



The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

Pinchas 5782

The Focal Point

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

In this week's parsha, God again tells Moshe that he will not enter the land with the rest of the people. Moshe asks God to appoint an appropriate leader to stand in his place, and He appoints Moshe's loyal student, Yehoshua. This appointment is followed in the Torah by a section on the sacrifices brought in the mishkan daily and on Shabbos and Yom Tov. We have discussed the connection between Yehoshua's appointment and the section of sacrifices a number of times. We have noted that one connection between these sections is that, according to the midrash, God told Avrohom at the covenant between the pieces that it would be through the merit of the sacrifices that his children would retain their hold on Eretz Yisroel. Rabbi Naphtoli Zevi Yehudah Berlin, in his *Ha'amek Davar*, elaborates on the function of the sacrifices brought in the mishkan and the Temple as a means of connecting the nation to God and in turn providing for their sustenance in Eretz Yisroel. Since, then, Yehoshua was to be the one to lead the nation into the Eretz Yisroel, the means for sustaining them in the land is presented in the Torah directly after his appointment. We may add that the section of sacrifices begins with the section of the twice-daily sacrifice that was brought, the *korban tamid*, which highlights the reason for Yehoshua's choice as Moshe's successor, which was because he was constantly in contact with Moshe, never leaving his tent. This aspect of constancy would be necessary in leading the nation in Eretz Yisroel, constantly reminding them of their need to trust in God.

One aspect of the section of the sacrifices and its connection to the preceding section that we have not discussed in the past is the inclusion of the sacrifices brought on Rosh Chodesh, or the new month, among the various other sacrifices. Rabbi Amnon Bazak, in his work *Nekudas Pesicha*, writes that the Rosh Chodesh

sacrifices appear between Shabbos and Yom Tov, and are a kind of intermediary point between them, coming on a more regular basis than the Yom Tov sacrifices, but on a less regular basis than those of Shabbos. In addition, he notes, Rav Avrohom Ibn Ezra, in his commentary cites, with approval, Rav Moshe HaSefardi as saying that the first mention of Rosh Chodesh in this section refers to the beginning of the month of Nissan, and that the subsequent reference to Rosh Chodesh is to the rest of the months of the year. Rav Bazak observes that since the Torah, in parshas Bo, tells us that the calendar year begins with the month that would later be called Nissan, Rosh Chodesh, as mentioned in our parsha, can, again, be seen as the focal point from which all other dates on the calendar emanate. I believe, however, that there is an additional aspect to Rosh Chodesh, not mentioned by Rav Bazak, that highlights its centrality to the Jewish calendar, and helps explain the connection between the section on sacrifices and the appointment of Yehoshua to lead the nation into Eretz Yisroel.

The Torah in parshas Bo commands us to sanctify the new moon through the process of *Kiddush HaKodesh*. This involves a process in which witnesses observe the appearance of the new moon and testify to that effect in *beis din*, the Jewish court sitting in the Temple. If their testimony is accepted, the new month is declared. The sanctification of the first month of the year is of special importance, because the cycle of the holidays follows from it. This process, known as *Kiddush Hachodesh*, or sanctification of the new month, can only be done in Eretz Yisroel. The Rambam, in a remarkable passage in his *Sefer HaMitzvos*, or *Book of the Commandments*, writes that, today, when the high court no longer exists, there must be a minyan of Jews in Eretz Yisroel in order for *Kiddush HaChodesh* to be effective. Although the appearance of

the new moon is no longer determined by *beis din*, but rather by the calendar fixed by Hillel over 1500 years ago, still, says the Rambam, as understood by the *Avnei Nezer*, this determination can only take effect through the Jewish people living in Eretz Yisroel. Without a minyan of Jews living there, the new moon would not be sanctified, and our entire calendar would be in disarray. However, continues the Rambam, there is a divine assurance that there will always be a minyan of Jews living in Eretz Yisroel, and, so, we need not worry about the effectiveness of the calendar.

Rashi, in the beginning of his commentary to the Torah, asks why the Torah doesn't begin with the mitzvoh of Kiddush HaChodesh, since it is the first mitzvoh that was given to the Jewish people. He answers that there was a need to establish the right of the Jewish people to the land of Israel. Perhaps the meaning behind this is that since the Torah can only be kept, in its entirety, in Eretz Yisroel, before the mitzvos are mentioned, the right of the Jewish people to the land must be established. Interestingly, according to the remarks of the Rambam in

his *Sefer HaMitzvos*, the mitzvoh of Kiddush HaChodesh itself is rooted in a divine assurance that there will be a continual presence of the Jews in Eretz Yisroel. Based on the Rambam's contention, then we can find an additional connection between the appointment of Yehoshua to succeed Moshe and the section of sacrifices. Yehoshua was to be the one who would lead the nation into Eretz Yisroel, and the section of sacrifices focuses around the sacrifices of Rosh Chodesh, whose offering depends upon the performance of the mitzvoh of Kiddush HaChodesh. That mitzvoh, in turn, is rooted in a divine assurance that there will always be Jews in the land. Thus, the appointment of Yehoshua as the leader who would bring the nation into Eretz Yisroel is followed by a section that revolves around a mitzvoh whose continued performance is dependent on at least a minyan of Jews, serving as representatives of the entire nation, remaining in Eretz Yisroel. There is, in turn, a divine assurance that such a minyan will always exist in the land, and, therefore, the section of sacrifices, following immediately after the appointment of Yehoshua, serves as an indication of the long range effect of Yehoshua's mission.

The Only One

Rabbi Assaf Bednarsh (Transcribed and adapted by a talmid from the YUTorah shiur originally given in the Gruss Kollel in Yerushalayim on July 9, 2020)

This week's Parsha mentions *Korban ha-Tamid*. We learn it on Rosh Chodesh, and we say it every day in *korbanos*. *Es ha-keves echad ta'ase ba-boker ve-es ha-keves ha-sheini ta'ase bein ha-arbaim*. There is an obscure Medrash, made famous by *Eyn Yaakov* in his *hakdama*. We don't exactly know its original source. There is a *machlokes* about the biggest *klal* in the Torah. One opinion says, *Sh'ma Yisroel Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad*. Another opinion declares, *Ve-ahavata le-re'echa kamocho*. And yet a third view claims: *Es ha-keves echad ta'ase ba-boker ve-es ha-keves ha-sheini ta'ase bein ha-arbaim*—that's what Rav Shimon ben Pazi says. And *Eyn Yaakov* quotes from the Medrash that we *pasken* like him. The most significant rule in Torah is to sacrifice one sheep in the morning and one sheep in the afternoon. It seems neither like a substantial *klal* nor a general rule. It's just one particular mitzvah, albeit one that applies every day. So why does the Medrash make such a big deal of it?

The Maharal, in his *Nesivos Olam*, says: The point here is not specifically *korbanos*—as great as *korbanos*

are. (*Eyn Yaakov*, though, says it is about the greatness of *korbanos*) However, Maharal says, No, it's about the *gadlus* of *hasmada*—of *temidus*. There are a lot of big things that you could do—like Rebbi Akiva saying *Shma* during his martyrdom. Says Maharal: The big things are obviously important. However, Torah is built on the small things. The whole point of the Torah and the *tarya"g mitzvos* is to have a routine. Jews have a routine of *Avoda*—day-in and day-out—that creates a framework that defines who we are. Your routine, says Maharal, defines who you are. The great things that you do define what you accomplish. While those things you do that are just part of your regular day, day-in and day-out, define who you are. A Jew who davens and says *brachos* regularly—those seemingly boring, unimportant, unexciting things we do every single day—define who we are. They are greater than the big things because they redefine your *mahus* (essence) as an *oved Hashem*. If I am *oved Hashem* regularly, it's not just me doing *avodas Hashem*—because I do that, I am an *oved Hashem*.

I want to add one *he'ara*. The Lubavitcher Rebbe mentioned an additional element in his *sicha*. Very often, when something is routine, and you do something repeatedly, you say to yourself: I did it a hundred times already (or a thousand). Something you do routinely is easy to lose in large numbers and lose sight of the moment. Says the Lubavitcher Rebbe, No! What's the *Klal Gadol*? *Es ha-keves ha-echad ta'ase ba-boker*—the one sheep, sacrifice in the morning. Even though you do it every day, today there is only one. There are 365 days in a year. However, there is only one *keves* this morning. There are so many *Shachrises*, but there is only one *Shachris* today. There is only one *Mincha* today. There is only one *tefillin* today. Of

course, we know this idea. The Lubavitcher Rebbe was not *mechadesh* this. Rashi quotes this idea all over: *Yehiyu be-einecha ka-chadashim*. He says: What's the key to the Torah? It's to have the *hasmada*—to do the same thing, day-in and day-out. But don't make it just another day. *Es ha-keves ha-echad*. Today is an opportunity I will never have again. Because yesterday was yesterday and tomorrow will be tomorrow. Today is the only today. Now is the time. If I am ready for *Mincha*, then today's *Mincha* is the only one in my life. So make the most of it; make it unique; make it special; make it speak to who you are right now. And that's the key to proper *Avodas Hashem*. Shabbat Shalom.

What is in a Name? In Israel Much More Than You Would Think

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

The names we select are always symbolic, drawing from past memory, present experience, and future hopes. At the dawn of history, Adam carefully screened the natural world, and, in the first creative act of Man, assigned a name to each species. Throughout Tanach, parents designated names based upon their own struggles and triumphs, or based upon their dreams for their newly born child.

Sometimes a single name is insufficient. Multifaceted characters such as Moshe, Dovid and Shlomo amassed a broad range of nicknames. Moshe went by at least seven names, each one capturing a different trait or quality. As they transition into new phases of their lives heroic personalities are renamed. As Avram embraces his universal role, he is renamed Avraham. When Ya'akov begins to surpass Esav, he is renamed Yisrael. Names, in Tanach and in life, matter.

Traditional names

Over the past thousand years the pool of Jewish names was primarily drawn from major characters in Tanach or renowned Jewish scholars. As it is a creative undertaking, naming will always be dynamic, and fresh names were always added to the pool. Languages such as Ladino and Yiddish, which merged Hebrew with foreign languages, supplied new choices to our reservoir of names. Additionally classic names were often altered into nicknames. By and large however, in the past, the pool of names remained relatively limited.

Additionally, Jewish names were recycled throughout the generations, as children were named after their ancestors. Sephardic custom advocated naming after living relatives, whereas Ashkenzaim named only after those who have passed. Either way, naming a child “after” an ancestor preserved the family legacy, while providing historical continuity to the younger generation. In a culture which so deeply emphasizes tradition, naming after ancestors was always an effective way of connecting with our past masorah.

“New” names in Israel

Our historic return to Israel has shifted numerous aspects of Jewish culture, including how we name our children. Life in Israel has provided new “horizons” for our religious and cultural experience, vastly expanding the pool of Jewish names. In the modern state of Israel, we are discovering new reservoirs of names.

In the diaspora, natural landscapes didn't carry profound symbolism. Though they may have been aesthetically appealing, they weren't “homemade”, and we didn't expect to remain there forever. In Israel, nature and landscapes serve as semi-religious backdrops. Even a quick glance at Shir Hashirim reveals how central landscapes of Israel are to our relationship with Hashem. This allegory of our love with Hashem plays out across Israeli mountains, valleys, rivers and gardens. Having returned to these historic landscapes we have begun drawing names from Nature, such as Aviv, Erez, Shachar, Re'em, Ma'ayan, Ayelet, Tamar,

Rimon and Kineret, just to name a few.

The full roster of Tanach names has supplied an additional reservoir of novel Jewish names. For thousands of years, the book of Tanach was relatively neglected. As Christians appropriated Tanach, and theologically distorted its meaning, we retreated from its study, focusing instead upon the oral tradition. Thankfully, with our return to our land, we have also returned to the book of land and of history. Please G-d, in two weeks, I will be participating in a Tanach study week in the Gush, which typically attracts over 5000 participants. As part of this rediscovery of Tanach, names are being taken from lesser-known personalities and objects in Tanach such as Ehud, Assaf, Yoav, Bat Galim, Noga and Yakira- again just to cite a small sampling.

A third, newly discovered reservoir of names, stems from the massive historical process which has been launched. We are authoring the final chapters of history while we are surging to a final state of redemption. Many names – especially women’s names- distill these redemptive hopes and dreams, such as Tikva, Geulah, Emunah, Tzofia, and Techiya.

Name of Hashem

In addition to the new names based upon Israeli landscapes, Tanach figures, and redemptive dreams, our return to Israel has also emboldened us to include Hashem in our naming. Parshat Pinchas describes the names of the various households, each of which inserted the name of Hashem into their own “labels”. For example, the house of Chanoch, son of Reuven, was listed as “Ha’Chanochi”, by adding the letter “*heh*” beforehand, and the letter “*yud*” afterward. The prefix of “*heh*” and the suffix of “*yud*” form the name of Hashem (*yud-heh*). Inserting Hashem into a name, is a bold demonstration of religious confidence and signals our intimate relationship with Hashem. This custom, more or less faded, and throughout history the name of Hashem rarely factored in human names. Now that we have returned to our homeland and have rebuilt our relationship with Hashem, these names are, once again

popular. Names such as Adiel, Uriel, Aviad, Eliav, Avishai, Talya, Amalya, and Hodaya all reflect a renewed confidence in conjugating our names with Hashem’s name.

Revolution and Tradition

Every revolution challenges us to merge the new with the old. By definition, revolutions introduce new paradigms, implying that past conventions are outdated. These novel names feel fresh and contemporary, reflecting our renewed historical opportunity. However, living through this shift many are less likely to name their children after past relatives. For many, those ancestral names feel too starched and too formal, and they don’t convey the revitalization of our national spirit. Naming in the modern world of the state of Israel challenges us to adopt this new spirit, while still preserving our links to past generations. It is not always that easy.

This dilemma is reflective of the general challenges of living through the historical shift in Israel. Religious identity outside of Israel rests squarely upon preserving past traditions. Masorah shapes personal identity and communal policy.

Life in Israel is more multi-variabed, as we navigate uncharted territory. We have never lived through a redemptive process, and it poses unforeseen questions. How can we respond to a historical revolution while still identifying with past traditions? Jewish history did not begin in 1948, but for many Israelis it sometimes appears that way.

Transitioning through history isn’t easy, and this dilemma is “stressing” many who do move to Israel. Adults are generally more adept at fusing the new world to the old one, but children often view past traditions as outworn and obsolete. Naming “policies” reflect a more general “existential” challenge to live through historical rebirth while still rooting ourselves to the past. It sometimes feels like an obstacle course, but we are fortunate that we have been chosen to cross it. For our ancestors, the future was shadowy, so they looked squarely to the past. We are lucky to be standing between past and future.

Yearning for Eretz Yisrael

Rabbi Yossi Goldin

It seems like an unfair request, almost cruel in a way... As Am Yisrael stands at the border of Eretz Yisrael and begins to make final preparations for entering the land, G-d commands Moshe to go up to Har Ha'avarim and view Eretz Yisrael from a distance- and then prepare for his imminent passing.

Why would G-d command Moshe to go up and see the land- isn't that basically teasing him? Moshe's entire life's mission has been to lead the Jews into Israel- a dream that he did not merit to realize. Seeing the land and its beauty would only intensify his desire to enter and increase his sadness over the fact that he would not personally merit entry. Why would Hashem seemingly add salt to the wound by commanding him to glimpse the beauty of the land, and then deny his continued pleas to enter?

A number of answers are offered to this question- I would like to share with you an answer that I recently heard that deeply resonated with me.

Perhaps Hashem's request that Moshe view the land from afar was specifically intended to heighten Moshe's yearning for Eretz Yisrael. The purpose of this experience, however, was not to increase Moshe's pain. Instead, by amplifying Moshe's yearning for Eretz Yisrael, Hashem sought to embed within Am Yisrael, as a whole, the significance and importance of *drishat tzion*, of yearning for Eretz Yisrael.

After forty years of wilderness wandering, Am Yisrael were finally on the cusp of entering the land- and yet, perhaps they didn't fully appreciate what they were about to experience. It was expected, the next stage of their journey. By witnessing the intense yearning that Moshe had to enter the land, perhaps Am Yisrael would gain a greater appreciation for the journey upon which they were about to embark.

Moshe's example, however, was meant to strike even further...

Thousands of years later, the Jewish people would be uprooted from the land, not knowing when they would return. Future generations would be challenged to preserve their individual and national desire to return to the land- to create strong and vibrant Jewish communities in the Diaspora while also keeping *drishat tzion* foremost on their consciousness. Throughout this journey, Moshe Rabbeinu

would be the model for his people of what it means to long for Eretz Yisrael. Maase Avot Siman L'banim. By heightening Moshe's yearning before his death, G-d urges future generations in Exile to heighten their own yearning as well.

Moshe's intense yearning and love for Eretz Yisrael thus serves a model for us today- a yearning and a love that we must develop and cultivate within ourselves and our children, as well.

Lest I be misunderstood, this is not meant to be a simplistic message pushing Aliyah. While Aliyah is certainly a wonderful thing, I fully realize and appreciate that there are many valid and important reasons why a person may choose, or need, to stay in Chutz La'aretz. As an *oleh* myself, I am also well aware of the myriad of challenges that one may encounter when making Aliyah. It is a decision that must be made thoughtfully and carefully.

Rather- *drishat tzion* is less about where a person lives, and more about a person's mindset and mentality. One could live in Chutz La'aretz and display intense and profound *drishat tzion*- while another could live in Eretz Yisrael, yet display a lack of *drishat tzion*, by failing to appreciate what is in front of his very eyes.

Yearning for Eretz Yisrael means reflecting deeply upon the *tefilot* we say three times a day- "*Vlirushalayim Ircha b'rachamim Teshuv..*", "and to Jerusalem Your city, with mercy You should return" and "*V'techezana Eineinu b'shuvcha L'tzion b'rachamim*", "And let our eyes bear witness as you return to Zion with mercy". It means viewing the Land of Israel and *Medinat Yisrael* as not simply a place to visit and vacation, but as home. It might be that one has another home as well, where he/she currently resides- but Eretz Yisrael is home.

And it also means having a deep longing and desire to, somehow and at some point, make Eretz Yisrael one's permanent home. It may not happen for a while- or perhaps not at all- for valid and practical or personal reasons- but the dream and ambition should never die.

And for those of us privileged to live in Eretz Yisrael, it means moving beyond the day-to-day stresses of our lives, in order to truly appreciate the gift we have been given, and continually strive to make our country better.

Drishat Tzion should always be at the forefront of our

consciousness.

And it should be prioritized as a value that we impart to our children as well. Our children should not view Eretz Yisrael as simply a vacation destination, or a place to learn about and sing about in school. It must be a place that they see as central to their religious worldview- a Land that is ours, given to us by G-d- our communal and national home- and a Land that we strive to return to. Whether we live in EY or not, we must make discussions about the centrality of Eretz Yisrael, and the issues facing Medinat Yisrael today, a part of the discourse in our homes. Of course, as with most things, our children will absorb these messages most profoundly and deeply if they see them as foundational components in our own worldview as well.

Never Tolerate the Intolerable

Rabbi Efreim Goldberg

We read in Parshas Pinchas of God's announcement of the reward He would be giving to Pinchas בקנאו את קנאתי – literally, “for avenging My vengeance.” During the incident of Ba'al Pe'or, as Benei Yisrael sinned with the women of Moav and worshipped their deity, Pinchas brazenly went ahead and killed Zimri and Kozbi – two violators who were committing a sinful act in public. Pinchas' zealotry brought an end to the devastating plague that Hashem had sent, which had killed 24,000 people. Now God announced that Pinchas would be rewarded for his zealotry.

Rav Yitzchak Blazer, in Kochvei Or, takes note of the fact that Hashem rewarded Pinchas not for intervening to stop the sinful act committed by Zimri and Kozbi, but rather בקנאו את קנאתי – for standing up for Hashem when nobody else did. As Zimri and Kozbi openly trampled on our most cherished values, our values of sanctity and nobility, everybody else looked on. They were afraid to act. They were too worried about being “cancelled.” They didn't want to get involved. They preferred tolerating this conduct, figuring, “They're not hurting anyone; they're in love; why should this bother me?” But Pinchas refused to accept it. He put his reputation – and even his life – on the line, and took a bold, uncompromising stand in defense of

Rebbe Nachman famously said, “Kol Makom She'ani Holeich, Ani Holeich L'ertz Yisrael”, “every place I go, I am going to the Land of Israel”. This inspiring image sets the tone for each of us as a doreish tzion, wherever we may find ourselves. For some of us, the path to the Land of Israel is direct and short- for others, it may be roundabout and take much longer. For even others, the journey may never be completed. But the common denominator between us all is a deep yearning and longing that defines our journey, and the destination. Thousands of years ago, G-d commanded Moshe Rabbeinu to ascend the mountain overlooking Eretz Yisrael, and intensify his drishat tzion. Generations later, we are tasked with keeping that same flame alive.

Wishing everyone a Shabbat Shalom!

Hashem's honor when nobody else had the courage to do so.

Of course, Pinchas' violent act of zealotry is not an example that we are encouraged or even allowed to follow. Chazal make it very clear that killing the perpetrators was sanctioned in this very specific case; generally, violence against sinners is not allowed and must never be deemed acceptable.

Nevertheless, the story of Pinchas is instructive for us in regard to the need to speak out and take a stand. There is no such thing as an “innocent bystander.” We must never tolerate the intolerable. When egregious violations are taking place, we do not have the luxury to remain neutral, to stay out of it. We need to loudly and firmly object. When Hashem's blueprint for the world and for human society is being discarded, we cannot be too afraid or too tolerant to speak out.

The Gemara in Maseches Shabbos (119b) teaches, לא חרבה ירושלים אלא בשביל שלא הוכיחו זה את זה – Yerushalayim was destroyed because people did not speak out or object to misbehavior. They tolerated the intolerable. We might not be able to stop egregious misconduct, but this does not absolve us of the responsibility to take a stand and object to it.

Messiah is the great, wondrous teacher-prophet, who will instruct and enlighten, and by doing so he will redeem the world” (Vision and Leadership, p.158-159).

Rav Nosson Tzvi (Rav Nosson Tzvi Finkel zt”l, Rosh Yeshiva Yeshiva Mir Yerushalayim, 1943-2011) considered himself forever indebted to his rebbe from his youth, Rav Yehoshua Levinson. “A particularly poignant moment of Rav Nosson Tzvi’s life took place at Rav Levinson’s levaya, which was a year and a half before Rav Nosson Tzvi was niftar. By that point, Rav Nosson Tzvi was very weak most of the time. The levaya was to take place close to Shabbos, and out of courtesy, Rav Nosson Tzvi was informed of the levaya. To everyone’s surprise, not only did Rav Nosson

Tzvi join the levaya, but he ran after the mittah and tried to grab onto it, crying bitterly, ‘Rebbi, rebbi, all that I have is yours!’” (Rav Nosson Tzvi, Artscroll, p.170-171).

As we journey, once again, through the Three Weeks of churban and galus (destruction and exile), let us hope and pray for the ultimate redemption, and the fulfillment of the prophecy of the End of Days, when וְהָיוּ עִיבָיִךָ רְאוּת אֶת-מִוֶרְיָךְ (Yeshayahu 30:2), with the mesorah from teacher to student having carried us through each generation, we will merit that our eyes will see our One Teacher, Who will be revealed with clarity and grandeur before our nation and the entire world.

Can a Perfect G-d Sin?

Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald

This week’s parasha, parashat Pinchas, is full of fascinating narratives. The parasha opens with G-d’s reward to Pinchas, the son of Elazar the Priest, for his zealous attack on Zimri and Cozbi, who had committed public harlotry. The narrative continues with the war against the Midianites, the census of the people, the story of the daughters of Zelafchad and the laws of inheritance. As if to balance the exciting tales, most of the remaining parasha is dominated by the litany of sacrificial offerings—daily, Shabbat and holiday, the stuff that we usually can’t wait to be done with!

For the skeptics out there (and for probably many non-skeptics as well), the ritual of animal sacrifice is a problematic and challenging part of Torah. And, yet, despite such difficult and challenging portions of the Torah, it is necessary, at least for the believer, to reaffirm that every word of Torah is valid and relevant. Rambam deals in a forthright manner with the question of the seemingly irrelevant and obtuse matters found in the Torah. In his Commentary on the Mishnah (Sanhedrin, Chapter 10) Maimonides unequivocally affirms: “Every verse in the Torah is equally holy.”

In developing his argument, Maimonides proceeds to quote a series of verses that seem thoroughly insignificant. He cites the verses: “The sons of Ham were Kush and Mizraim” (Genesis 10:6), “His [Hadad’s] wife’s name was Mehitebel,” (Genesis 36:39), “and Timnah was a concubine [of Eliphaz]” (Genesis 36:12). After citing these verses, Maimonides dramatically declares that these verses

are equal in holiness and meaning to the famed verses of the Ten Commandments, “I am the L-rd your G-d” (Exodus 20:2) and the central declaration of faith, “Hear O Israel” (Deuteronomy 6:4). “This all originates from G-d,” says Maimonides, “and are all part of G-d’s Torah, which is perfect, pure, holy and true!”

By focusing on one of the verses featured in parashat Pinchas that concerns the sacrifices brought on Rosh Chodesh, the New Moon festival, we may learn how a seemingly irrelevant and obscure verse may be a repository of profound wisdom and insight. In Numbers 28:15, regarding the sacrifice of Rosh Chodesh (the new moon), the Torah instructs the priests to bring one he-goat for a sin offering unto the L-rd. In Hebrew it reads: וּשְׂעִיר עִזִּים אֶחָד: לַיהוָה. Although לַיהוָה is usually translated as a sin offering unto the L-rd, it is more accurately translated as “a sin offering for G-d!” Can it be that the Torah is suggesting that G-d needs to bring a sin offering? Sounds heretical!

There is a well-known textual problem in the Creation story found in Genesis 1:16, concerning the formation of the sun and the moon. That verse first states that G-d made אֶת שְׁנֵי הַמָּאֲרוֹת הַגְּדֹלִים, “the two great luminaries.” Then it declares that G-d made “the greater luminary [the sun] to dominate the day, and the lesser luminary [the moon] to dominate the night.” We all know that the moon, which has no light of its own, cannot be compared to the sun in either its mass or its energy. How then, can the Torah refer to the moon as one of “the two great luminaries”?

According to the Midrash, (the compendium of legends on the Bible), G-d originally created both the sun and the moon to be of equal size. Unhappy with sharing the limelight, the moon approached G-d and complained that it is impossible for two monarchs to reign over the same domain. G-d responded forcefully and declared, that since the moon complained, the moon will be reduced, and the sun will remain large. The Midrash concludes, stating that G-d sensitively compensates the moon by allowing the stars to shine at night, to minister to the moon and to enhance its reduced status.

The Talmud in Hullin 60b, in an obscure, but most remarkable statement cited in the name of the sage Resh Lakish states that the reference to the sin offering of Rosh Chodesh is the only time with respect to sacrifices that the phrase חטאת—“*lchata*”—as a sin offering, appears in this form in Scripture. This unusual phraseology, says Resh Lakish, implies that G-d, so to speak, declares: “May this [he-goat] be an atonement for Me [G-d], for reducing the moon!”

Had this statement not been cited in the name of the great sage Resh Lakish, it surely would have been condemned as unadulterated heresy—since it clearly implies that G-d had sinned!

This Midrash, and the Talmudic statement of Resh Lakish, underscore, once again, one of the most remarkable features of our Torah and a recurring pattern found in our faith system. While the Torah surely is a book of law, of history and of philosophy, it is first and foremost a guidebook of ethics and morality! Whenever there is a conflict between an historical or philosophical truth, and an ethical truth, the Torah always comes to confirm and bolster the ethical and moral truth.

Yes! In our faith system, G-d depicts Himself as expressing remorse for reducing the moon. How fascinating, how fantastic that an “Omnipotent” deity expresses remorse. How revolutionary that our G-d considers Himself a sinner!

We can learn much from G-d’s “sin offering.” We mortals of flesh-and-blood need to own-up to our shortcomings. We need to brazenly confess our own wrongdoings and be prepared to bring our own sin offerings. We need, at least on occasion, to publicly confess our shortcomings to impress upon others that we too are fallible. But too often we don’t know where to start. That is why G-d, so to speak, allows Himself to serve as an example for us, by offering

His own sin offering.

And, so, we see how each verse of the Torah is of infinite value—even those heavy-duty and obscure verses that deal with such difficult subject matters as animal sacrifice. To have dismissed the verse that appears in Numbers 28:15, would have meant to eliminate one of the great lessons of Judaism, of the humility of G-d and of His fierce sense of morality—and would have diminished the ultimate value of Torah.