next step was to prepare the world to absorb the G-dliness that is inherent in the Torah, for without preparation on our part, Divine revelation cannot be absorbed into our being, and therefore cannot elevate us in any meaningful or lasting way.

G-d gave us the Torah through Moshe, but Aharon was the one who made society receptive to G-dliness by inspiring the people to aspire to the spiritual life. It was therefore Aharon who completed the process of Divine revelation begun by Moshe. The rites that Moshe performed in the Tabernacle’s installation rites did not reveal G-d’s presence; only those that Aharon performed accomplished this.

We all desire to feel G-d’s presence in our lives. In order for this to occur, we must imitate Aharon: “love peace and pursue peace; love your fellow creatures and bring them close to the Torah.” (Likutei Sichot, vol. 7, pp. 298-299) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

IT’S ALL FROM ABOVE

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“And it was on the eighth day that Moshe summoned Aharon and his sons, and the Elders of Israel.” (9:1)

After serving as the Kohen Gadol for seven days, Hashem informed Moshe that he had to relinquish the role to Aharon. The Midrash notes that Moshe did not initially know that he would not be the Kohen Gadol until after seven days when he was replaced, corresponding to the seventh day of his argument with Hashem as to who would redeem the Jewish People from Egypt (Vayikra Rabbah 11:6 with Shemos 4:13).

The Ohr HaChaim notes that a natural response for having to give up such a prestigious position would have been to transfer power reluctantly and quietly, yet Moshe acted with great alacrity, joy, and fanfare despite knowing that he would be forfeiting this holy duty to Aharon and his descendants until the end of time.

Moshe’s enthusiasm is all the more impressive considering that the role of Kohen Gadol was originally intended for him and his children, yet, after insisting that Aharon be chosen to lead the Jewish People out from Egypt in his stead, Hashem became angry and removed the priesthood from Moshe in favor of Aharon (Zevachim 102a). Nevertheless, Moshe’s joy at Aharon’s appointment was so immense that the Midrash writes, he would not have been any happier if he himself would have been appointed as the permanent Kohen Gadol (Vayikra Rabbah 3:6).

Although Moshe’s sincere and perfect acceptance of Hashem’s “punishment” was truly remarkable, by acknowledging that everything that Hashem does is for our greatest benefit, we too can come to fully accept the difficulties and challenges that we face in life.

HOLY TRANSFORMATION

Reb Noson of Breslov

“He said to Aharon, ‘Take a calf for yourself for a sin-offering and a ram for a burnt-offering - both unblemished - and offer them before G-d.’” (9:2)

Specifically a calf, recalling the sin of the golden calf. By sacrificing this calf for G-d rather than for idolatry, the root of evil could be turned into a vehicle for holiness. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 354)

ELICITING REVELATIONS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“An ox and a ram as peace-offerings, to slaughter before G-d, and a grain-offering kneaded with oil, for today G-d is appearing to you.” (9:4)

There are natural levels of Divine revelation - whether Divine beneficence or Divine consciousness - that we can elicit. The Torah is the "instruction manual" that G-d gave us in order to show us how to live life in the way that elicits His beneficence and enables us to sense His presence in our lives.

However, there are also supranatural levels of Divine revelation, which are beyond our ability to elicit. The prime example of this type of revelation was that which occurred on the final, eighth day of the installation rites for the Tabernacle, when G-d completed the inauguration of the Tabernacle by revealing His presence within it. This revelation of Divinity was far too intense to be elicited by anything any human being could possibly do. Nonetheless, since G-d did not want us to feel unworthy of this revelation, He prescribed certain rites for this day, more as a "gift" for us to give Him than an obligation to fulfill.

In this way, G-d taught us that when we observe His commandments in fulfillment of our obligations toward Him, we elicit natural levels of Divine revelation, but when we give Him the "gift" of going beyond what He requires of us, we elicit supranatural levels of Divine revelation. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

UNITED FRONT

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"And the entire congregation approached, and they stood before Hashem [in order to hear Moshe's instructions to the Kohanim]." (9:5)

Rav Yisrael Yosef Bronstein (Ah Chassidische Vort) understands these words very differently. He explains that the Torah is teaching us that only when Klal Yisrael gathers together as one and becomes close - Va'yikrivu es kol ha'edah, can they stand appropriately before Hashem - va'yaamdu lifnei Hashem. Our ability to serve Hashem the right way is solely dependent on the unity that exists within the Jewish people. This perhaps is the source for the Arizal's daily custom of accepting upon himself the mitzvah of v'ahavta l'reyacha kamocho (loving your neighbor as yourself) before accepting the yoke of Hashem. One can't be a servant of Hashem before first expressing one's love for His children.

As we continue to find ourselves in the midst of the long exile that was caused by baseless hatred, let us accentuate that which unites us and ignore that which divides us. By working hard to get closer to each other, we, like Bnei Yisrael, can stand before and serve Hashem in the right way.

CONTEMPLATING OUR CHOICES

Reb Zusia of Anipoli

"And Moshe said, 'This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do; then the glory of Hashem may appear to you.'" (9:6)

If a person wishes to know if his action is a mitzvah, "the thing that Hashem has commanded you," first he must examine his actions to see "if the Glory of Hashem will appear to you."

REMOVING DISUNITY

Chiddushei HaRim

"This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do; then the glory of Hashem may appear to you." (9:6)

The words "This is the thing" are specific; that is why they are preceded with the "definite hey" - "the thing." This teaches us which of the evil inclinations should be removed. We are requested to remove hatred, dissension, and communal conflict from our hearts. "This is the thing Hashem commanded us to do."

SIMPLY BECAUSE HE SAID SO

Tiferes Shmuel

"This is the thing that Hashem has commanded you to do; then the glory of Hashem may appear to you." (9:6)

Every commandment has countless deeper implications and meanings, and even people capable of discerning some of them must realize that whatever they know is still only a drop in the bucket compared to the wealth of meaning inherent in any one of G-d's commands. It is therefore best to perform the commandment for no other reason but that G-d bade us do it.

This, too, is Moshe's message to the Jews: "This is the thing that Hashem commanded" - Do it because it is what G-d commanded you. Don't try to find other reasons, for you'll never understand all its deeper implications. But if you'll do it simply because it is G-d's will, "the glory of Hashem may appear to you."

WHEN NOT TO BE BASHFUL

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"And Moshe said to Aharon, 'Approach the altar...'" (9:7)

We are taught that there are three inherent traits of the Jewish people: bashfulness, mercifulness, and kindness (Yevamos 79a). Therefore, although Aharon knew that G-d chose him for his role as high priest - and indeed, had been preparing for it for a full week before this - he was naturally reluctant to assume a position of greatness.

Moshe therefore reminded Aharon that as praiseworthy as bashfulness is, we must overcome it when it is at odds with performing our Divine mission.

We, too, while cherishing our innate shyness, must not let it interfere with fulfilling our Divine mission. Our innate mercifulness and kindness toward those that need us to help them should in such cases override our innate bashfulness. (Hitva'aduyot 5747, vol. 3, pp. 62-64) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

SHOW OF REMORSE

Divrei Sha'arei Chaim

"And Moshe said to Aharon, 'Approach the altar...'" (9:7)

Aharon was shy and afraid to go up there. That is why Moshe said to him: "Why are you diffident? It is for this purpose that you were chosen." (Rashi)

Moshe explained to Aharon that he had been chosen because he was still ashamed of his participation in the making of the Golden Calf and still atoning for it. The Sages relate that following the incident, Aharon had put iron shackles around his loins and traveled from dwelling to dwelling to teach the Jews to accept the sovereignty of the kingdom of Heaven. For this reason, Moshe felt that Aharon was the one best qualified to atone for the misdeeds of all the repentant sinners among the people of Israel.

JOINT RESPONSIBILITY

Meshech Chochmah

"...and perform your sin-offering and your burnt-offering, atoning for yourself and for the people..." (9:7)

According to the Sages, anyone who causes someone to be punished is regarded as a sinner. The Jews had forced Aharon to make the Golden Calf, and thus caused him to be punished. The Sages also teach that anyone who causes his fellow to be punished is not allowed to enter the vicinity of the Holy One. Therefore, in addition to their own terrible sin, they bore partial guilt for Aharon's sin. Hence, the atonement for Aharon was also atonement for the Jews' sin to the extent that they contributed to Aharon's sin.

Accordingly, Moshe said to Aharon: "Approach the altar and perform your sin-offering and your burnt-offering, atoning for yourself and for the people." Your sacrifices will serve as atonement not only for you, but also for the people that caused you to sin.

NEVER TOO LATE

Rabbi Elimelech Biderman

"Aharon approached the altar and slaughtered the calf that was his sin-offering." (9:8)

The Rishonim explain that when Aharon approached the altar to bring his sacrifice to Hashem, the Satan came and appeared to Aharon from within the fire on the altar, in the form of the golden calf. This was an attempt to discourage him from serving Hashem and bringing his sacrifice by reminding him of his role with the golden calf. In response to this, Moshe Rabbeinu said to Aharon "Approach the altar" (9:7). Don't let the Satan's discouraging ideas stop you! With this, Aharon approached the altar and slaughtered the calf; meaning, by overcoming the discouraging thoughts and feelings of inadequacy, he slaughtered his yetzer hara that appeared in the form of a calf.

BLESSINGS OF A HUMBLE LEADER

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Aharon lifted his hands towards the people and blessed them. Then he went down from having performed the sin-offering, the burnt-offering, and the peace-offering." (9:22)

Although Aharon was aware that it was his performance of this special day's rituals that would bring G-d's presence into the Tabernacle, and he did everything exactly as Moshe instructed, he still felt unworthy of his role. The memory of his participation in the incident of the Golden Calf still weighed heavily on him.

Aharon expressed these sentiments when he blessed the people, applying the text of the priestly blessing to the day's unique circumstances:

He said, "We know that G-d's presence can only dwell in this Tabernacle if He has forgiven us for the incident of the Golden Calf. Since I played a central role in this incident, His forgiveness for all of us depends upon His forgiving me. Therefore, until we know that G-d has forgiven me, I cannot bless your efforts by myself. Therefore, I must appeal to G-d Himself to bless you and watch over you. May G-d shine His face to you and grace you with His presence, as a result of His being partial toward you, forgiving you the sin of the Golden Calf, and thereby granting you peace."

Like all great Jewish leaders, it was Aharon's feelings of inadequacy that truly made him fit for his role. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 22, pp. 39-44) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

PROTECTING OUR BLESSINGS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Aharon lifted his hands towards the people and blessed them. Then he went down from having performed the sin-offering, the burnt-offering, and the peace-offering." (9:22)

The first stanza of the priestly blessing is, "May G-d bless you and watch over you," which, as Rashi tells us, means, "May G-d bless you with abundance and watch over you so that no one steals your wealth."

Spiritually, the abundance referred to here is our success in our efforts to refine ourselves and serve G-d wholeheartedly. This blessing needs to be guarded from being "stolen," since the forces of negativity within us often try to sabotage the spiritual excitement that we generate in prayer, transforming it afterwards into righteous indignation or an awakening of physical desire.

We therefore ask G-d to not only bless us with success in spiritual refinement and the experience of spiritual ecstasy, but also with the ability to properly focus it and channel it in pure and wholesome directions. (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5705, p. 204) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

JUST A QUESTION OF HOW

Imrei Emes

“Aharon lifted his hands toward the people and blessed them...” (9:22)

At the time when Aharon became eligible for the priestly gifts, he also became eligible to bestow the blessing - he and his descendants until the time of the resurrection of the dead. (Midrash)

Concerning the Priestly Blessing, the Torah (Bamidbar 7:28) says: “In this way shall you bless the Children of Israel.” But there is no explicit commandment in the Torah specifying that it is the duty of the kohanim to bless the people at all. Why was this commandment not explicitly set down?

Because the kohanim were endowed with loving-kindness, which made them eager to bless the Jews on their own. This is why the Torah did not find it necessary to command them to do it, and confined itself to giving directions as to how the kohanim were to give the blessing.

HANDFUL OF BLESSINGS

Reb Noson of Breslov

“Aharon lifted his hands towards the people and blessed them...” (9:22)

The main blessing comes through the hands (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 358). The greater the purity of one’s hands - the cleaner they are from usury and other monetary transgressions - the greater one’s capacity to receive and channel blessing.

FOCUS ON THE PRESENT

Radomsker Rebbe

“Aharon lifted his hands towards the people and blessed them. Then he went down from having performed the sin-offering, the burnt-offering and the peace-offering.” (9:22)

The Talmud states: “One does not bypass a mitzvah” (Pesachim 64b).

It is the way of the evil inclination to hold back an individual as he approaches to serve Hashem, especially as he begins to pray. The inclination asks how a person can approach holiness when he is full of transgression.

But that is really not the case. Hashem listens to all and has mercy on all.

While performing mitzvos, one does not think of his transgressions. When one is doing good, the evil that lurks in the heart is removed and he does not think of anything else. That is the meaning of “He descended from having performed the sin-offering, the olah-offering, and the peace-offering.” While Aharon was blessing the Jewish people, he did not remember any of their transgressions.

FINDING LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

Imrei Shefer

“And Moshe and Aharon went into the tent of meeting...” (9:23)

Why did Moshe enter together with Aharon? To instruct him concerning the incense. (Rashi)

Why didn’t Moshe teach Aharon about the incense ceremony before, when he had gone over the other sacrificial procedures?

Actually, Moshe didn’t go with Aharon to instruct him in the incense procedure, but to prepare him for a tragic occurrence in which incense was to be involved, namely, the death of Aharon’s sons Nadav and Avihu who were devoured by fire when they brought their incense with “foreign fire before G-d” (10:2).

The Torah relates that when this tragedy struck, Aharon took it with exceptional self-control for - like all exceedingly righteous people - he accepted sorrow with serenity and gratitude.

It was this ability to praise G-d even for tragedy and accept suffering with serenity that Moshe went to teach Aharon in the Tent of Meeting.

The solemn moment when Moshe and Aharon entered the Mishkan for the first time was the most fitting occasion for Moshe to teach Aharon “concerning the incense,” i.e., to be calm, and to praise G-d even for the crushing sorrow that was to befall him because of an offering of incense; namely, his two sons’ death. As the Sages say, “One must bless [G-d] for bad tidings just as one blesses Him for good tidings.”

LOVING OUR FELLOW

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“When they came out, they blessed the people; and the Glory of Hashem appeared to all the people.” (9:23)

It was only as a result of the combined efforts of Moshe and Aharon that the Divine presence descended upon the Tabernacle - and thereby upon the Jewish people in general. Aharon performed all the sacrificial rites, but Moshe instructed Aharon how to perform them.

Aharon embodied the trait of brotherly love. As the Talmudic sage Hillel instructs us, “Be of the disciples of Aharon, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving your fellow creatures and drawing them close to the Torah” (Avos 1:12).

Moshe’s role was to convey G-d’s teachings to the people, which included teaching Aharon how to love others.

From this we learn that the key to constructing our own Tabernacle - i.e., to making our own lives into a home for G-d, wherein G-d’s presence can be revealed - is loving our fellow Jews as G-d instructs us in His Torah. (Hitva’aduyot 5742, vol. 3, pp. 1125-1126) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

MUTUAL LOVE

Reb Noson of Breslov

“A fire went out from before G-d and consumed the burnt-offering and the fats upon the Altar. When all the people saw this, they sang praises and fell upon their faces.” (9:24)

Though a fire from Heaven descends upon the Altar, it is a mitzvah to bring an earthly fire as well. (Yoma 21b)

The fire from Heaven sent to burn the sacrifices (i.e., to receive them) represents a burning love of G-d towards us. When we present our love for G-d as an offering upon the Altar - even though that love may be blemished - the Heavenly fire consumes our passions and purifies them. (Likutey Halakhot V, p. 38a)

CAUTION: VERY HOT

Rebbe Nachman

“Aharon’s sons Nadav and Avihu each took a fire pan and placed fire and incense upon it. They brought before G-d a foreign fire which He had not commanded them to bring.” (10:1)

A person who burns with desire for G-d creates a “fire,” an “appeasing fragrance” that brings Him satisfaction, for His will has been done. However, one must be wary of the fire of the evil inclination burning within him. This was the “foreign fire” that Nadav and Avihu brought before G-d. (Likutey Moharan I, 41)

ALL IN GOOD TIME

Reb Noson of Breslov

“They [Nadav and Avihu] brought before G-d a foreign fire which He had not commanded them to bring.” (10:1)

The dedication of the Tabernacle was such a holy act that an incredible revelation of G-dliness was manifest at that time. Seeing this, Nadav and Avihu thought that the time had come to bring a complete rectification for the sin of the golden calf, which had been caused by the mixed multitude. Now that G-dliness was drawn back into the world, Nadav and Avihu thought they could ignite a “fire” - a total eradication of the forces of evil from the world. But the time was not yet ripe for this rectification, and their fire was considered a “foreign” fire that consumed them instead.

When a person desires to draw others close to G-d, he must exercise infinite patience and not act hastily. Therefore, the Torah relates: “G-d spoke to Moshe after the death of the two sons of Aharon... Speak to your brother Aharon. He must not enter at all times the Holy [i.e., he should enter only on Yom Kippur in this fashion]” (Leviticus 16:1-2). G-d’s commandment is juxtaposed with the reminder of the death of Nadav and Avihu to teach that one must not act hastily, even when entering the realm of sanctity (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 244).

FOLLOW THE INSTRUCTIONS

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

“They [Nadav and Avihu] brought before G-d a foreign fire which He had not commanded them to bring.” (10:1)

There are many suggestions quoted in the Midrash as to what wrong Nadav and Avihu did that caused them to be deserving of death. However, the Chiddushei HaRim points out that one does not have to look farther than the simple reading of the pasuk to identify their mistake and what we can learn from it. He explains that Nadav and Avihu, who were righteous and great people with pure intentions, were punished simply because they did something that they weren’t commanded to do. The Chiddushei HaRim points out further that if Hashem punished Nadav and Avihu so severely for doing something that they were not instructed to do, we could imagine the positive impact we can make when we perform the mitzvos that Hashem did instruct us to do.

[The Chiddushei HaRim adds that it is in view of the foregoing that every blessing we recite before performing a Divine commandment includes the phrase “Who have sanctified us by Your commandments and commanded us to...” The Divine commandment is the fundamental force that makes us holy.]

There are times in our lives when we get caught up in trying to find new and creative ways to connect to Hashem. Instead, we need to realize that Hashem has already provided us with the instruction manual for us to follow. If we perform the mitzvos in the manner that we were commanded to by Hashem, then we are guaranteed to have a positive outcome instead of a potentially negative result. This will surely help us continue to grow closer to Hashem.

MANAGING ECSTASY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“A fire went forth from before G-d and consumed them.” (10:2)

Nadav and Avihu were swept up in the ecstasy of the moment. In their intense desire to cleave to G-d, which they expressed through their unauthorized incense offering, they rose through spiritual heights even as they felt their souls leaving them. From this perspective, their death was not a punishment but a fulfillment of their wish to dissolve into G-d’s essence.

Nevertheless, we are not intended to imitate their example; on the contrary, we are expressly forbidden to pursue such suicidal spiritual rapture. Although it is necessary to seek inspiration and renew it constantly, the purpose of reaching increasingly higher planes of Divine consciousness is to bring the consciousness that we acquire down into the world, thereby making the world increasingly more conscious of G-d, transforming it into His home. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 3, pp. 987-991) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

STICK TO THE PLAN

Sefas Emes

"A fire went forth from before G-d and consumed them." (10:2)

[Nadav and Avihu] died because they entered the Sanctuary intoxicated with wine. (Rashi)

How can one say that men like Nadav and Avihu could have been guilty of profaning their priestly office by allowing themselves to become intoxicated? This statement is not to be taken literally. It simply means that the two men approached their sacred task with perception and rapture not of Divine origin. The allegory of "wine" is used to describe their conduct because wine is the symbol of wisdom, adding, as it does, to wisdom and opening the heart to understanding, as it is written: "Wine causes the close-mouthed to speak" and the Sages say that "wine makes wise."

Nadav and Avihu went to the Sanctuary with thoughts and emotions that originated from within their hearts. Therein lay their error, because kohanim, as representatives of the Merciful One, were expected to perform their functions inspired only by the spiritual implications of the mission entrusted to them by G-d, without any thoughts and feelings of their own.

NOT AT THEIR EXPENSE

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"A fire went forth from before G-d and consumed them." (10:2)

This verse describes the death of Nadav and Avihu, which, according to the Gemara served as punishment for their asking of each other when Moshe and Aharon will leave the world so that they can lead the generation in their stead. This account is very perplexing; how could the great sons of Aharon be eager to lead the Nation when it would mean the death of their own father and uncle?

Rav Yosef Salant answers that they of course had no desire for anyone to die, rather, their words simply reflected a passionate eagerness to come close to Hashem in a way that was only possible at this specific juncture in history. For they knew that a leader only merits as much greatness as his generation itself is worthy of, and at that time, the Jewish People were at their spiritual peak, unparalleled in their understanding of Hashem. Therefore, only by leading this group of people would they personally be able to reach the highest possible level of connection to Hashem.

Now that we see their intentions were only positive and geared toward holiness, we can ask, why were they punished?

Rav Yosef Salant answers that on their level of greatness, such words were inappropriate. Perhaps this is because the pursuit of personal greatness - even spiritual greatness - must never come at the expense of anyone else.

SHOWING CONSTRAINT

Reb Noson of Breslov

"A fire went out from before G-d and consumed them. They died before G-d." (10:2)

Nadav and Avihu died because they burned with great zealotry for G-dliness, even beyond their capabilities (Likutey Halakhot II, p. 408). They did not constrain themselves in matters of spirituality. They received too much light and could not contain it. Therefore, they died (ibid., II, p. 146a). Reb Noson adds that though they were great tzaddikim, Nadav and Avihu did not exercise restraint when approaching the Holy of Holies, which is the highest level of sanctity in this world.

ACCEPTANCE AND ACTION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"And Moshe said to Aharon, 'This is what G-d spoke, I will be sanctified through those nearest to Me, and I will be honored before all the nation.' Aharon was silent." (10:3)

There are times when tragic things happen for which there is no rational explanation. In the face of such tragedies, we must realize that our limited minds cannot comprehend G-d's infinite intellect. The only way we can process what has happened is the way Aharon did: through silently accepting G-d's will and our friends' and relatives' condolences.

This acceptance of our fundamental uncertainty applies, however, only to the search for explanations. There is no uncertainty regarding the proper response to tragedy. We must take our cue from our ancestors in Egypt: "The more they oppressed them, the more they increased and spread" (Shemos 1:12). Drawing more Divine revelation into the world through increasing our participation in studying the Torah and fulfilling its commandments will hasten the ultimate and final Redemption, when "death will be swallowed up forever, and G-d will wipe the tears off all faces" (Yeshayahu 25:8). (Igrat Kodesh, vol. 13, pp. 239-240) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

OUR GUIDING LIGHT

Reb Noson of Breslov

"And to teach the Jewish people all the laws that G-d has told them through Moshe." (10:11)

To teach (Le'horot) has the same root as Torah. The Torah is a pathfinder that directs a person to the true path of life. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 430)

TRUE CLOSENESS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"Moshe spoke to Aharon and his surviving sons, Eleazar and Itamar, 'Take the grain-offering left over from G-d's fire-offerings and eat it as unleavened loaves near the Altar, for they are of superior holiness.'" (10:12)

Moshe comforted Aharon over the loss of his two older sons, Nadav and Avihu, by pointing out that their death through Divine ecstasy showed that they were closer to G-d than Moshe or Aharon were.

Moshe was not exaggerating in order to comfort Aharon; on the other hand, he was also aware that Nadav and Avihu had not been privileged to communicate with G-d directly, as he had.

What Moshe meant, rather, was that whereas G-d had commanded him (and Aharon) to forego their personal, exalted spiritual state in order to lead the people and teach them the Torah, G-d had made no such demands on Nadav and Avihu. Therefore, they indeed remained “closer” to G-d than Moshe or Aharon were able to be.

Nonetheless, G-d subsequently made it clear that Nadav and Avihu’s approach was not meant to be a model for others. True closeness to G-d results from identifying with His purpose in creating the world: refining it and transforming it into His home, and inspiring and instructing others to do the same. (Hitva’aduyot 5724, vol. 2, pp. 395-399) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

PREP TIME

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“You shall eat [your portions of the sacrifices]... for so have I been commanded [by G-d].” (10:13)

The normal rules governing the behavior of the priests were suspended on the eighth day of the installation rites because the day’s essential message was that G-d can override His own rules. Whereas the number seven signifies the natural order, the number eight signifies the miraculous transcendence of natural order.

Nevertheless, there could not have been a miraculous eighth day of the Tabernacle’s inauguration without the preceding seven non-miraculous days. This is because G-d makes His miraculous intervention in life dependent upon us.

The ultimate transcendence of the natural order will occur in the Messianic era. The miraculous revelations of the future will be the result of the preparations we make now. As we continue to refine the world through natural means, we should bear in mind that the results of our efforts will be beyond whatever we can imagine. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

ASCENT AND DESCENT

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“The breast used as the wave-offering and the thigh used as the raised-offering, you may eat...” (10:14)

The installation offerings were a type of peace-offering. All peace-offerings require “raising” and “waving”: the priest and the offeror must together hold specific parts of the animal and lift them, lower them, and then move them back and forth.

The vertical movements allude to our relationship with G-d: sometimes we ascend to great heights, and sometimes we suffer temporary descents or setbacks.

The horizontal movements allude to our relationship with our fellow human beings: sometimes we need to draw them close to us, and sometimes we need to push them away, encouraging them to assert their independence.

The fact that both the raising and lowering movements are part of the sacrifice indicates that we can remain conscious of G-d’s presence in our lives both when we are on the spiritual ascent and when we are suffering a setback.

The fact that both the back and forth movements are part of the sacrifice indicates that we must both teach this lesson to others and encourage them to develop their appreciation of it on their own. (Hitva’aduyot 5746, vol. 2, pp. 784, 787-790) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

THINK IT OVER

HaDerash VeHalyun

“And Moshe diligently inquired concerning the goat of the sin-offering...” (10:16)

One of the principal causes of sin and violation of the Torah is rashness, the failure to make diligent inquiry to whether the action contemplated is permissible.

“To make diligent inquiry is half of the Torah” (Mesorah) - half of its observance depends upon careful deliberation before embarking on a course of action.

A similar thought is conveyed by the Psalmist’s words (Tehillim 10:13): “Why would the wicked man spurn G-d and say in his heart: ‘You will not call to account,’” which may also be rendered as “How does the wicked man anger G-d? He says in his heart: ‘Don’t call to account.’”

“Do not inquire so much,” the sinner says, in effect. Do not deliberate too carefully. Whatever you desire to do, act quickly and do not ask too many questions. Such rashness causes G-d to become angry, while “diligent inquiry” is conducive to the proper observance of the Torah.

THE PERFECT BLEND

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“Aharon said to Moshe, ‘See, this day they brought their sin-offering and their burnt-offering before G-d, and such things have befallen me! Had I eaten a [regular] sin-offering today, would it have pleased G-d?’” (10:19)

Moshe and Aharon’s perspectives on the difference between the special sacrifices of the day and those that would be offered up on a regular basis reflect their emphases in our relationship with G-d.

Moshe was devoted to transmitting G-d’s Torah to the people, whereas Aharon was devoted to elevating the people to the Torah.

The Torah is unchanging truth, whereas human beings are constantly changing. Moshe saw the Torah's truth as being uniformly applicable in all situations, whereas Aharon realized that each situation must be assessed in order to know how to apply the Torah's unchanging truth effectively.

Aharon saw that a one-time sacrifice is different than one that would be offered up regularly, that G-d's truth can be reflected differently in different contexts.

In our own lives, we must meld Moshe's and Aharon's perspectives. For ourselves, we must be like Moshe, devoted to the Torah's absolute and unchanging truth.

When interacting with others, we, like Aharon, must take into account their moods and inclinations, drawing them closer to the Torah through forgiving love. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 17, pp. 113-116) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

MESSENGER OF TRUTH

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"And Moshe heard [Aharon's explanation], and it was pleasing in his eyes." (10:20)

G-d instructed Aharon and his two surviving sons to eat their designated portions of the day's sacrifices as an exception to the rule that priests in mourning may not eat sacrificial meat.

Moshe assumed that this exception applied to all the sacrifices of the day, while Aharon assumed that it applied only to the special sacrifices that were offered up exclusively on this unique day. When Aharon explained his perspective, Moshe agreed that he was right.

When Moshe heard Aharon's reasoning, he acknowledged that it made more sense than his own, admitting that he had not received any direct instructions from G-d in the matter.

The obvious lesson for us in this episode is never to be afraid to admit the truth, even if doing so may prove to be embarrassing.

Moreover, we should admit the truth even if we might think that our social or religious standing obligates us not to. G-d Himself had appointed Moshe as the transmitter of the Torah, and it was therefore paramount that the people trust his integrity. Moshe was fully aware of this, and could have thought that admitting his own fallibility might compromise his authority as G-d's messenger. But he correctly realized that, on the contrary, demonstrating his readiness to bow before the truth would only enhance the people's respect for his message.

We, too, can be effective messengers of truth when we demonstrate that it means more to us than our esteem in the eyes of others. (Sichot Kodesh 5739, vol. 2, pp. 571-573) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

UNIMAGINABLE ACCEPTANCE

Chasam Sofer

"And Moshe heard [Aharon's explanation], and it was pleasing in his eyes." (10:20)

Moshe was pleased with Aharon's subdued reaction to his personal tragedy. When Aharon "held his peace" (10:3) at the time of his two sons' death, one could have attributed his silence not to resignation to G-d's will but to grief and bitterness too powerful to express. But when Moshe saw that Aharon's mind was clear enough to be able to discuss laws, make distinctions between them and render decisions superior to his own, Moshe was satisfied that Aharon's silence was not due to the numbness of shock and grief, and he was pleased that his brother had so calmly and willingly accepted Heaven's decree.

PREPARING FOR PROPHECY

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

"G-d spoke to Moshe and to Aharon, saying to them, 'Speak to Bnei Yisrael, saying: These are the creatures that you may eat from among all the animals of the land...'" (11:1-2)

We should examine why the verse states, "saying to them," which seems to be superfluous, since the very next words direct Moshe and Aharon to speak to the Jewish people. It appears that we can understand the meaning of this phrase by citing Rashi's comments on the passage regarding Miriam's question to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call a wet nurse for you from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?" (Shemos 2:7). Rashi remarks: "This teaches us that she had taken him around to many Egyptian women to nurse, but he did not nurse from any of them because he was destined to speak with the Shechinah in the future" (see Sotah 12b; Shemos Rabbah 1:25). Moshe, as a newborn, refused to suckle from the impure Egyptian wet nurses since he was destined to prophesy to the Jewish nation as the messenger of the Shechinah.

The Ramban (Vayikra 11:13) explains that the Torah prohibited us from eating these impure types of animals because doing so instills cruel traits in a person's physical being. The Jewish people - a holy nation - must cultivate the trait of kindness. Furthermore, in the future, G-d will speak with every Jew (Tanchuma, Mikeitz 2), as the verse states, "Your sons and daughters shall prophesy..." (Yoel 3:1). Since they are destined to converse with the Almighty, how is it possible for someone who has eaten impure food to converse with the Shechinah?

This is what our verse alludes to with the words "saying to them": "Since in the future I will be "saying to them" - i.e., conversing with each and every individual - they must not eat impure creatures."

BON APPETIT

Rabbi Yehonatan Eybeschutz

“These are the creatures that you may eat from among all the animals of the land...” (11:2)

The saying “You are what you eat” means that it is important to eat good food in order to be healthy and fit. Nutrients from the foods we eat provide the foundation of the structure, function, and wholeness of every cell in our body – from the skin, hair, and bones to the muscles, digestive system, and immune system. “You are what you eat” is correct from a spiritual sense as well. G-d, in His infinite wisdom, knows what foods are spiritually healthy for us and those that are not.

When a doctor treats a patient with blocked arteries, one of the first steps the doctor will take is to modify the person’s diet. They will encourage the patient to increase their eating of avocados and asparagus, among others as both are considered to be natural artery-clearing. We all understand that if someone wants to become an elite athlete, it is important they follow a regimented diet to enhance their ability to perform at the highest level.

We all have, in a sense, spiritual arteries that allow us to absorb holiness and spirituality. By eating nonkosher food, we are blocking our spiritual arteries, and it becomes very difficult to receive and absorb holiness. And by eating kosher food, this will enhance our spiritual self and we will be primed for spiritual greatness. We are what we eat, in more ways than one. - Rabbi Yacov Berber

If we eat to be healthy and use our good health to serve G-d, then the mundane act of eating becomes a holy endeavor and the food consumed becomes elevated to a higher spiritual plane. A person who eats simply because he enjoys the food or because he wants to have the energy to indulge in personal pleasure is no better than an animal. Animals also eat because they like the food and need the energy to pursue their desires.

Life’s experiences can be divided into three categories: black, white, and gray. Black represents all forbidden acts, such as stealing. White signifies all acts that we are obligated in doing, such as giving charity. And gray represents everything in between, acts that are neither sinful nor obligatory.

Most of our lives are spent in the gray zone. However, we have the ability to turn gray into white. We can elevate the mundane and the ordinary to make it holy. Most of our waking hours are spent trying to make a living. What we do with our hard-earned incomes will very much impact in which category all those hours will end up. Will they stay in the gray, or will they be elevated to the white? If we use our disposable earnings to indulge in personal pleasure, then the many hours we spent working will remain ordinary and mundane. If, however, we use those funds to help those less fortunate than ourselves, our working hours will be elevated and viewed as a noble and righteous endeavor. - Rabbi Yacov Berber

The Kohanim (the priests) were considered more scholarly than the rest of the Jewish people. This was attributed to the fact that they consumed meats of the animal that had been brought as a sacrifice in the Temple, and as a result, their food was saturated with sparks of holiness.

G-d, in His infinite wisdom, shared with us which foods are kosher and which are not kosher. Kosher food is beneficial for our spiritual well-being, while nonkosher food is considered detrimental to our spiritual state. Non-kosher food is for the soul what poison is for the body. - Rabbi Yacov Berber

RESTORING HIDDEN SPARKS

Baal Shem Tov

“These are the creatures that you may eat from among all the animals of the land...” (11:2)

A king lost a precious diamond that had been set in his ring. Despite having scores of servants, officers, nobles, dukes, and military personnel at his service, he did not command them to search for his gem.

Instead, he commanded his only son to conduct the search. The king knew that his officers were highly capable and guaranteed to succeed, but he wished to credit his precious son with the jewel’s recovery.

The king aided his son by dropping hints, because the gem was not truly lost. It had been planted to justify a search, so as to bring merit to his son. The king longed to delight in his son’s success, take pride in his accomplishment, and exclaim, “See! No one was able to find it except for my son!”

This parable allows us to recognize that G-d deliberately created a universe with sparks of holiness trapped within materiality, so that He could instruct His son, the Jewish people, to find them and restore them to Him. In particular, they achieve this through eating food that is kosher.

You might feel drawn to food and drink out of hunger and thirst, but in truth, it is your soul that is attracted to the sparks of holiness trapped within food and drink, because you have received a mission of redeeming these particular sparks. G-d gave us a clear set of instructions as to how we must use and interact with materiality. These are hints, pointing to the sparks that form the basis of our mission. He did not offer these instructions to the countless angels; rather, He lovingly planted the sparks on earth, especially for us.

SEPERATION AND DELIBERATION

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“You may eat any animal that has split hooves which are completely separated, and that chews its cud.” (11:3)

The first sign of a kosher animal is its split foot. The foot both touches the ground and separates us from the ground. It therefore alludes to the notion that in our involvement with the physical world, we must remain separate from it, aloof in our dealings with materiality.

The fact that the foot must be split alludes to the notion that there must be an opening in this barrier: We must make sure that the light of holiness permeates even the most mundane aspects of creation, and make sure to retain Divine consciousness even when we are involved in the mundane aspects of our lives.

The other sign of kosher land animals is rumination. This alludes to the necessity of deliberating before engaging the mundane aspects of life. First, we must weigh our intentions, ensuring that they are solely toward elevating the world, purging them of any desire to simply indulge in sensuality for its own sake. Second, we must weigh the methods we employ in elevating the world, ensuring that they conform to the guidelines set forth in the Torah. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 1, pp. 224-226) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

KOSHER HOSTING

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"You may eat any animal that has split hooves which are completely separated, and that chews its cud." (11:3)

The two most prominent characteristics of a kosher animal are split hooves and that it chews its cud. Interestingly, the words "parsah - hoof" and "geirah - cud" have a double meaning. "Parsah" can also mean a slice of bread while "geirah" can also refer to an ancient coin with the weight of one-twentieth of a shekel. This, say the sefarim, is an allusion to two important mitzvos: charity and welcoming guests.

R' Meir of Premishlan zt'l enlightens us in the following manner. The camel and the pig are both non-kosher animals and may not be eaten. The camel, says the Torah, "chews its cud but does not split its hoof." The pig is just the opposite; it "has split hooves but does not chew its cud." In order for an animal to be considered kosher, it must have both of these qualifications. Likewise, when a Jew invites a guest into his home, he must ensure that his guest is perfectly comfortable. The halachah states that a host should always cut several slices of bread from his loaf in case the guest would like more but is too embarrassed to cut for himself. The host must also partake of enough food to encourage his guest to eat without self-consciousness. This is alluded to in the pasuk. The camel "chews its cud" - eats enough to encourage guests, but does not "split its hoof" - share its bread with others. The reverse holds true for the pig. So, too, only a host who fulfills both requirements is "kosher."

From this we learn that one of the primary distinguishing marks of a Jew is that he willingly shares his bread with the poor and distributes charity freely.

LEAVING AN OPENING

Reb Noson of Breslov

"You may eat any animal that has split hooves which are completely separated, and that chews its cud." (11:3)

A split hoof is one of the signs of a kosher animal. Symbolically, this implies that even if a person finds himself living an animalistic existence, he can always find a way to return to G-d and live as a human being. A completely closed hoof, however, denotes the tendency to remain at an animalistic, subhuman level.

These two signs of a kosher animal correspond to the qualities that can help a person return to G-d.

A closed hoof represents a closed atmosphere, where nothing enters. A split hoof has an opening - i.e., an inner, tranquil atmosphere - which can be entered, even from the lowest of levels (the feet or hooves).

The chewing of the cud returns food that has descended into the animal's stomach back towards its head; this indicates that a person is returning to da'at - to intellect - rather than following his animalistic tendencies.

FALSE ADVERTISING

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"But this is what you shall not eat from those that chew the cud or have split hooves; the camel, though it chews the cud, its hoof is not split - it is impure for you." (11:4)

The Kli Yakar points out that the phrase "the camel, though it chews the cud" in the above verse is inappropriately placed. Since the verse tells us the reason why we cannot eat this animal, why does it begin by stating a reason that we can eat it - the verse should have said "But this is what you shall not eat from those that chew the cud or have split hooves; the camel, for its hoof is not split [even] though it chews the cud." Why is the camel's "Kosher sign" written first, or even at all?

The Kli Yakar answers that the phrase "it chews the cud" is actually not coming to explain its "Kosher sign" rather the exact opposite. The fact that the camel chews the cud - its "Kosher sign" - is precisely what makes it even more treif, because pretending to be good when in fact you are not, is a terrible character trait, worse than someone wicked who at least openly acts wickedly. (This principle can also be learned from Rashi [Bereishis 37:4] when he praises Yosef's brothers for "not speaking one thing with their mouth and another in their heart" when they were "not able to speak with him [Yosef] peacefully"; they acted with open honesty, not pretending to behave in a way that was not a genuine reflection of their feelings towards Yosef.)

Therefore, the Kli Yakar explains that this sort of animal is worse to eat as it represents more of a danger to the Jewish people who may be tricked by its "Kosher sign."

FINS AND SCALES

Reb Noson of Breslov

“Of everything that is in the water, this is what you can eat. You can eat anything that has fins and scales, whether in the water, the seas, or the rivers.” (11:9)

For a fish to be kosher, it must have both fins and scales. There are fish that have fins but do not have scales. But every fish that has scales has fins, too. If so, why does the Torah even mention fins? In order to magnify the Torah and glorify it. (Niddah 51b)

This teaching demonstrates that even things that are not absolutely applicable to Torah law can also be sanctified and elevated into holiness. People ask, “Why did G-d give us so many mitzvos, making it difficult to observe the Torah?” In fact, G-d wanted us to become absolutely pure, and the only way to attain that level is through Torah study and the performance of good deeds. Then, even seemingly simple deeds can become a vehicle for attaining purity. This concept mirrors the devotion of the tzaddikim, who transform mundane acts into holy acts. And it also explains why the Torah contains many stories, which show how the Patriarchs served G-d even in their everyday acts. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 150)

For a fish to be kosher, it must have both fins and scales. There are fish that have fins but do not have scales. But every fish that has scales, has fins, too. (Niddah 51b)

Tzaddikim are compared to fish; charity is compared to water. Unlike animals which require shechitah (ritual slaughter), fish do not require shechitah. Symbolically, tzaddikim are pure and do not require rectification, and charity is an act of purity symbolizing the rectification of the soul.

The signs of a kosher fish are fins and scales. “Scales” refer to charity, which is a suit of armor that protects a person, as in “He dressed in charity as in armor” (Isaiah 59:17), and “He dressed him in a garment of armor” (I Shmuel 17:38). Anyone who gives charity merits to this type of garment. The word tzaddik (צדיק, righteous person) comes from the same root as tzedakah (צדקה, charity), connecting the concepts of purity and protection. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 148)

A kosher fish must possess both fins and scales. (Chullin 66b)

Snapir (סנפיר, fins) is similar to Snapirin (סנפירין, bright light) - the material of which the Second Tablets were made (Rashi on Shemos 34:1). Fins represent the light of the intellect that a person attains. Scales, on the other hand, represent a tzitzum (constriction) of the intellect (scales are coverings of the skin, conceptually a “concealment” or “constriction”) - since a person must take care not to exceed the bounds of his intellectual capacity. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 71a)

For a fish to be kosher, it must have both fins and scales. There are fish that have fins but do not have scales. But every fish that has scales, has fins, too. (Niddah 51b)

Deep waters are the counsel in a man’s heart. (Mishlei 18:4)

The phrase “swimming in deep waters” implies acting on advice, much as people travel from place to place according to the counsel they receive. The way to swim in those waters are with fins, similar to the way fish navigate in the sea. The fins of a fish are called Snapir (סנפיר), alluding to the Second Tablets which were made of Snapirin (סנפירין, bright light) (Rashi on Shemos 34:1) - meaning that the ability to navigate depends on one’s acceptance of the advice of the Torah. However, not every fish that has fins is kosher, because some advice is wrong and improper. The main sign of a kosher fish is its scales, which represent a constriction of intellect. By properly focusing upon one’s goal, a person can use his intellect correctly to find the right advice. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 77a)

WRITTEN AND ORAL - BOTH ESSENTIAL

Reb Noson of Breslov

“These are the birds that you should avoid...” (11:13)

We are permitted to eat the egg of a kosher bird, but not the egg of a non-kosher bird. If an egg is completely oval or completely round, it is from a non-kosher bird. If one end is curved while the other end is oval, it could be from a kosher bird. [Notwithstanding this sign,] we must have the testimony of a trapper who has a tradition that the bird that laid this egg is kosher, before we can eat it. (Yoreh Dei’ah 85)

The oval or “sharp” end of an egg alludes to the Oral Law, for the Talmud is constructed of questions and sharp retorts that clarify the issues it raises. The round end of an egg corresponds to the Written Law, since the Hebrew word kad (round) has a numerical value of 24, paralleling the twenty-four books of the Tanakh (the Written Law). To be considered kosher, an egg must have a round end and an oval end, corresponding to the Written and Oral Laws, respectively.

If an egg is completely round, it represents the Written Law without the Oral Law, which is unacceptable and therefore not kosher. If an egg is completely oval, it represents a tradition based on the Oral Law which is laden with questions and sharp retorts that are totally unrelated to Torah thought. Therefore, eggs that are completely round or completely oval are non-kosher.

The round end of an egg represents humility. The oval or “sharp” end of an egg represents boldness and brazenness. A kosher egg is a combination of round and oval, alluding to the Jew who acts humbly before those who are G-d-fearing, yet stands up boldly to those who try to obstruct his devotions to G-d.

An egg that is completely round corresponds to a person who has holy humility - that is, he acts humbly before those who are G-d-fearing, but he also behaves humbly before those who obstruct him. Being humble when he should be brazen makes him unable to fulfill his devotions to G-d. An egg that is oval in shape represents a person who has holy boldness - that is, he is willing to stand up to those who oppose his devotions, but he also acts brazenly towards G-d-fearing people.

It is possible that a person could have impure humility and unholy boldness. Therefore, the only way to ascertain that an egg is kosher is by tradition - just as we can see if a person is "kosher" by whether or not he follows Jewish tradition. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 180)

COME ONE, COME ALL

Rabbi Alexander Zusia Friedman

"And these shall you abominate from among the birds, and the stork..." (11:13-19)

Why is the stork called "chassidah" (kindly one)? Because it deals kindly with other creatures with regard to food. (Rashi)

According to the Ramban, birds labeled as impure have been classified this way because of their cruelty. But why should the stork, which deals kindly with its fellow creatures, be classified as impure?

It is because it is kind only to others of its species but will never give food to a creature not of its own kind. This teaches us that when giving food to the needy, we must make no distinction between friend and stranger.

THE SEARCH FOR PURITY

Reb Noson of Breslov

"These are the creeping things that teem upon the earth which are impure for you: the weasel, the mouse and the toad." (11:29)

The weasel is called a Choled, which is similar to Cheled (i.e., this world). An impure animal that resides in the recesses of a house, the weasel represents the concealment of the spiritual, much as the material world conceals spirituality and gives rise to impurity. The essence of our life in this world is based on concealment, for if the reward or punishment for our actions were obvious, there would be no free choice. One who sets his sights on spirituality and searches for G-d and truth can avoid the impurity of this world. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 12a)

INNER VALUE

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"Any earthenware utensil into whose interior one of them will fall, everything in it shall become impure and you shall break it." (11:33)

The Torah teaches us that an earthenware vessel becomes impure only on the inside but not on the outside. The Kotzker Rebbe (Ohel Torah) explains that unlike a metal utensil, which has intrinsic value, an earthenware vessel has no innate worth. Rather, it only has value by virtue of its contents. Therefore, an earthenware utensil can only become impure when it has impurity inside of it.

The Kotzker Rebbe explains further that an earthenware vessel is analogous to a human being. A person's body is worthless without content. Our physical existence only has value when we fill it with spirituality. If we cruise through life, never attempting to fill ourselves with Torah and mitzvos, then we, like the earthenware vessel, have no worth.

The Kotzker Rebbe is conveying a powerful lesson, one that carries great responsibility. Hashem has given us a physical body that has the capacity to house Hashem's Presence. However, it is incumbent upon us, by observing the Torah, to ensure that our bodies and environments are befitting for the Shechinah to reside in. Let us assess ourselves and our behaviors in order to ensure that we increase our spiritual value and worth.

CLEANSING WATERS

Reb Noson of Breslov

"Only a spring or a cistern, a gathering of water, will remain ritually pure, but one that touches their carcass will become impure." (11:36)

A mikvah must contain forty se'ah of water (about 140 gallons). These forty se'ah correspond to the forty days that Moshe ascended to Heaven to receive the Torah. Like the Torah, a mikvah possesses incredible powers of purification (see Yoma 85b). (Likutey Halakhot VII. p. 20a)

The mikvah represents the waters of Creation. By immersing in the mikvah, a person returns to his source, to the state of perfection that existed prior to the creation of man. (ibid., IV, p. 280)

REMAINING CONNECTED

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"But if water is put upon sown plants and any of their carcasses falls on them, they become defiled for you." (11:38)

A plant used for food cannot become susceptible to ritual defilement if it is still attached to the ground - by even the smallest root (Mishneh Torah, Tumas Ochalin 1:1, 2:1).

Allegorically, "defilement" is feeling distant from G-d, and "holiness" is feeling close to G-d. In this context, the one precaution we can take to immunize ourselves against the defilement of spiritual depression is to remain rooted to our source - to the essence of our Divine soul. The essence of our soul never becomes defiled, for it is constantly united with G-d.

When we rouse the essence of our soul from its dormancy - by reminding ourselves of our inner connection to G-d - and manifest it in all of our thoughts, words, and deeds, we can actualize our full spiritual potential - joyfully, optimistically, and energetically. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 27, pp. 74-78) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

WORMING THOUGHTS

Reb Noson of Breslov

“Any creeping thing that teems upon the earth is detestable; it should not be eaten.” (11:41)

The prohibition against eating worms and insects applies only to those creatures that appear upon the earth. Those that form within the fruit are permitted, as long as they never left the fruit. (Yoreh Dei’ah 84:4)

The earth represents the lowest of all levels. The worms and insects that are attracted to it are compared to the snake that slithers upon the ground (as do worms), for they are conceptually a part of the polluted concept of earth. People are naturally disgusted by the thought of eating insects, for they represent severe spiritual pollution. Yet these creatures have no intrinsic power. Although they cause everything they touch to spoil and decay, they can be defeated easily.

This knowledge can empower us to overcome all evil thoughts and material lusts that “worm” their way into our consciousness. As they are drawn from a source of spiritual pollution, these thoughts and lusts are easily defeated. We must always take care not to allow them to spread. They must be contained within our minds, similar to the worm that is permissible to eat as long as it never leaves the fruit. For once the worm “sets foot” upon the earth - once a person allows his mind to wander outside the realm of the spiritual - it becomes totally forbidden. (Likutey Halakhot IV, p. 154)

RISING ABOVE EVIL

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“You may not eat [the snake], who moves about bent over [and only then falls on its belly].” (11:42)

The Zohar (1:35b) compares the snake to the evil inclination (the yetzer hara). The evil inclination is smart: it does not immediately suggest that we “crawl on our belly” and bury ourselves in earthliness. It begins by suggesting that we walk with a “lowered head,” that we forget G-d who is above us, neglecting as well the higher purposes of life. This eventually leads us to forget our purpose altogether.

The antidote to the snake’s schemes is to immerse ourselves in the study of the Torah, especially the inner dimension of Torah, which lifts us into a realm that the snake cannot reach. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 17, p. 122) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

[G-d instructed Moshe to teach the Jewish people how] to distinguish between the defiled and the undefiled. (11:47)

Spiritually, this decree refers to making the moral distinction between what is acceptable, healthy behavior and what is not. This distinction is easy enough when matters are clear and obvious. But all too often, the distinction is blurred, and what is in fact defiled can easily be taken as being undefiled.

By studying the Torah, we remain connected to G-d, who is not subject to the limited reach of human intellect. Thus, attuned to Divine consciousness, we instinctively know what is spiritually healthy and what is not. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 7, pp. 72-73) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

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