

The Marshmallow Test

A Model for Success

Without a Beit Hamikdash for nearly two millennia, most Jews find it difficult today to relate to the concept of Temple service, the world of *kodashim* (realm of Temple sanctity) and *korbanot* (sacrifices). Even in the world of Torah study, Temple service is in a separate category. When one opens a volume of the classic Vilna edition of the Talmud, one finds the Gemara accompanied by its classic commentaries including Rashi, Tosafot and Rif. However, in the tractates of *Kodashim*, the Rif and accompanying super-commentaries are absent, since the Rif's work is meant to be a practical summary of the Talmud, and *Kodashim* does not have a practical application today.

However, there is one time each year that the world of *kodashim* takes center stage in our Jewish lives: the night of the Pesach Seder. Even today, when the actual offering is not present, the mitzvot of the Seder and its structure and practices all revolve around a korban — the korban Pesach. Many customs of Seder night are meant to remind us of life in the Beit Hamikdash generally, including wearing a *kittel*, washing before dipping, and how we treat the meat we will eat at the Seder dinner.¹ A question arises in this context: what can we learn from the world of *kodashim* generally, and the



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korban Pesach specifically, that can help inform and inspire our service of Hashem on Pesach and during the rest of the year in the absence of a Beit Hamikdash?

To begin thinking about this question, perhaps we should consider another fascinating juxtaposition: Pesach and *Chag HaMatzot*. When looking closely at the verses in Shemot chapter 12 and Vayikra chapter 23, we learn that there are actually two distinct holidays that overlap in Nissan. The first is Pesach, which occurs on the 14th of Nissan and concludes before the morning of the 15th of Nissan. The second is *Chag HaMatzot*, which begins on the eve of the 15th of Nissan and continues for seven days. These holidays have separate mitzvot as their central motif. Pesach is focused on the slaughtering and eating of the korban Pesach; *Chag HaMatzot* is focused on a weeklong holiday, much like Sukkot, and the requirements of eating matzah and prohibiting chametz. The two holidays overlap on the night of the Seder, fusing the concepts of the korban Pesach and matzah. We can wonder: why must these mitzvot

be blended together? Why are the mitzvot intertwined so that one may not slaughter the korban Pesach with chametz in one's property? Why must the Pesach be eaten with matzah? What is the meaning of the relationship between the holiday of the korban Pesach and the holiday of matzah and chametz?

Additionally, we may wonder about the placement of *korbanot* in our national development. Nissan is the time of the birth of the Jewish people. Although we observe Rosh Hashana in the Hebrew month of Tishrei, the lunar calendar and the schedule of our holidays begins in Nissan (as the Gemara in *Rosh Hashana* 4b explains). The Torah informs us that Nissan is the first month of the year: *Hachodesh hazeh lachem rosh chodashim* (Shemot 12:2). We are a people symbolized by the moon; hence, we are born as a nation during Nissan. In this light, the Midrash describes *yetziat Mitzrayim* as a birthing process:

ויושע ה' ביום ההוא את ישראל מיד מצרים ... כאדם שהוא שומט את העובר ממעי הפרה. מכילתא דרבי ישמעאל בשלה - מסכתא דויהי פרשה ו

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And God saved the Jewish people on that day from the hands of Egypt... Like a person that removes a fetus from the womb of a cow.

Mechilta, Beshalach, Masechta Vayehi no. 6

Just as when a child enters the world, its future is shaped largely by its experiences during its formative years, our nation was influenced at its inception, shaped by its first mitzvah, the korban Pesach.² It is fascinating that Hashem chose a korban as the first charge for the Jewish people as they became a nation and that the transition from slavery to peoplehood occurred in the context of *kodashim*.

In essence, every Jewish home in Egypt became a miniature *mikdash*, with the placement of blood on the doorpost instead of the altar and the eating of a sacrifice in its confines. Why is the world of *kodashim* the first one we enter as we begin our covenantal journey with Hashem?

Discipline

The answer to these many questions can be found in one word that is essential to *kodashim* and definitional to Judaism: discipline. It is difficult to capture the scope and detail of the regulations and minutiae that govern the world of *kodashim*; to say it is exacting is an understatement. Every aspect of a korban must be fulfilled with complete precision, from the specifications of the offering and the manner in which the offering is

consecrated to how it is treated and even where its owner stands in the Beit HaMikdash. The kohanim, similarly, have an extremely regimented set of guidelines and procedures for each offering that governs their every movement and even their mindset. The Rambam teaches:

שלוש מחשבות הן שפוסלין את הקרבנות. ואלו הן. מחשבת שינוי השם. ומחשבת המקום. ומחשבת הזמן. מחשבת שינוי השם כיצד. זה השוחט את הזבח שלא לשמו: כגון שהיה עולה ויחשב שהוא שלמים ... מחשבת המקום כיצד. כגון ששחט את הזבח לשמו על מנת לזרוק דמו. או להקטיר ממנו דבר הראוי להקטרה חוץ לעזרה ... מחשבת הזמן כיצד. כגון ששחט את הזבח לשמו על מנת לזרוק דמו מאחר שתשקע החמה שאינו זמן זריקתו. רמב"ם, הלכות פסולי מוקדשין יג:א

There are three types of thought that invalidate sacrifices and they are: thoughts relating to a change in designation, thoughts relating to a change in place and thoughts relating to a change in time. What is an example of thoughts relating to a change in designation? One who slaughters an animal for the wrong purpose, such as one who slaughters an olah thinking that it is a shelamim. ... What is an example of thoughts relating to change in place? Such as one who slaughters the sacrifice with the correct designation but with intent to sprinkle the blood or sacrifice a part that is worthy of sacrifice outside of the Azarah ... What is an example of thoughts relating to a change in time? Such as one who slaughters an animal with the correct designation for the purpose of sprinkling

the blood after sundown, which is no longer the time the sprinkle blood.

Rambam, Hilchot Pesulei HaMukdashin 13:1

Even an errant intent can ruin an otherwise perfectly good sacrifice. This emphasis on discipline and obedience is rooted in the Torah's description of the construction of the first sanctuary — the Mishkan.³ According to the *Beit HaLevi (Ki Tisa)*, the Torah reiterates the phrase *ka'asher tziva Hashem* — as Hashem commanded — repeatedly in Parshat Pekudei for precisely this reason:

וכיון דעיקר חטאם בעגל היה מה שרצו להתחכם מעצמם לעשות ע"פ ידיעתם והכמתם מעשה אשר לא נצטוו עליו ולזה במעשה המשכן שבא לכפר נאמר על כל אשר עשו כאשר צוה ה' ... היה כל כוונתם רק כאשר צוה ה' ונתכוונו רק לעשות ציווי ורצונו יתברך לא משום שהשכל של עצמם מחייבת לעשות כן, וזהו שכיפר להם על חטא העגל.

Since the primary sin of the Golden Calf was that they wanted to be autonomous and act based on their own knowledge and wisdom and they performed an act that they were not commanded, when the Mishkan, which was to atone for their sin, was built, it says regarding everything that they did "as Hashem commanded." ... Their entire intent was only to do what Hashem commanded and they did so only because Hashem commanded them, not because their own thoughts led them to that conclusion, and this is what atoned for the sin of the Golden Calf.

While the realm of *kodashim* may be unique in its extreme emphasis on discipline, its character is symptomatic of Jewish life in general, which is defined by this central concept. Torah life expects us to abide by specific guidelines; the word mitzvah means commandment, not good deed. We are expected to

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discipline all aspects of life, even beyond those that are formally forbidden by the Torah. This is how Ramban (Vayikra 19:2) defines the mitzvah of *kedoshim tihiyu* — being holy:

והענין כי התורה הזהירה בעריות ובמאכלים האסורים והתירה הביאה איש באשתו ואכילת הבשר והיין, א"כ ימצא בעל התאווה מקום להיות שטוף בזמת אשתו או נשיו הרבות, ולהיות בסובאי יין בזוללי בשר למו, וידבר כרצונו בכל הנבלות, שלא הוזכר איסור זה בתורה, והנה יהיה נבל ברשות התורה. לפיכך בא הכתוב, אחרי שפרט האיסורים שאסר אותם לגמרי, וצוה בדבר כללי שנהיה פרושים מן המותרות.

The idea is that the Torah warns of sexual transgressions and forbidden foods, but the Torah also allows sexual relations between husband and wife and allows eating of meats and wines. Therefore, a lustful person will take advantage and have multiple wives or will be a savage when it comes to drinking wine and eating meat, speaking in a vulgar manner. He will do as he pleases because there is no prohibition in the Torah. However, he will be vile within the permissions of the Torah. Therefore, the Torah after enumerating the actual prohibitions presents as general rule that we should [even] refrain from permissible acts.

The halacha — the path along which we lead our lives — directs all aspects of a person's existence, much like a guard rail follows the highway. With its specific positive and restrictive mitzvot, the Halacha serves as a guide and governor for each individual in public and private settings. Each precept itself has specific parameters and requirements that fill the innumerable pages of Talmudic learning, commentaries, responsa and codes that endeavor to define them. Beyond the realm of action, Judaism requires that we discipline our minds and hearts. The Gemara, *Berachot* 12b, states that the prohibition against straying after one's heart (Bamidbar 15:39) refers to having thoughts and beliefs that are antithetical to Judaism, and the prohibition against straying after one's eyes refers to having thoughts of committing a sin. Judaism even calls upon us to discipline our emotions; the commandment not to covet others' possessions is one example.⁴ The disciplined life of the Jew, which requires self-control and sacrifice, is all encompassing and serves as a model of heroism, *eizeheu gibbor hakovesh et yitzro*, who is strong? One who conquers his inclination (*Avot* 4:1).⁵

This self control is the ultimate goal for which we strive. Hence, we can appreciate why Hashem chose *kodashim* to serve as the context for our initial, formative experience as



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a people: it is the paradigm for a life of discipline. Now we can understand why the korban Pesach was chosen as the first mitzvah, and we realize the significance of its many specifications. Those who participate in the korban Pesach must be disciplined in preparation by avoiding any contact with *tumah* that would disqualify them. They must consume the korban in a designated place and at a specific time within their specific group. Even the manner in which the meat is cooked and eaten is regulated in detail. Imagine looking back on such an achievement of fulfilling the korban Pesach with its fullest discipline and expressing the sentiment:

חסל סידור פסח כהלכתו ככל משפטו
וחוקתו.

The Seder is now concluded according to halacha, following all of its laws and statutes.

The connection between Pesach and the mitzvah of matzah is clear as well. Matzah and its corollary prohibition of chametz are both focused on regimen and discipline. As we know, matzah must be baked in a specific way in a fixed amount of time. Chametz is an acutely severe prohibition, as it carries the punishment of *karet*, and we are required to be exceedingly punctilious about it. Even the slightest trace of chametz can render a food prohibited on Pesach, unlike other non-kosher foods that are generally nullified in amounts less than 1:60. This prohibition of chametz is an added level of discipline, restricting a food that is otherwise kosher all year round. Tosafot (*Pesachim* 2a) notes that it is precisely because of this general familiarity that we must search for chametz before Pesach, lest we find it and inadvertently forget about the new stricture against eating it

during this special week. We clearly carry over the discipline and rigor of *kodashim* on the holiday of Pesach to the weeklong holiday of *Chag HaMatzot*.

A Modern Dilemma

All of this may give an onlooker, or even a seasoned and committed Jew pause: how should we view a life of such discipline? It sounds as though, as the Talmud teaches, we have simply substituted one servitude for another:

לשעבר הייתם עבדי פרעה מיכן והילך אתם
עבדי ה' .
ירושלמי פסחים ה

In the past, you were servants of Pharaoh and from now on, you are servants of Hashem.

Yerushalmi, Pesachim ch. 5

How are we to understand this statement? Are we supposed to be so focused on our spiritual other-worldly goals and the discipline necessary to achieving them that we completely reject our current physical existence? How can a lifestyle that is so rigid, inspire a generation of Jews living in a culture that celebrates autonomy as a primary value?⁶

The Torah and our sages have answered these questions in a way that has become increasingly compelling in recent years: Hashem wants us to succeed in this world and discipline is, in fact, a key to accomplishing this goal. While we know that this world is merely an antechamber to the next world (*Avot* 4:21), Hashem does want us to embrace our life in this world (*Midrash Aggadah, Ki Teitzei* no. 22).

The Torah's description of reward for our achievements in Parshat Bechukotai is given in material terms, which reminds us that Hashem wants

us to live fulfilled lives that include enjoyment and accomplishments in the eternal spiritual world and also in our this-worldly existence. This idea is carried to the extreme by a passage in the Talmud Yerushalmi:

רבי חזקיה ר' כהן בשם רב עתיד אדם ליתן
דין וחשבון על כל שראת עינו ולא אכל.
ירושלמי קידושין ד

R. Chizkiyah and R. Kohen said in the name of Rav: A person will have to give an accounting [in Heaven] for all that he saw and didn't eat.

Yerushalmi, Kiddushin ch. 4

While these physical benefits are not an end in and of themselves and are expected to be utilized in achieving our mission of bringing Godliness into our world, they point to a value in creating a meaningful life in this world.⁷ To this end, the Torah's disciplined way of life doesn't just enable us to achieve spiritual goals, it facilitates and enables us to create a more meaningful life in this world as well.

The Marshmallow Test

Our service of Hashem, unlike that of Paroh, which was meant to degrade and diminish the Jewish people, is actually a gift to us to raise us up and enable our achievement in this world. On the most basic level, a life of discipline refines and ennoble:

רב אמר לא נתנו המצות אלא לצרף בהן את
הבריות, וכי מה איכפת ליה להקב"ה למי
ששוהט מן הצואר, או מי ששוהט מן העורף.
בראשית רבה, פרשת לך לך פרשה מד

Rav said: The mitzvot were only given to refine people. Does it affect Hashem if someone slaughters from the front of the neck or the back of the neck?

Bereishit Rabbah, Lech Lecha no. 44

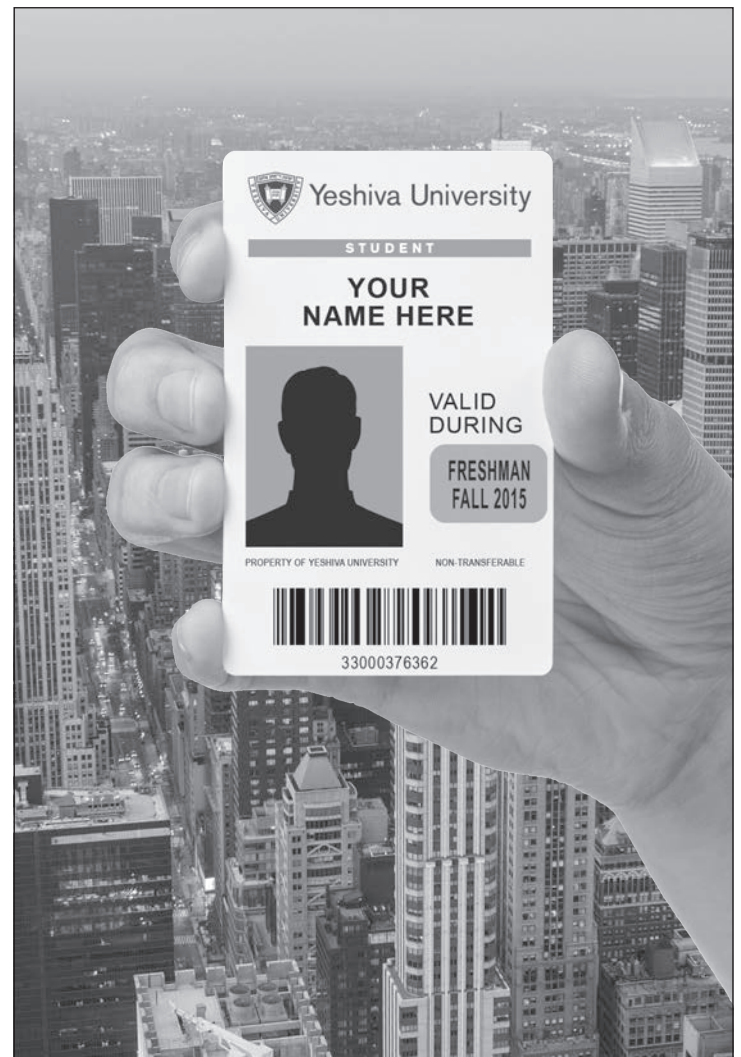
Yet there is a much more profound and far reaching impact of leading this

life of discipline and limits. It enables us to accomplish and succeed more than had we been left unfettered. By guiding us in a life of self-control, idealizing the *gibbor* who controls his impulses, we are opening doors to greater achievements in all areas of life, as our Torah tradition teaches *charut* of Torah enables true *cheirut*, freedom to accomplish (*Avot* 6:2).

This concept has become the focus of major psychological and social research. In a landmark study that has become a blueprint for continued expanded research, renowned psychologist Walter Mischel found that children who were able to demonstrate self control and delay self-gratification achieved greater success over their counterparts — even decades later — in all major aspects of life. They tested this ability of self discipline by placing a single marshmallow in front of a 5-year-old and offering the child the choice of eating it immediately or waiting several minutes, at which point the child would receive two marshmallows.⁸ This impact of discipline on an individual is magnified when it is in the context of an entire society, as the abstract of a recent paper presented at the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America outlines:

Policy-makers are considering large-scale programs aimed at self-control to improve citizens' health and wealth and reduce crime. Experimental and economic studies suggest such programs could reap benefits. Yet, is self-control important for the health, wealth, and public safety of the population? Following a cohort of 1,000 children from birth to the age of 32, we show that childhood self-control predicts physical health, substance dependence, personal finances, and criminal offending outcomes, following a gradient of self-control. Effects of children's self-control could be disentangled from their intelligence and social class as well as from mistakes they made as adolescents. In another cohort of 500 sibling-pairs, the sibling with lower self-control had poorer outcomes, despite shared family background. Interventions addressing self-control might reduce a panoply of societal costs, save taxpayers money, and promote prosperity.⁹

Hashem charged the Jewish people with the lofty goal of serving as a *mamlechet kohanim v'goy kadosh*, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. We are each individually meant to serve as a kohen, with an impeccable, disciplined uniform code of conduct and to collectively create a nation that is holy, which the aforementioned Ramban said refers to discipline. Hence, while our lives may be distant from the actual Mikdash, the ability to



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live a life of *kedusha* is here and now, and it provides us with the freedom to achieve all of our goals both in this world and the next.¹⁰

Joy

We can identify one final imprint of a disciplined life: joy. Psychologists have noted that even adolescents, who often challenge boundaries and authority, crave a measure of discipline in their lives to provide meaning and satisfaction.¹¹ True joy is found in a sense of accomplishment, the satisfaction of sustained and focused effort that produces results. It is the *yegia kapecha*, the toil of your hands that brings about good (Tehillim 128:2). It is no wonder, then, why Judaism places such an emphasis in the service of Hashem on *simcha*, joy (Tehillim 100:2).

The Maggid of Mezritch would say: *The main thing is that you should always be happy. This is especially true when you are bound to God. Without joy, it is impossible to be attached constantly to God.*¹²

We can appreciate why, according to the Talmud (*Arachin* 11a), song is an integral and according to some opinions, indispensable part of the service in the Beit Hamikdash. It is precisely in the context of the discipline of *kodashim* that we feel and express the gladness of heart that is manifest in song. It is, therefore, in this place that we find the apex of a joyous Jewish experience: the Simchat Beit Hashoeva on Sukkot in the courtyard of the sanctuary:

מי שלא ראה שמחת בית השואבה לא ראה
שמחה מימיו.
טובה נא.

Whoever did not see the Simchat Beit Hashoeva, never saw true joy in his lifetime.
Sukkah 51a

The fullest experience of happiness is found in the Beit Hamikdash, with the celebration of the service of Hashem. A similar experience of service and song is also found on the holiday of Pesach, focused on the Mikdash. Both during the slaughtering of the korban Pesach in the Beit Hamikdash in the afternoon and again when families came together to eat the korban in the evening, the Jewish people sang the song of Hallel. This was the song of joy that accompanied the accomplishment of being devoted servants of Hashem. Today, each of us at our Seder re-enacts the rare experience of *kodashim* with our commemoration of the korban Pesach, and we experience a sense of joy. This happiness is not only because we accomplished and fulfilled the mitzvot of the Seder with all of their specifications. It is a profound, perhaps even subconscious feeling of happiness and contentment with having a life whose discipline and focus bring such richness and meaning. We express these feelings by singing Hallel — the same songs that our ancestors sang centuries ago when the Beit Hamikdash still stood.

Notes

1. This concept is developed by Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (Netziv) in his introduction to *Haggadah Imrei Shefer*.
2. The mitzvah of Pesach was the first commandment to the nation as a whole; the fulfillment of milah in Egypt was only performed as a preparatory step for the korban, as the Torah teaches, *kol arel lo yochal bo*, "an uncircumcised male may not eat the korban Pesach."
3. According to the Rambam (*Moreh Nevuchim* 3:32) the entire institution of sacrifices in the Mikdash was to discipline the Jewish people in their worship: to channel these offerings away from idols into the service of Hashem.
4. For a discussion of this mitzvah of *lo tachmod* and the issue of commandments

which relate to emotions, see "*Lo Tachmod*" in Nechama Leibowitz's *Studies on Sefer Shemot*.

5. See Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik zt"l's essay "Catharsis" published in *Tradition* (Spring 1978) by for a fully developed presentation on this concept of restraint in all areas of Torah life.
6. Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter develops an approach to this challenge of submission to the will of Hashem in an age of autonomy in his article "Halakhic Authority in a World of Personal Autonomy" published in *Radical Responsibility*.
7. The Maharal in several places notes that the word *chamor*, donkey, shares the same root as *chomer*, material. Avraham, Moshe and the Mashiach are all described in Tanach as riding a *chamor*, which we can understand as utilizing the material world as a vehicle for accomplishing spiritual feats.
8. See *The Marshmallow Test: Mastering Self-Control*.
9. "A gradient of childhood self-control predicts health, wealth, and public safety," Terrie E. Moffitt, Louise Arseneault, Daniel Belsky, Nigel Dickson, Robert J. Hancox, HonaLee Harrington, Renate Houts, Richie Poulton, Brent W. Roberts, Stephen Ross, Malcolm R. Sears, W. Murray Thomson, and Avshalom Caspi, Edited by James J. Heckman, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, and approved December 21, 2010 (received for review July 13, 2010).
10. In his New York Times editorial on April 15, 2014, David Brooks comments on the holiday of Pesach and this notion of the benefits of living a life of self-control, concluding, "The 20th-century philosopher Eliyahu Dessler wrote, 'the ultimate aim of all our service is to graduate from freedom to compulsion.' Exodus provides a vision of movement that is different from mere escape and liberation. The Israelites are simultaneously moving away and being bound upward. Exodus provides a vision of a life marked by travel and change but simultaneously by sweet compulsions, whether it's the compulsions of love, friendship, family, citizenship, faith, a profession or a people."
11. Dr. David Pelcovitz, a renowned psychologist, has noted that often his least happy patients are those who lack structure and self-control in their lives.
12. *The Light Beyond: Adventures in Chassidic Thought* by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, p. 298.