



The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

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Antiseptic Religion

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered April 1, 1967)

We read this morning of the strange rite of the Parah adumah, the ashes of the red heifer which were used to purify one who had contracted levitical impurity by contact with a dead body, but which ceremony at the same time defiles the priest in charge of the act of purification. Parah adumah has thus always been accepted as a mystery, a hukah or incomprehensible law that defies reason in its paradoxicality. It is therefore an annual reminder that important as reason is in the life of religion, it is not the totality of religion. If man understood all that religion and God demand of him, he would not need Divine revelation; indeed, man would displace God as the center of life, and all authentic religion would thus come to an end.

Parah adumah therefore tells us that intelligent as man is, and as much as he must endeavor at all times to exercise that intelligence, his intellect nonetheless remains limited. God, as Creator and Source of all intelligence, transcends human intellect. Life conceived only in terms of reason or logic is shallow. It is even monstrous, like a man with an oversized head and an undersized heart.

The idea that pure reason is a sufficient guide for man through life is sophomoric, it is an index of intellectual adolescence. One might even describe it with that worst of modern epithets: it is non-modern, medieval. Modern science emerged only when it denied the omnipotence of reason, when it cut itself off from the tyranny of pure reason. Natural science does not at all come to its conclusion on the basis of logic, but on the basis of empirical evidence: testing, experimenting, investigating. Indeed, one of the greatest theories of modern physics, concerning the nature of light, embodies a logical contradiction, it violates the principle of reason that a thing cannot be two opposites at the same time.

This does not mean to say that science affirms faith and religion. It does mean that shallow rationalism is a thing of the past. The Rabbis told us that the law of parah adumah was a source of vexation for Jews in their confrontation with the non-Jewish world: umot ha-olam monin et Yisrael, the nations of the world would taunt and deride the Jews because of the apparently unreasonable nature of parah adumah. Today, such tauntings sound silly indeed.

However, we must be prepared for the challenge in response to such an assertion: "Is this not an instance of blind faith?" Most Orthodox Jews, rabbis and laymen, have had to put up with such reproach, at one time or another, when trying to explain that we observe even if we do not understand the reason for every observance. What do we answer to this charge of "blind faith?"

First, let us always remember that such pejorative and emotion-laden terms always confuse, rarely clarify. Who is to say which faith is blind and which not? Usually, what is one man's blind faith is another's fearless determination; what I believe is far-sighted vision, and what the other one believes is silly superstition ...

Of course, faith can be blind— but it also can be luminous and enlightening and insightful. The emunah that transcends reason, as symbolized by parah adumah, is founded on a sense of confidence in the Divine intellect, on trust that God, in His infinite wisdom, knows what I in my limitations can never know. Thus, the first time I send a child away from home, I do so on a basis which is usually irrelevant to reason. Is this blind faith— or is it confidence? Or, I submit to a medical doctor for a very serious and delicate operation, though I know almost nothing about the technicalities of surgery and medicine. Is this blind faith or confidence? It is blind faith if I only project my own wishes irrespective of the objective situation. It is

confidence if I use a wise intuition, an overview which integrates all the nuances of the situation, and hence is more than merely the facts and reason. *Ezehu hakham, ha-roeh et ha-nolad*, our Rabbis taught: “Who is the wise man? – one who sees the consequences that will be born from the present situation.” A computer cannot do this; only a wise man can.

Certainly, then, man does not live by reason alone, even though reason helps to make order and sense out of life’s experiences. Love, hate, fear, ambition, sentiment, friendship, passion, desire, suffering— these are not matters of reason, yet they are the stuff of real life. Similarly, man possesses a religious dimension to his personality, one that cannot be reduced merely to reason or to psychology. This is what Rabbi Shneur Zalman, founder of HaBaD Hasidism, called *ahavah tiv’it u-mesuteret*, the natural but concealed love for God that inheres in man, and what the great German-Jewish thinker, Isaac Breuer, referred to as *ha-tzad ha-hazoni*, the prophetic dimension of human personality. And *parah adumah* reminds us that this religious or spiritual or any other aspect of personality; it is separate, independent, and autonomous as a feature of human life. Without it, we deny man his very humanity and reduce man to nothing more than a biological computer. And religion as such, if it is based only on reason, becomes antiseptic and lacking in drama and depth. Furthermore, it is the kind of religion that cannot really survive a crisis. The great author of “*Ore ha-Hayyim*” has told us, from his personal experience, that when Spanish Jewry was expelled in the fifteenth century, those Jews who observed the Torah and the mitzvot out of faith alone, the simple Jews, were able to demonstrate remarkable heroism and prefer exile and banishment to baptism, whereas the sophisticated Jews, who prided themselves on their knowledge of philosophy and their use of “pure reason” instead of “blind faith,” were the first ones to submit to Christian pressure to kiss the cross.

But if so, we face a direct and troubling challenge: does this mean that reason has no role in Judaism? Obviously it does. Furthermore, what of the Jewish rationalists, such as Saadia and Maimonides? Did they not insist that Judaism not only can but should make use of shekel, reason? In fact, the saintly Rabbi Bachya maintained that if a man has the capacity to use reason and philosophy in his religious thinking and does not do so, he commits a sin in the eyes of Torah. How shall we fit this emphasis on reason into

the context of a Judaism which proclaims a law of *parah adumah*, which speaks of the importance of *hukah*, which declares the autonomy of *emunah*?

The answer is that no Jewish thinker ever believed that man can fully understand God and Torah by reason alone, without any assistance from revelation. *Parah adumah* is the corrective for this, giving man the capacity for intellectual embarrassment, teaching him intellectual modesty. Hasidism used to say that that is why a man should cover his head. Clothing is worn for one of two reasons: either to keep one warm or because of modesty. Our heads are covered not because we fear the climate, but because it is an act of modesty: we cover the cranium to show that no matter how brilliant we are, our intellect nevertheless remains sorely limited before Him, the God of infinite wisdom. *Parah adumah* similarly teaches us this kind of modesty and prevents us from indulging in intellectual arrogance.

But if we cannot reach God by reason alone, why did the great Sages of Israel in the middle ages devise the classical proofs for God’s existence? These proofs, truth to tell, were not potent enough to convince the agnostics, and they were essentially unnecessary for one who already believed— as did these same Sages of Israel. Why then did they offer them? Why did they emphasize the role of shekel, of reason?

The answer that I wish to commend to your attention is one that touches the very foundations of Judaism itself. It is an insight provided to us by the foremost disciples of the late Rav Kook, Rabbi Yaakov Mosheh Charlop, of blessed memory. He teaches us that man has many dimensions to his personality: amongst them, emotion, actions, ethical bent, intellect. Our sacred duty is to reveal God’s presence, to make Him manifest, to bring Him into this world on every level and every manner. Man’s purpose is: *le’galot et ha-nistar*, to take the potentialities for being aware of God—potentialities and possibilities which inhere in every atom of matter and in every moment of life and in every aspect of personality— and actualize them, expose them, reveal them, bring God to our awareness and to the consciousness of every human being. That is why we must use all dimensions of life to reach Him. We ought to experience Him with our emotions; we ought to act practically so as to build the *malkhut shamayim*, the Kingdom of Heaven, actualizing the will of God for man and his society; and so too we must understand Him

rationally and therefore demonstrate His existence through the use of intellect and philosophy. None of these alone is sufficient; all of them together constitute the human paean of praise to the God of all perfection.

This is what parah adumah does for us: by telling us that there is something beyond our reason, it challenges us to reach God by all means, by exercising every aspect and fibre of human personality. It does not deny the value of reason at all; but it tells us that it is not enough to feel Jewish, or to think Jewishly, or to act Jewishly; rather, we must do all three— and even more; it reminds us that the human personality is infinitely rich and multifaceted, and all of it must rise in one great spiraling symphony of devotion to God. Kol atzmotai tomarna, all my bones, each and every aspect of my life and my energy and my time and my personality, must proclaim, “Who is like unto Thee, O Lord?”

The great Rabbi of Kotzk once said: “*Frum iz shlecht*,” to be pious is sometimes to be cruel, for a man of piety is liable to the weakness of self-righteousness which results in insensitivity to the feelings of others. “*Gut iz ni’uf*,” excessive goodness and generosity can lead to immorality, for in goodness I may try to satisfy the whims and passions of another without regard to moral restraint. And, “*Klug iz krum*,” to be bright is often to be crooked, for brilliance frequently degenerates to mere shrewdness or craftiness. Any one of these virtues by itself can prove exceedingly damaging. However, he added, “*Uber frum un gut un klug—dos iz a Yid!*”—but to be pious and good and bright—that constitutes a Jew! No one aspect of personality should be overdeveloped at the expense of any other; all together must rise to the Creator of the world.

Parah adumah is thus not a doctrine of the denial of reason, not a proposition basing faith on absurdity. It appears now in a new meaning, teaching us the inadequacy of any single explanation of man, any single mode of life, any single way of reaching the Almighty. Parah adumah confirms man’s marvelous complexity, it affirms the mystery of his personality, it assures us of a religion which is not flat and antiseptic but varied and colorful and deep and comprehensive, and even mysterious. It tells us that man and God meet on many levels, indeed on all levels.

Therefore, no person is ever cut off from God because he was born inadequate in any one aspect of his personality. Some people may be impoverished in their intellect, some in their emotions, some in their ability practically to implement the Divine design for the world; but every one has some opportunity to reach out to Heaven.

It has been asked: should not our special portion of this morning begin with the words *zot hukat ha-parah*, this is the law of the parah adumah, even as we read elsewhere *zot hukat ha-pesah*, this is the law of Passover? Why does our portion begin with the word *zot hukat ha-torah*, this is the hukah, or law, of all the Torah? I suggest that this is the beauty of Torah itself, that it includes preeminently hukah, the integrating element, the principle that no one aspect of life or character is sufficient, but that all together are required and demanded of us.

A Jew is not a disembodied intellect who does nothing but philosophize: not an ecstatic and ascetic, monastic mystic; not one who believes, and believes that his belief alone will bring him salvation; not an obsessive observer of ritual or ethics who does what he does without feeling or understanding. None of these alone is enough; we need all, and even more than all of these. *Zot hukat ha-torah*— when we have a Torah, we have the principle of *hukah*,

Along with *hokhmah* and *maaseh* and *reggesh*, reason and action and emotion.

And when we have these, we have then achieved wholeness as well as holiness, for both holiness and wholeness are the goal of Torah. *Torat ha-Shem temimah*, the Torah of the Lord is whole, it is perfect and comprehensive. And through our study and observance of Torah we can achieve this wholeness and thus we will discover that Torah is also *meshivat nefesh*, it restores wholeness to the human soul and personality.

Having understood and experienced this, we shall then learn to appreciate the remainder of that verse: *Pikudei ha-Shem yesharim, mesamhei ley*, the laws of the Lord are straight, they are meant for the ultimate benefit of man even if man does not understand them at the present, and they make the heart— and the mind and the soul and society— glad and happy.

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At the Zoo

Rabbi Joshua (*The Hoffer*) Hoffman z"l

The first half of this week's parsha deals with the eighth day of the dedication of the mishkan and the events surrounding it. This includes the sacrifices that were brought that day, the death of Nadav and Avihu, and the laws given following their deaths. The latter part of the parsha deals with the laws of kosher animals, birds and fish, and the laws of forbidden creeping things (*sherotzim*). At first glance, there seems to be no connection between these two sections of the parsha. However, it is reasonable to assume that there is, indeed, some connection between one part of the parsha and the other. As Rabbi Asher Ben-Zion Buchman notes in his work on the unity of the weekly sidrah, *Bedibur Echad*, the rabbis did not divide the Torah into fifty-four approximately equal sections, one to be read each Shabbos, based on length, because we find that the parshiyos vary in length from thirty to one hundred seventy-six verses. Therefore, it would seem more logical to say that the division was made on the basis of some thematic unity within each parsha. Why, then, do these laws of kashrus follow the recording of the dedication of the mishkan?

Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin, in his commentary *Oznayim LeTorah*, explains that once the Torah recorded all of the sacrifices brought at the inaugural ceremony, the laws of *korbonos* were basically completed. The Torah therefore wanted to note that the animals permitted for general consumption are more numerous than the limited number that are qualified to be used as sacrifices in the mishkan. This explanation, however, is very technical, and one would think that a topic as important and all-pervasive in Jewish life as forbidden foods would carry a more profound message as far as its relation to the Torah section which precedes it. Rabbi Alexander Simcha Mandelbaum, in his work *MiMa'amakim*, which is based on the teachings of the Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Moshe Shapiro of Yerushalayim, cites many sources to show the deleterious effects that the consumption of non-kosher animals has on a person's soul. He concludes that since the mishkan is meant to bring the divine presence down to dwell among the people, the Torah teaches us, after describing in detail the dedication of the mishkan, how to maintain God's divine presence within our daily lives, avoiding foods that prevent Him from dwelling among us. However, according to this

explanation, these laws could just as well have been given at the time of the commandment to build the mishkan. I would like to offer an explanation that, on the one hand, has wider significance than the one offered by Rabbi Sorotzkin, and, at the same time, relates specifically to the moment in time at which these laws were given—after the dedication of the mishkan.

The Midrash *Tanchuma* to parshas *Shemini* relates that when God taught Moshe the laws of kosher and non-kosher animals, he held up each animal for Moshe to see, just as he brought all the animals before Adam to look at and give names to. What is the connection between Moshe's learning the laws of kashrus and Adam learning the characteristics of the animal in order to name them? Rabbi Henschel Leibowitz, in his *Chidushei HaLeiv*, explains that Adam needed to have a clear idea of the nature of the animals in order to give them their appropriate names. In a similar way, Moshe needed to have a clear idea of each animal in order to know how to apply the appropriate laws to each of them. Rabbi Leibowitz concludes that in learning Torah, clarity of understanding is of utmost importance, and one should not hesitate to put in extra effort to clarify even the small details. I believe, however, that there is a deeper significance to the reference in this midrash to God's display of the animals to Adam at the time of creation.

We have mentioned in the past the notion that the exodus from Egypt constituted a recreation of the world, or perhaps a completion, in a spiritual sense, of the original creation of the worlds (for more on this concept, see *Netivot* to parshas *Bo*, 5760, available at Torahheights.com). That is why we find, in kabbalistic sources, that the ten plagues brought upon the Egyptians corresponded to the ten sayings with which God created the world. The redemption from Egypt culminated with the giving of the Torah and the subsequent dwelling of the divine presence over the mishkan, as explained by Ramban. Thus, the dedication of the mishkan constituted the spiritual completion of the universe. This idea is reflected in the *Midrash Rabbah*, cited and expanded upon by Rabbi Gedaliah Schorr in his *Ohr Gedaliyohu* to parshas *Shemini*, that God rejoiced on the eighth day of the dedication of the mishkan as He rejoiced at the end of the

original creation of the universe. Seen in this context, we can better appreciate the analogy between God's bringing the animals to Adam to name and His bringing them to Moshe to understand the laws of kashrus.

Ramban in his commentary to parshas Bereishis says that the creation of the universe was completed only after Adam had assigned names to the animals that were brought before him. Although he goes on to explain his comment in a somewhat esoteric way, perhaps we can present it using a different approach. Harvey Cox, in his book *The Secular City*, writes that when one names something, he is relying on defining it, assigning it its function within his universe of discourse. Thus when God brought the animals to Adam to name, He was telling him to understand the place of the animals within his own life. Following this explanation of what happened in regard to Adam, we can perhaps go on to explain that after the completion of the mishkan, which constituted the culmination of the redemption process and the spiritual completion of the universe, there was a need to understand the function of the animal kingdom in that universe in a spiritual sense. For that reason, just as God brought the animals to Adam so that he could define their meaning within his universe, God brought the animals before Moshe, to explain to him the way in which God wants His people to define their function within their spiritual universe.

Following our explanation of the connection between the two sections of the parsha, perhaps we can say that it also informs the comment of Rashi on the verse at the end

of Shemini, "For I am God Who brings you up from the land of Egypt to be a God unto you ; you shall be holy, for I am holy" (Vayikra 11:46). Rashi, noting the use of the word 'ma'aleh' - Who brings you up - rather than 'hamotzi' - who takes you out - cites a teaching of the house of Rabbi Yishmael, brought in the Talmud, Bava Metzia, 61 b. God tells the Jewish people, explains the Talmud, that had He not brought them out of Egypt for any reason other than their not making themselves impure with creeping things (sherotzim), as do the other nations, it would have been sufficient cause for them to have been redeemed. Such abstention, Rashi continues, is an elevation for them, and that is why the expression 'hama'aleh' is used in the verse. This verse comes at the end of the section in Shemini that lays out for the nation which animals, birds and fish they may indulge in and which they may not. Moreover, the following two verses, the last in parshas Shemini, read, "This is the law of the animal, the bird, every living creature that swarms in the water, and for every creature that creeps on the ground; for distinguishing between the impure and the pure, and the creature that may be eaten and the creature that may not be eaten." Therefore, we can view this comment of the Talmud as referring to this entire section of the parsha. We can then understand this verse as saying that by defining the function of these various living things on the basis of God's Torah and indulging only in those that God permits to us, we are able to bring God's presence into our daily lives, and thereby realize the ultimate purpose of the redemption from Egypt.

Between the Keruvim and the Egel

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from a shiur given in the Gruss Kollel)

At the beginning of Parshas Shemini, Moshe tells Bnei Yisroel that Hashem commanded them to bring certain korbanos for the eighth day of the miluim—*Eigel ben bakar le-chatas, etc., etc. ve-shor ve-ayil le-shlamim, etc.* Then it says *va-yikchu es asher tziva Moshe el pnei Ohel Moed*. Bnei Yisroel took what Moshe told them and brought it to the Ohel Moed. *Va-yikrevu kol ha-eida ve-ya'amdu lifnei Hashem*—they all stood there waiting for Aharon to do the Avodah. *Va-yomer Moshe: Zeh hadavar asher ta'asu*—this is what Hashem said you should do. *Va-yeira aleichem kvod Hashem*—and Hashem's Shechina will appear to you. All the meforshim wonder about this. Bnei Yisroel already brought everything, and now they were just

standing there—there was nothing left for them to do. So why is Moshe telling them that this is what they should do to see the Shechina if they already did everything?

Some Rishonim suggest that some pesukim are out of their chronological order—Moshe told them this previously. But this approach is a bit of a chidush. The Netziv understands this from a philosophical perspective. He says that Moshe was not trying to tell them to do something now. They already did everything. They brought the prerequisite korbanos, and they were just standing there. Says the Netziv: Moshe was trying to give them a philosophical insight. *Zeh ha-davar asher tziva Hashem ta'asu ve-yira'e lachem kvod Hashem*. Now, what are we going

to do? We are going to do *asher tziva Hashem*—and then you will see the Shechina. What was Moshe trying to tell them? Netziv sees this in the context of what will happen later in Parshas Shmini. There is an unfortunate death of Nadav and Avihu—after they do something that’s not so clear. What did they do wrong? There are so many deynos in the Midrash detailing what they did. But one thing that this plurality of opinions proves is that it’s very unclear what it was. But what are all those deynos in the Midrash getting at? What was the yesod of the sin of Nadav and Avihu? So the Pasuk says: *Va-yikchu shtei bnei Aharon, Nadav ve-Avihu, ish machtaso vayitnu bahem eish ve-yasimu aleichem ketores, va-yakrivu lifnei Hashem eis eish zarah asher lo tziva osam*—something that Hashem did not command them. Look at that in the context of the pasuk *Zeh hadavar asher Hashem tziva ta’asu* at the beginning of the Parsha. And Nadav ve-Avihu did *asher lo tziva Hashem*. And that was their mistake. Otherwise, they just brought some ketores—that doesn’t seem like such a terrible thing. So Netziv says that you must be incredibly careful with Avodas Hashem. If you have noticed, in Parshas Pikudei—where we have the building of the Mishkan and making of all the keilim and begadim—there is a recurring refrain. Every paragraph ends with *ka’asher tziva Hashem es Moshe*. Somehow, it’s important that they did it exactly like Hashem commanded Moshe. Now, our whole lives, we are supposed to be oved Hashem. Why davka here, in the context of the Mishkan, do we have a constant refrain of *ka’asher tziva Hashem es Moshe*. So the answer is very pashut. If we are dealing with theology, with the Mikdash—with bringing Hashem’s presence to be among us, so we can have a direct relationship with Hashem—how do you get ruchnious in your life? If you want to be a good person, you know what, there are diverse ways of being a good person. Perhaps, you could use your common sense to figure out how to be more or less a good person. There is value to that. Ok, the more simanim from the Shulchan Aruch you are mekayem, the better. There is a value in being a nice person, and you can figure that out on your own. But when it comes to being oved Hashem, to the Shechina, to the Mikdash; when it comes to the theology of bringing down the Shechina into our lives, what do we really understand about the nature of Hashem? Do we really know the difference between empty enthusiasm and authentic feelings of spirituality? You can’t see Hashem. You can’t feel Hashem. Hashem is not a physical being. How do we know

the difference between the real presence of Hashem—the kind that leads to living kadosh and tahor lives, brings the world to the way that Hashem created and wanted it to be, brings Mashiach, etc.—and spiritual feelings and excitement that just lead to peculiar and unethical actions that end up destroying kedusha and tahara? How do we know that difference? Is there any human being smart enough to figure it out? I once saw a book, *ba-avanoseinu ha-rabim*, it was called *Everything I Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. That book might be true about manners, politeness, basic midos that all philosophers can figure out. Everything I need to know about some parts of life. Maybe, the most basic levels of being a civilized person taka you can learn in kindergarten. But if there is one thing that the Torah is against, it’s against that book. What does the Torah teach us? That there is more to life than what you learn in kindergarten. There are amazing heights you can reach in life. There is ruchnius. There is coming close to Hashem. There is bringing Shechina amongst us. There is perfecting the World—*le-taken es Malchus Sha-dai*. You can’t learn that in kindergarten. And not only that, but you also can’t learn that in Elementary School or in High School. You can’t learn that in University, even if you get a Ph.D. Because it is not something that we can figure out on our own. By definition, Hashem is not graspable by human logic. What’s the only way we can know how to reach Hashem and bring Hashem into our lives? The answer is: Hashem tells us. Hashem gave us the Torah to remind and reinforce those things that we can figure out on our own—like don’t kill, don’t steal, and honor your parents. But how to bring G-d into our lives is something that a human being can’t figure out. If you think that you can understand Hashem, then you don’t believe that Hashem is greater than anything a human mind can grasp. The only way we can really bring Hashem into our lives is by following the Halachah (and certain Mesorah). Hashem Himself told us how to bring Him into our lives because He is the only one who understands Himself. And He is the only one who could tell us what authentic spirituality is and what is considered fake spirituality. One is an authentic desire to be a good person and find favor in Hashem’s eyes, and one is just people making things up as to what they think would be a nice idea and calling it Avodas Hashem. The only answer to that, *ka’asher tziva Hashem*, is found in Halacha. And that was the problem with the Cheit ha-Eigel. The Kuzari, Ramban, and others ask: What was so bad about

the Cheit ha-Eigel? Didn't Hashem tell us to make two golden Cheruvim? They only made one golden calf instead of two golden Cheruvim. So what was so Avodah Zara-dik about it? The answer is very pashut. Because Hashem said that He has it all worked out in His unfathomable machshavos that the golden Cheruvim will lead to authentic spirituality and re'iyas ha-Shechina. If we try doing it our own way, it only leads to the opposite. And we see that the making of the Eigel led to *va-yakumu le-tzacheik*. Instead of leading to Moreh ha-Mikdash it led to tzchok and kalus rosh. How do you know that one calf leads one way and two Chruvim lead another way? I don't know. However, we have Hashem—who gave us the Torah—to tell us. Because He knows these things. That's why the Mishkan must be a place of *ka'asher tziva Hashem*. You want to do it in your own life, ok, you can be more or less a good person, and that would be more or less good enough. But in the Mikdash the difference between more or less is equivalent to the difference between the Eigel and the Cheruvim. It's the difference that backfires and turns into a s'chok. And some think that that is authentic spirituality. That's *ka'asher tziva es Moshe*. And that's exactly, says the Netziv, what Moshe said to the people. Moshe wasn't telling them to do anything specific. He was telling them the philosophy behind it. *Zeh ha-davar asher tziva Hashem ta'asu*. We are doing a lot of exciting and interesting-looking things. Do you know what's really holy about them? It's not about how impressive the clothing is or how nice the music is. What's really holy about them is: *ka'asher tziva Hashem*. Hashem gave us these instructions to bring Himself into our lives, and we could not have figured it out on our own. And that was the problem of Nadav and Avihu. They said: We also want to bring ketores—we can figure it out on our own. Figuring it out on your own is nice, and in some realms of life, you could do a pretty good job. But in the Mikdash, figuring it out on your own means *eish zarah*—which is akin to Avodah Zarah. In the Mikdash, it's like walking along the edge of the cliff and falling into an abyss of Avodah Zarah. What Nadav and Avihu did came from a desire for Avodas Hashem. But it was their problematic Avodas Hashem that

led to such a big punishment.

I just want to end by pointing out that this is the tremendous insight of the Beis ha-Levi on the Maftir for this Shabbos—Parshas Parah. Beis ha-Levi refers to a famous stira in Rashi in Parshas Parah. He says that Parah Adumah is a chuka—we don't understand what it means at all. And then, at the end of Parsha's Parah, Rashi says that he learned from Moshe ha-Darshan pshat in Parah Aduma. Parah Aduma is symbolically a mother of the Eigel, which we used to sin (and the Acharonim point out that it brought more death into the world). The mother comes to clean up the mess that her child made. Hence, we offer the Parah Adumah to atone for the chet of Eigel ha-Zachav. Beis ha-Levi asks: If it atones for the chet ha-Eigel then it is not a chet—then it's not a *tzorech chok*. If Rashi gives a nice explanation, why does he also say that we don't understand? And the answer is, that's exactly the point. How do you atone for the chet ha-Eigel? The chet was us saying that we can create our own brand of spirituality. We can have our own rules of Avodas Hashem, our own services, and our own ways of doing things. And we don't have to follow exactly *ka'asher tziva Hashem es Moshe*. We can pretend to bring Hashem into our lives in any way that makes sense to us. That was the chet of the Eigel. What's the only way to be mechaper for the chet ha-Eigel? Not by sacrificing this animal or that animal. No. None of that will do. The only way is to fix what you did wrong. How do you do that? *Zos chukas ha-Torah*. If we do what does not make sense to us just because Hashem commanded us, because Hashem knows better than we do, that would be a tikun of the chet ha-Eigel. Therefore, there is no stira in Rashi. And that's exactly how we are mechaper for the chet ha-Eigel. By showing that we know what the real Avodas Hashem is and what is improper. And be'ezrat Hashem—going from parshas Parah to parshas ha-Chodesh—if we are all mis'chazeik in the proper form of Avodas Hashem and live with *ka'asher tziva Hashem ta'asu*. Then *va-yeira lachem k'vod Hashem*—it will bring k'vod Hashem. Parah leads to Chodesh, which leads to the ultimate Geula when we will have the Shechina in the Beis Ha-Mikdash. *Be-meheira be-yameinu, amen*. Shabbat Shalom.

A Brave New Kosher World

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Upon first glance, the Biblical laws governing kosher food appear random. Why should animals which chew their cud be kosher, while those with more direct digestive “flows” be forbidden? Why should split-hoofed animals be kosher while straight-pawed animals be banned? Selecting birds based on the bone structure of their tiny legs seems capricious. Though the criteria determining kosher items may seem haphazard, our tradition asserts that foods forbidden by Hashem are toxic to human health and hazardous for spiritual welfare. It is highly unlikely that science will uncover medical reasons to rationalize kosher dietary norms. However, faith does not require scientific ratification and we adhere to the laws of kosher with conviction that we are not just conforming to Hashem’s will, but also, cultivating a healthier lifestyle and a purer spiritual existence.

A Life of Temperance

Beyond the benefits of avoiding specific ‘harmful’ foods, maintaining a kosher lifestyle adjusts our overall attitude toward the experience of eating. We depend upon food for nutrition and for survival. Furthermore, we draw great physical, emotional and social benefit from the experience of eating. Hashem desires this human benefit and our recitation of blessings before and after eating validates these enjoyments.

Yet, there is a thin line between enjoying eating and obsessing over food. A quick “recall” of the 180-day long party of Shushan - complete with an endless food-orgy and induced regurgitation- is enough to remind us of the horrors of unlimited food consumption. By banning

most animals, the Torah isn’t just protecting us from specific harmful species. It is also tailoring a lifestyle which balances the joy of food against the dangers of addiction or obsession.

I remember the horror which my revered Rebbe HaRav Lichtenstein expressed upon reading a newspaper article which reviewed and rated the in-flight meals of various airlines. He was so dismayed that something so trivial should warrant this type of attention and interest! Similarly, he would routinely conclude his Torah lectures a half an hour after lunch began to train us not to be enslaved to our stomachs. I vividly recall the hunger pangs I sensed as I was being trained that moral and religious

commitment were more important than my appetite. Keeping kosher should lend us overall dietary discipline.

Creating Distance

The section in parshat shmini which details kosher and non-kosher animals, concludes with the instruction to live our lives as “kodesh”. The word kodesh is commonly interpreted as “holy” or “pious” but, actually instructs us to be “separate” or “detached” from this world. Hashem possesses no physical attributes and is therefore the ultimate kodesh- completely different from our reality and completely separate from it. In our attempt to simulate Hashem, we are also encouraged to be partially “detached” from this physical world. Limiting our food intake, partially disconnects us from the sensual pleasures of this world.

Judaism does not venerate extreme self-deprivation or ascetism. There are built-in limits upon fasting, upon celibacy and upon other forms of self-deprivation. However, we are meant to temper our desires and to impose our will over our cravings. The restrictions upon food intake and the strict laws of food preparation deters unbounded and unrestrained food indulgence.

Our Pesach experience is riveted by even stricter laws which limit food consumption far “beyond” the normal kosher routine. Chametz is not only forbidden to eat but cannot be owned; owning chametz may lead to inadvertently consuming chametz. Pesach commemorates our emancipation from the indignities of slavery and the genesis of a people who aspire toward spiritual nobility. The tightening of dietary restrictions during Pesach shields us from slipping back into slavery. Not just subjugation to a human tyrant but slavery to our base desires.

Kosher food limitations aren’t just “targeted” laws preventing us from consuming hazardous species. These laws encourage us to calibrate our relationship with food. Eating healthy and enjoying our food are legitimate elements of physical emotional and spiritual well-being. Unlimited pursuit of food and unrestrained binging are not.

A Deliberate Life

In the concluding section of parshat Shemini, the Torah alludes to a third benefit of a kosher lifestyle: By preserving kosher laws we learn to distinguish between separate

between tamei (impure) and tahor (pure) animals. Kosher laws force us to make deliberate choices about our daily routine. Keeping kosher lessons us about making decisions in life. Just as we discriminate between pure and impure animals, we also take care to distinguish between moral and immoral behavior. We filter our cultural influences rather than mindlessly succumbing to them. These questions lie far beyond the scope of kosher laws, but if we are discriminatory “eaters” we also aim to be morally and religiously discerning people.

Has it Become too Easy?

By granting unprecedented access to a broad range of kosher food, the modern world has greatly simplified the experience of ‘keeping kosher’. The emergence of national and international kashrut organizations, coupled with the ability to efficiently transport kosher food across the globe has provided reasonably accessible kosher food to a broad audience. Recently, kosher food accessibility for vacationers has dramatically expanded, liberating ‘kosher travel’ across the globe.

In the state of Israel, we aim to provide national kosher coverage even for those who would not purposely choose

kosher. As a kosher diet is fundamental to Jewish identity, we hope to provide this baseline to every Israeli citizen. In most instances, both in Israel and abroad, maintaining kosher lifestyle requires much less exertion and far less struggle than it entailed for our ancestors.

At a practical level, these developments are welcome and have popularized kosher experience across a broad range of the Jewish world. However, the ease of keeping kosher may dull us to the value of keeping kosher. In many areas, our practice of religion has become decidedly easier than in the past. Take, for example the modern experience of Shabbat, which has become significantly upgraded through electricity, home appliances and shabbat clocks. When religion becomes too ‘easy’ the meaning behind religion becomes obscured. Struggle lends resolution to religion while facility and ease blur that resolution. If we lose sight of the “meaning” behind religious experience, it can become dry and flaccid. Has keeping kosher become too easy? Do we find meaning in keeping kosher or has it just become part of the “background” of Jewish life in the modern world?

Living Holy, Living Higher

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

In this week’s parsha, Parshas Shemini, after commanding us regarding ma’achalos mutaros and asuros (permitted and forbidden food-stuffs), including animals, fowl and fish (Vayikra 11), the pasuk commands us: כִּי אֲנִי ה', אֱלֹהֵיכֶם, וְהִתְקַדְּשֶׁתֶם וְהִיִּיתֶם קְדוֹשִׁים, כִּי אֲנִי קְדוֹשׁ אֲנִי - For I am Hashem, your G-d, you are to sanctify yourselves and you shall be holy, for I am holy (Vayikra 11:44). We are commanded to be holy. Yet holiness is an esoteric concept, a mitzvah that is not tangible and not concrete. How can we achieve holiness, and what does this mean?

Rav Yaakov Bender shlita, Rosh Ha’Yeshiva Yeshiva Darchei Torah, writes, “Kedusha - holiness - is a word so basic to Yiddishkeit. Our Creator, the Borei Olam, is Kadosh, holy, and we are mandated to emulate Him (see Sotah 14a and Shabbos 133b), to find ways to create kedushah in our lives. But what does it mean, to be kadosh?”

“Sometimes, you hear a word used in a certain context, again and again. Holiness, to many people, is connected

with asceticism, a holy person being someone who fasts, or immerses in a mikvah regularly. This is certainly part of kedushah, but it is not the full extent of kedushah. Kabbalas Ha’Torah changed the essence of our nation, investing every single person with a new mission and new abilities.

“But, wonders the Meshech Chochmah in Parshas Yisro, what did Kabbalas HaTorah change for Moshe Rabbeinu? He had been able to ascend to heaven even before the Giving of the Torah! Had he not already reached perfection, the epitome of holiness?”

“Until Matan Torah, explains the Meshech Chochmah, Moshe Rabbeinu could serve Hashem, but only through spiritual means, connecting through ruchniyus; the chiddush, the innovation of Matan Torah, was that it allowed man to access the greatest kedushah possible through gashmiyus, through physical tools. Food and drink, clothing and furniture, interpersonal relationships and words between people... suddenly, it could all be sanctified. Man became holy.

“At the sneh, the burning bush, Hashem told Moshe (Shemos 3:5), “Remove your shoes from upon your feet, for the place upon which you stand is holy ground,” as if to say: ‘Take off the clothing that serve as vehicles for your gashmiyusdik’e living. Remove your chomer (physical components of self) as you approach Me. Here, as you stand before G-d, you must be an angel.’

“However, that was before Matan Torah. After Matan Torah, the shoes are part of the package. The package called a ‘mentch,’ to whom the Torah was given. The Torah is telling us: ‘Be Holy! Figure out how to live and exist within society, to be a father and husband and friend who is holy, for I am holy.’ The Creator invested us with kedushah and planted us in a world where we are meant to spread that holiness, to invest our relationships and interactions with kedushah... Kedusha, we must teach our children, is always within reach. If there are people around you, there are opportunities to be holy. You just have to look for them” (Rav Yaakov Bender on Chumash, Artscroll, p.189-191).

What a beautiful, relevant and applicable message and lesson. What is holiness? Eating, drinking, dressing, interacting and living in this world; but knowing how to eat, drink, dress, interact and live within the parameters of Torah. While pre-Matan Torah, Moshe had to remove his shoes, i.e.: divest himself of physicality to achieve holiness and connection with G-d, after Matan Torah, we are commanded regarding what we can eat, and what we cannot eat, and that very engagement in the physical world has the capacity to make us holy. Through elevated physical living, holiness can be attained.

“There were times that Rebbetzin Kanievsky a’h gave away so much of the food in her house to their daily orchim - visitors, petitioners, and indigent people alike - that she or a granddaughter had to go to the grocery store to replenish basic provisions. Some people would just walk into the house and go to the refrigerator in her bedroom (the kitchen was too small to accommodate one) and help themselves to a meal or take out most of the food! During

the last three years of her life, one grandson came daily and put stickers on some of the food in the refrigerator and on one bottle of the diet grapefruit drink that Rav Chaim favors. The stickers said ‘Reserved exclusively for the Rav and Rabbanit.’ Sometimes even this didn’t help; people either didn’t notice the stickers or ignored them.

“Because the Rebbetzin did not want to reach the point where there would be no food left for R’ Chaim, she allowed one - and only one - container to be labeled as reserved. A few times the grandchild affixed a sticker that said, ‘Please don’t take.’ The Rebbetzin removed those stickers and said that she didn’t like the wording, as everything in her refrigerator was intended for everyone.

“A certain woman, ‘Milka,’ took advantage of living nearby and would regularly empty out most of the contents of the Kanievsky fridge, including many home-baked items. She told the Kanievsky family members that the Rebbetzin had given her permission to feed her family from the Kanievsky fridge. The relatives begged Rebbetzin Kanievsky to discontinue allowing Milka to help herself to the food. The Rebbetzin replied, ‘Should the woman and her family starve? I always make sure there’s enough food for Abba and me, and my refrigerator and food are public property’” (Rebbetzin Kanievsky, Artscroll, p.316).

Torah and ruchniyus are holiness, and gashmiyus must also be channeled into holiness, so that we may eat what is permitted, refrain from that which is forbidden, and thereby fulfill the dictum: you are to sanctify yourselves and you shall be holy, for I am holy.

May the unparalleled, indescribable kedusha of Maran Sar Ha’Torah, HaRav HaGaon Rav Chaim Kanievsky, zt’v’k’l, zy’a and his tzadokes eishes chayil, Ha’Rabbanit Kanievsky a’h, bring shemirah, yeshuos, besuros tovos and the geula asida to our nation and our Land.

For G-d will comfort Tzion, comfort all her destroyed places, and make her deserts like Eden, and her dried places like the garden of Hashem, gladness and joy will be found in her, thanks and the voice of song (Yeshayahu 51:3).

We Didn’t Start the (Strange) Fire

Rabbi Steven Gotlib

Parshat Shemini opens with Aharon and his sons finally beginning their service as priests. Things take a turn for the worst, though, when Aharon’s

sons Nadav and Avihu bring an aish zarah (“strange fire”), which had not been commanded, to the altar for Hashem. This resulted in a fire coming forth from Hashem and

consuming the two young priests, killing them. (Vayikra 10:12) To properly understand this event, we must examine what exactly this “strange fire” was and why it prompted such a striking reaction from Hashem.

The Talmud (Eruvin 63a) cites Rabbi Eliezer’s explanation that Nadav and Avihu were punished for issuing a halachic ruling to bring the fire in the presence of their teacher, Moshe. This position is quoted by Rashi (Vayikra 10:2) in addition to an alternative approach in the name of Rabbi Yishmael. The latter’s opinion (Vayikra Rabbah 12:1) was that Nadav and Avihu were punished because they brought their offering while intoxicated. The proof brought for this opinion is that a mere few verses later, Hashem commands that no sacrifices be drunkenly offered. (Vayikra 10:811)

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (Likutei Moharan 41) expands on this discussion, teaching that excitement in holiness can be likened to wine that gladdens, while the uncommanded “strange fire” can instead be likened to wine that makes one intoxicated and strengthens the evil inclination. In many ways, this position bridges the gap between the two ideas that Rashi shares. Nadav and Avihu were so excited to serve Hashem that they could not wait to hear from Moshe about how they should go about it. That excitement unfortunately led them to do something that was ultimately against Hashem’s will. In effectively becoming drunk with excitement, they went too far and caused profanity rather than sanctification.

But why would Nadav and Avihu have thought that they could take such important religious matters into their own hands in the first place? Rabbi Mordechai Yosef Leiner, the Ishbitzer Rebbe, answers this question while adding yet another layer of depth to these happenings. Rabbi Leiner wrote (Mei HaShiloach, Shemini) that all sins recorded in the Torah have a lesson to teach all of Israel. So what can

we learn from the deaths of Nadav and Avihu?

... *the incident of Nadav and Avihu recorded in the Torah comes to teach the individual fear. For they too were clean [of sin] through their mother, for she was the sister of Nachshon son of Aminadav, from whom emerged the kingdom of the house of David. And a king may breach a fence, since he is confident that his will is the will of God, blessed be He. They could, therefore, rely on their will, which was surely from God, blessed be He. But God, blessed be He, showed that a person should do nothing without [first] clarifying it seven times.* (translation by Rabbi Itamar Eldar)

In other words, Nadav and Avihu were at a high enough level that they would have been able to intuit the Divine Will. However, they didn’t make sure that it was in fact what Hashem really wanted. They trusted their gut and went straight into service without taking time to confirm their intuitions, and that is why they were punished.

The four approaches we’ve seen are united in a fundamental way: Nadav and Avihu put themselves above what was expected of them as priests. Whether due to disrespecting the authority structure, being intoxicated on the job, getting too immersed in their excitement, or not using proper confirmation protocol, the two thought that their feelings were more important than those of anyone else in the camp.

This fire of selfgratification at the expense of the ideal system has, to quote Billy Joel, been “burning since the world’s been turning.” After all, the sin in Gan Eden, murder of Hevel at the hands of Kayin, and so many more sins, had a similar root. Billy Joel sang that even though we didn’t light this fire, we still try to fight it. But Nadav and Avihu didn’t. Rather than fight that fire, they added oil, resulting in a lesson for all Israel to learn: There is room for excitement in our service of Hashem, but we can never lose sight of our primary obligations as servants of Hashem.

With the L-rd as Our Partner

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

This week’s Torah portion, parashat Shemini, opens with a description of the eighth and final day of the consecration ceremony of Aaron and his sons. This day, that was expected to be the highpoint of Aaron’s life, was suddenly turned into a day of great tragedy for Aaron when his two eldest sons, Nadav and Avihu, died because they brought a strange fire upon the altar.

In Leviticus 9, the Torah describes in great detail, the various rituals that were part of the ceremony of consecration. As the ceremony reached its crescendo, the Torah reports, Leviticus 9:22: וַיִּשָּׂא אֶהָרֶן אֶת יָדָיו אֶל הָעָם, וַיְבָרֶכֶם, *Aaron raised his hands towards the people and blessed them.* According to tradition, for the first time, Aaron pronounced the priestly blessings that are found in

Numbers 6:24-27. Our commentators note that although this blessing was not yet recorded in the Torah, the formula had already been taught to Moses who in turn taught it to Aaron.

In Leviticus 9:23 the Torah records that, following Aaron's blessing, Moses joined Aaron in the Tent of Meeting. They then went out together and blessed the people. At that point, the glory of G-d appeared before the entire people.

While some Torah commentators contend that the blessing referred to in verse 23 was really the tripartite priestly blessing, the Sifra and Torat Cohanim, Miluim 9, cited by Rashi, maintain that it was an entirely different blessing. Says the Sifra: Moses said: "May it be G-d's will to cause His shechina (Divine Presence) to rest on the work of your hands! May the L-rd, the G-d of your fathers, increase your numbers a thousandfold and bless you, as He promised you!" The people then responded: "May the favor of the L-rd be upon us; let all that we put our hands to prosper, O prosper the work of our hands."

These words of response by the people may be found in Psalm 90:17, a psalm whose authorship is ascribed to Moses. It is the psalm that is recited as part of the conclusion of the Saturday evening service, in which, in effect, Jews pray that the works of their hands in the coming week may be blessed.

A story is told of a young, enthusiastic, Minister who arrived at his new church only to find the building in complete disrepair—the walls in danger of collapse, the paint peeling and the garden littered with thistles, thorns and shards of glass. With great zeal, the young Minister mobilized the congregants to begin repairing and repainting the chapel. After much effort, the building was now sparkling, and glory had returned to the sanctuary. The church's gardens however, the Minister left for himself. Every Sunday, at the conclusion of services, the Minister would change from his Sunday finest to begin toiling in the garden. By the end of spring, the garden was in full bloom—a glorious sight to behold.

One Sunday afternoon, as the Minister was laboring in the church's garden, a congregant approached and complimented him on the beauty of the gardens. "The L-rd must surely be your partner!" he said to the Minister. The priest looked up, flattered by the compliment, but said to the congregant wryly, "Yes, the L-rd surely is my partner, but you should have seen this garden when my partner took care of it!"

When Moses and Aaron blessed the people and prayed that G-d should cause His Divine presence to rest on the work of the people's hands, he understood the nature of the Divine-human partnership. The Al-mighty may bring the rain, but if His human partners do not plant the seeds, nothing will grow. The Al-mighty may make the sunshine, but if we do not remove the weeds, the healthy flowers cannot flourish.

How beautifully the Psalmist in chapter 127:1 expresses how essential G-d's help is, by saying: אִם הַשֵּׁם לֹא יִבְנֶה בַּיִת, שָׁוְיָ עֲמָלוֹ בִּזְיוֹן בּוֹ, *Unless the L-rd builds the house, they that build it, labor in vain. Unless the L-rd watches the city, the watchmen who guard it, guard it in vain.*

As the philosophers are eager to point out, G-d, the Prime Cause, makes all of human achievement possible, but, unless the human partners perform their assigned roles, not much will happen.

This is what is alluded to in that very famous dangling participle found in the verse from Genesis 2:3, recited every Friday night in the Shabbat Kiddush:

G-d blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because on it He abstained from all His work which G-d created to make. אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא אֱ-לֹקִים לַעֲשׂוֹת, which G-d created to make—say the rabbis, refers to the fact that G-d created the world, but it was left for His human partners "to make"—to finish the act of creation and to perfect the world.

And so, to paraphrase the words of the Sifra attributed to Moses: May it be G-d's will to cause His Divine Presence to rest upon the work of our hands. May our Divine talents be used to bring perfection in this world. May G-d be our partner, and may we truly become G-d's partner.