



# The Marcos and Adina Katz YUTORAH IN PRINT

## Vayikra 5783

### The Great Dialogue

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm z"l (Originally delivered March 14, 1964)

**T**he Jewish year has two peaks or high points, one coming in the Fall with the months of Ellul and Tishri, and the other in the Spring with the month of Nisan, which begins today. The Fall peak includes Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Succot, and the month of Ellul preceding them. The Spring peak consists primarily of Passover and the preparations for it by means of the four special portions, the *arba parshiyot*, and especially the month of Nisan. Both of these high points are considered of the utmost importance; both are regarded by the Talmud as two kinds of "New Year." Tishri is considered the Rosh Hashanah or New Year for shanim, in the sense that the year chronologically begins at that time, and Nisan is, as we read on this special parshat ha-hodesh the rosh hadashim, the first of the months insofar as reckoning the holidays of the year. Each of these represents a complex of moods, associations, and attitudes that are deeply ingrained in the Jewish experience and the Jewish soul.

What is the essential difference between them? One of the finest analyses was presented by Rabbi Yosef Yitzhak, the Rabbi of Lubavitch who died 14 years ago, in a work called "*Kuntres Hai Ellul*." I beg your leave to present to you the gist of his ideas, together with some additions, elaborations, and modifications of my own.

The story of man is essentially the story of his encounter with God, the confrontation of creature with Creator in the great dialogue between them. This dialogue does not necessarily consist of words that are exchanged; there are also deeds, feelings, and orientations that pass between the two in a state of mutuality.

The Zohar regards this dialogue between God and man as similar, in many respects, to a human conversation: one side initiates it, and the other responds. The Zohar uses two terms, depending upon who initiates the dialogue. When it is opened by God, then it is called *itra'uta di-le'ela* – the impulse

or initiative from above. When man begins this dialogue, it is called *itra'uta di-le'tata* – the initiative from below. When either *itra'uta* receives a response, there is the happiness of fulfillment. If, Heaven forbid, there is no answer, there can be only tragedy and frustration. When man calls out to God and it seems as if the sky is leaden and the Heavens an impenetrable barrier returning only an empty echo of his own unfulfilled pleadings, then man suffers intense loneliness. And when God calls out to man and humanity turns a deaf ear to the divine invitation, then, so to speak, He too experiences solitude in that the divine plan for the world is frustrated.

Now, Tishri is a time of *itra'uta di-le'tata*, when man reaches out for God. And Nisan is a time of *itra'uta di-le'ela*, when God seeks to arouse mankind.

Ellul and Tishri are the months that come at the end of the summer, when the most intense and exciting and lively period of the year comes to an end. The leaves turn brown, life seems to slip away with the end of the season, and Nature seems to be dying. Man looks to the world for inspiration, and he is disappointed because he finds nothing. Nature is, at most, neutral, indifferent to his joys and his sorrows, apathetic to his search for meaning and his true destiny. Man is gripped by a sense of futility. He looks for signs of God's presence and accessibility, and he finds nothing. So he realizes he must look within himself, and by himself make the attempt to reach out for God. This is the *itra'uta di-le'tata*. The year draws to an end, the noises of the world silence the voice of God, and it is man who must arouse God and initiate the great dialogue. That is why in these months our tradition calls upon us to do teshuvah, for by our repentance we initiate a relationship with the Almighty. So too do we pursue tefillah and tzedakah, waiting anxiously for the response from Heaven.

The month of Nisan comes in the Spring; after a long, cold, and lifeless winter, the world comes to life. The

reawakening of Nature is (to anyone yet young in spirit and heart, and not soured by the years and embittered by time) a call from God to man. It is an *itra'uta di-le'ela*. With every bud and blade and blossom, with every waft of warm wind, with the welcome whispers of spring, we hear a call from God, a divine invitation to which we must and can and ought to respond with love and enthusiasm.

Historically, this is the season of God's arousal of Israel. It is the celebration of the Exodus! Our ancestors never wanted to leave Egypt. All they sought was an increase in wages and better working conditions. It was God who forced us out of Egypt. All the miracles that were performed were an expression of the *itra'uta di-le'ela*, as God came down to remove us from the "house of slavery" and give us our spiritual character and mission. So that during Nisan, the miracles of both history and Nature express the call from above, the *itra'uta di-le'ela*.

During this season we read Solomon's famous Shir ha-Shirim, the Song of Songs. This is, according to sacred Jewish tradition, a love song between God and Israel. And in it we find both ways of beginning the great dialogue. When the beloved, who represents Israel, sings *ani le'dodi ve'dodi li*, "I am for my lover and my lover is for me," that is the expression of the mood of Ellul and Tishri; for the beginning is made by man: "I am for my Lover." As a matter of fact, the Hebrew word Ellul consists of the initial letters of the phrase *ani le'dodi ve'dodi li*. And when the beloved sings *dodi li v'ani lo*, "my beloved is for me and I am for him," that represents the initiation of the dialogue by God, "my Beloved is for me," and is expressive of the mood of Nisan.

During Tishri, the season of the High Holidays, we implore God: *anenu, ha-Shem, anenu*, "answer us, O Lord, answer us." We have initiated the conversation, the relationship; now please respond to us. During Nisan, however, He implores us to answer Him. We refer to Matzoh by saying *ha-lahma anya*, normally translated "this is the bread of affliction." However, the Rabbis had another interpretation of *anya*: they said, *she'onim alav devarim harbeh* – it comes from the word "to answer," for it is the bread over which we answer God's call, summarized in the tale of the Haggadah.

Indeed, God calls upon us in so many ways to answer Him! Freedom itself is such a precious gift from the Almighty — all we need do is compare our conditions to the unfortunate one of our fellow Jews in Russia! It is an opportunity which is in itself a disguised call from God

to do something with our lives. If we use the freedom of religion to reject religion, if we interpret it as the freedom from religion, than we are misusing democracy by offering a rebuff to the Almighty,

Youth, life, health – all these are simple and natural opportunities which are an *itra'uta di-le'ela*, a call from God, inviting us to answer Him by making something holy and useful and purposeful of our lives.

Even an occasional failure and disappointment can be a good thing, a divinely given opportunity, a way that God calls to us to do something creative with our lives. Those who, from youth, have always had an unbroken chain of successes, are sometimes unfortunate. They do not know how to handle a difficult situation, they lose their sense of humor and perspective, and often may develop a distorted view of life. Failure is often the stuff from which growth and maturity are made. It can be an *itra'uta di-le'ela*, a way that God calls to us offering us greatness itself. No wonder that maror requires a blessing, a berakhah. Bitterness itself can be a way that God calls to us, and we ought respond with a blessing of thanks.

This Shabbat, then, is most important for us to listen for the voice of God, for the *itra'uta di-le'ela*. It is the first day of Nisan, the season of miracles, the awakening of Nature, the welcome of Passover on this parshat ha-hodesh. It is also the Sabbath of Va-yikra, when we speak of "God's call," for the *kol ha-Shem* in all aspects of life. For only if we listen will we hear.

For the Jew must always be like the beloved who symbolizes Israel in the Shir ha-Shirim, she who can say with all honesty and integrity: *ani yeshenah ve'libi er*, "I may be asleep, but my heart is awake." Sometimes we sleep, our moral senses are dulled; but inwardly our hearts must be sensitive and responsive.

We must be prepared to answer the call that comes to us from the distance; in the words of Solomon, *kol dodi dofek*, the voice of my Lover rebounds to me from afar, even as He comes close and knocks at the door and raps at the window: *pithi li, ahoti rayati yonati tamati*, "open up for me, my sister, my beloved, my dove, my undefiled one."

He who has ears will hear this call. He who has eyes will see it in the drama of a world waking up. He who has a heart will open it for the call and the invitation of God in this mood of Nisan, of Spring.

Let this be the beginning of our response to God's invitation in the great dialogue between the people of Israel and the God of Israel.

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# The Power of Invitation

Dr. Erica Brown

Sometimes we wait for a formal invitation only to be told, “You don’t need to be invited. You’re always welcome.” But we don’t necessarily feel welcome until someone extends a real invitation to us. This is the way we open the very first chapter of Vayikra, Leviticus.

Our sedra and our book commences with the power of an invitation: “And God called...” (Lev. 1:1). The “and” connects this Torah reading to that which preceded it. When we turn back to the last chapter of Exodus, we find Moses in a flurry of activity to complete the Mishkan. It’s the way the last chapter begins: “On the first day of the first month you shall set up the Tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting. Place there the Ark of the Pact, and screen off the ark with the curtain” (Ex. 40:1-2). And it’s the way the chapter continues: “In the first month of the second year, on the first of the month, the Tabernacle was set up. Moses set up the Tabernacle, placing its sockets, setting up its planks, inserting its bars, and erecting its posts” (Ex. 40:17-18). This was hard physical labor, and Moses executed it alone.

Fifteen chapters of Exodus are filled with the vision and action necessary to build the Mishkan. Many commentaries ponder the need for such detailed instructions and the repetition that these instructions were carried out. There is an important leadership lesson embedded in this structure. You can have a vision, an architectural rendering or a strategic plan, but your ideas are only as good as your follow-through. Your actions reflect your accountability. And if you’re the leader, your actions matter most.

Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan, in their best-selling leadership book, *Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done*, write about the importance of leaders having a granular understanding of the personnel, activities, and directions of their organizations. This is the job. When this kind of close monitoring for accountability is absent, visions fall flat. Strategies die. Results tank. “Execution has to be a part of a company’s strategy and its goals,” they write. “It is the missing link between aspirations and results. As such, it is a major—indeed, the major—job of a business leader. If you don’t know how to execute, the whole of your effort as a leader will always be less than the sum of its parts.” Talk can only get you so far. Only clear

goals, measurable performance, and tight operations bring results.

The entire close of the book of Exodus reflects this intense concern for details and execution. Holiness, like love, resides not only in the amorphous cloud but in the small things, the sockets and the planks. Leaders must care about the minutiae of the work because that creates the foundation for everything else, especially when there is much to do and little time to do it in. Bossidy and Charan continue the theme:

*Follow-through is a constant and sequential part of execution. It ensures that you have established closure in the dialogue about who will be responsible for what and the specific milestones for measurement. The failure to establish this closure leaves the people who execute a decision or strategy without a clear picture of their role. As events unfold rapidly amid much uncertainty, follow-through becomes a much more intense process. Milestones need to be placed closer together so there is less room for slippage, and information needs to flow faster and in more detail so that everyone knows how the strategy is evolving.*

Finally, in the very last verses of Exodus, the Mishkan was complete. Herein lies the irony. The very leader who ensured the instructions were carried out precisely was then forbidden to enter the space: “Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting, because the cloud had settled upon it and the Presence of God filled the Tabernacle” (Ex. 40:35). God filled the entire Mishkan and there was no room for human beings.

This is why the word “Vayikra” – and He called - is so essential to understanding the entire book. God formally invited Moses back into the space after it was infused with the Divine Presence. Only then would the activities taking place there be full of vitality and purpose. Without God’s presence, the walls would have been just walls. God’s presence made the space a sanctuary. But not until Moses re-entered the space did it become a true covenantal center, a meeting place where God and human dwelt together in holy partnership. Without God’s invitation, Moses would never have re-entered the Mishkan. He would have created it and remained outside its boundaries.

An ancient rabbinic text celebrates the importance of invitation (Kallah Rabbati 8:11). God called (*vayikra*)

to Moses from the Mount Sinai: “God called to him from the mountain...” (Ex. 19:3). Just like our opening verse in Vayikra, a momentous occasion calls for a formal invitation. God calls out to Moses, reflecting His active engagement with humanity, as Rabbi Jonathan Sacks notes in his book *The Great Partnership*: “Far from being timeless and immutable, God in the Hebrew Bible is active, engaged, in constant dialogue with his people, calling, urging, warning, challenging and forgiving.” Calling is part of this essential, Divine dialogue. Moses, in turn, called out to other leaders at the foot of the mountain: “Moses called (*vayikra*) the elders of the people and put before them all that God had commanded him” (Ex. 19:7). Later, in prophetic literature, Isaiah calls the people to attention: “When I call (*ekra*) to them, they stand up together (Is.

48:13). There is a reason we have a term for professions and obsessions that speak to the most alive part of us: a calling. We feel called.

Leaders grow people by inviting them to a task, to a project, or to a new level of service. Calling matters because it lets people know that they matter. “You’re always welcome” is not the same invitation as “I was thinking about you. I’d like to invite you...” Think of a time you were not invited to take on a leadership responsibility. You felt excluded, unimportant, or even rejected. Now think of a time you were invited to assume a significant role. Whether or not you said ‘yes,’ you still felt special and included. You can gift that gift to others.

What invitation can you extend right now that would grow someone else’s leadership?

## It’s the Thought that Counts

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

Several times in Parshas Vayikra, the Torah, in describing the process of bringing sacrifices on the altar, uses the term “it is a burnt-offering, a fire-offering, a pleasant aroma.” This phrase first occurs, in the parsha, in regard to the olah, or burnt-offering (Vayikra, 1:9), from cattle then in regard to the offering of an olah from a fowl (Vayikra, 1:9) and then in regard to the mincha, or meal-offering (Vayikra, 2:2). The Mishneh at the end of Menachos (13:10) derives from this recurrence of the phrase in all three instances that whether one brings a lot or one brings a little, his offering is equally acceptable to God as long as his heart is geared towards heaven. Rabbi Chaim ben Attar, in his commentary Ohr HaChaim, raises an interesting question in regard to this teaching and its derivation. He asks, couldn’t the Torah have delivered its message by saying only in regard to the olah offering from a fowl that it is acceptable to God, thus implying that a more expensive offering is certainly acceptable and a pleasant aroma? He answers that had the phrase only been mentioned in regard to the olah offering from a fowl, we may have thought that its acceptance is a function of God’s mercy on the poor man, but that the more expensive offering is actually considered greater in His eyes. Therefore, the Torah mentions the phrase in all three cases, to teach us that all three sacrifices are equally accepted and regarded as a pleasant aroma. I would like to suggest a different answer to this question, based on a teaching of

Rav Yisroel Salanter, which I heard from my teacher, Rav Aharon Soloveichik, zt”l, many times.

Rav Yisroel taught that there are two kinds of tests in life, that of poverty and that of wealth. While the common perception is that the test of wealth is the more severe one, in truth, the test of wealth can, sometimes, be much greater. The Torah often warns us of the possible disastrous effects, most notably in the book of Devarim, when it describes how, after the people enter the land and are met with material success, they need to guard themselves from attributing that success to their own efforts and not acknowledging God’s role. Rav Aharon mentioned that an ancestor of his, a certain Rav Yeshaya, was a student of the Vilna Gaon, the Gra, and known to be a great tzaddik, or righteous person, to the extent that even non-Jews would ask him to bless their fields. Rav Yeshaya, said according to the story, was worried about his future descendants, who would not have the benefit of the Gra’s influence, and asked his teacher. The Gra answered that he should pray every day that none of his descendants become rich, based on the verse in Mishlei, 30:8, in which King Shlomo asks God not to cause him either poverty or wealth, but that He should grant him his daily portion (*‘hatrifeini lechem chuki’*). Rav Yeshaya followed the Gra’s advice, and according to Rav Aharon, the prayer was answered. Rav Aharon went on to say that by realizing that wealth can be an even bigger test of one’s faith we can

understand why, in the prayer we say before announcing the new moon, we repeat our request to live a life filled with fear of heaven. The reason for this, said Rav Aharon, is that an extra degree of fear of heaven is needed once wealth is attained. Parenthetically, while this request for wealth would seem to be opposed to the prayer of king Shlomo in Mishlei, perhaps we can differentiate between a prayer for riches on a personal level, and a prayer for riches on a collective level. In any case, the point is that the challenge of maintaining one's faith in God after he has attained wealth can be greater than the test he has when poor, when he may very likely feel that his only recourse for help is turning to God in prayer.

Based on Rav Yisroel Salanter's teaching, we can offer a different answer to the Ohr HaChaim's question. When the Mishneh tells us that whether one gives more or gives less, his offering is acceptable, as long as his intention is directed to God, the surprising idea is not that the poor

man's offering is equally acceptable, but that the rich man's offering is also a pleasant aroma to God. Although we may think that it is the larger offering that is more likely to be accepted, and, therefore, if the Torah would only mention the acceptance of the poor man's offering, we would then infer that the bigger offering of the rich man is certainly accepted, by mentioning the pleasant aroma of all the offerings, we are being taught that sometime the rich man's offering may be less likely to be accepted, because he may have an attitude of arrogance in bringing it, and perhaps have intention for his own personal honor rather than to show his allegiance to God and His Torah, while the poor person naturally has a contrite heart and is more likely to direct his intention toward God therefore, the Torah had to teach us that in all three instances, a person's offering is equally acceptable to God, as long as his intentions are directed towards Him.

## Moshe—Soul of Shabbos, Soul of the Mishkan

Rabbi Hershel Reichman

**T**he parsha begins (Vayikra 1:1), "*Vayikra el Moshe, vay'dabeir Hashem eilav mei'ohel mo'eid.* [God] called to Moshe, and God spoke to him from the Mishkan." The Midrash comments on the double expression in this pasuk, "*called*" and "*spoke*." Specifically, it contrasts the way different prophets were summoned to receive their prophecies. Hashem himself called Moshe, *vayikra el Moshe*. This stands in contrast to Avraham, who at the Akeidah, was addressed by an angel.

On many occasions in Tanach, there is a reference to an angel at the beginning of a communication from God. In this respect, Moshe was different from all other prophets. Hashem Himself called to Moshe, and Hashem Himself spoke to him. "*Ani dibarti af k'rasiv haviosiv v'hitzliach darko.* I myself have called to him and spoken to him; I brought him close and made him successful" (Yeshaya 48:15). There is also another Midrash that depicts how Hashem would call, "Moshe, Moshe," endearingly repeating his name.

What is the significance of who calls to the prophet? The Shem Mishmuel explains that in order to understand this concept, we should study the divine communications with Bilam, the evil prophet who was an enemy of Israel and was eventually killed in battle against Israel. With Bilam, the

Torah uses the phrase, "*vayikar el Bilam.* God met Bilam" (Bamidbar 23:4). What is the difference between meeting and calling? Rashi says that *vayikar* is not an expression of love, unlike *vayikra*. The Avnei Neizer explains that *vayikar* means that Hashem just met Bilam. He met him and talked to him. After this encounter, Bilam was not changed at all. He continued on his previous evil path.

### Junk Mail

We all receive lots of mail and messages. Most communications we receive do not change us at all. Many conversations we have do not change us. Bilam met with Hashem, and Hashem even spoke to him. This should have been an overwhelming experience. Nonetheless, Bilam remained unchanged.

But when Hashem called to Moshe, or even when an angel called to a Jewish prophet, the calling and ensuing encounter effected profound change in the person. It was like a phone call that a person never forgets. For example, most people who are married remember the first phone call with their beloved future spouse. They remember the phone calls they made to their family on the night the couple decided to get engaged. These are calls that we can never forget. They profoundly changed our lives. When Hashem calls to a true prophet, it is a life-changing call.

When the angel called to Avraham, he changed forever. Avraham never forgot the call that told him to let his son live. He would never forget the message that affirmed that “Yitzchak will be your son forever.” By contrast, when Bilam finished receiving his communication from God, he continued living as wickedly as before.

Many of us are fortunate to learn Torah and to hear Torah messages. How many of these messages affect us as a divine call, a *vayikra*? Do they make a profound and everlasting imprint on us? How many are messages that do not affect us? We must appreciate the *divrei Torah* that we learn. It has to impact us and change us forever. It is not junk mail that we throw into the garbage. It is supposed to penetrate our hearts and become part of us forever.

“*Vayikra el Moshe*” created an everlasting impact. Torah should also create an everlasting impact upon us. This is the difference between Moshe and Bilam. Moshe and other prophets changed incredibly from their communication with Hashem. It made an indelible impact on their personality.

Every dedicated Jew who studies Torah sincerely knows of its incredible impact. One’s very being becomes overwhelmed with God’s holy words. Unfortunately, there are some Bilam-types who know of the word of Hashem, but it runs by them. We must avoid the Bilam syndrome.

### **Lifestyle Choices**

Why didn’t the word of Hashem impact Bilam? How could someone who hears the words of his Creator remain unchanged by the experience? How could Bilam remain the wicked lowlife that he was before?

The *Shem Mishmuel* provides an answer that is so profound and yet so simple. Bilam definitely sought to meet Hashem. He repeatedly told Balak, “I will find Hashem and He will speak to me.” Bilam had all sorts of methods to make this happen. He built altars, uttered prayers, and performed rituals to find the Divine. He wanted the Divine experience—but he wanted it together with his personal, lust-filled lifestyle.

Bilam was unwilling to give up his vulgar pleasures and personal gratifications, as he should have in order to attain the Divine experience. But he wanted to have both. Our Sages describe his personal life as including atrocious personal behavior, including deriving pleasure from the most terrible kinds of illicit relationships with animals. He didn’t want to give up his pleasures. He wanted them together with his experience of the Divine. Surprisingly,

Hashem granted his wish. “You will be able to experience Me, but you won’t have to give up your personal lifestyle. You can pursue your dirty, disgusting, and immoral behavior, and you can still talk to Me.” This is why Bilam did not change through his encounter with Hashem. He did not want to change. He wanted the Divine experience because it, too, was pleasurable.

The experience of the Infinite, while terrifying, is indeed pleasurable. Bilam wanted the pleasure of touching the Divine spirit. But he did not want to change, and so he remained the same. This stands in contrast to Moshe Rabbeinu, who gave up everything for the Divine. According to Kabbala, Moshe is “*min hamayim meshisihu*” (*Shemos* 2:10), removed from the physical pleasures of the world. Water represents the pleasures of this world. Drinking cool water on a hot day, enjoying a hot shower, and taking a refreshing dip in a pool have become veritable symbols of pleasurable activities. When the daughter of Pharaoh removed Moshe from the water, Moshe became a person who would give up the physical pleasures of this world so that he could be close to Hashem. Moshe stood on Har Sinai for forty days and forty nights while he spoke to Hashem. The Rambam writes that Moshe felt close to death, with intense pangs of hunger and thirst. But he knew that this was necessary in order to receive the Torah with all of its explanations. Moshe worked on himself for decades to become less physical—even non-physical, to a certain extent— as he took care of Yisro’s sheep. He gave up physical pleasures in order to be dedicated to God.

Moshe did not do this for himself, but rather to fulfill the purpose for which God had created him, to be dedicated to Hashem with every fiber of his being.

### **The Prophetic Love Affair**

Our Sages compared Moshe to a wife and Bilam to a concubine in their respective relationships with Hashem. What is the difference between being married to a woman and having a concubine? When man and woman get married, they become united. Each spouse gives up everything for the other. Chazal call this form of marriage *kiddushin*, a holy state. Bilam, however, maintained the status of a concubine with Hashem, an aloof relationship. A concubine is a business transaction. There is no holiness in that relationship; it is only a practical one.

Hashem met with Bilam. There was no relationship or love affair between them. The prophets of Israel, though, are not like Bilam. The prophets of Israel have a calling, a

kria. They are called by Hashem and His messengers to rise and meet Him. When the prophets rise to the occasion, they see His message of love.

Yet, even among these great prophets, Moshe still stands out. All of the other prophets begin with a calling from an angel. The prophet is a regular person. Most of the day, he is not connected in a prophetic way with Hashem. He eats, drinks, has a wife, and goes about his business. When a prophet like this experiences prophecy, he falls to the ground in a prophetic trance. After the prophecy is communicated and the trance ends, the prophet returns to his daily life. The Sages mention several prophets who only prophesied once in their lifetime. During the rest of their lives, they lived like other people.

The prophet is a righteous person. He works to improve his character. Still, he is a plain human being. He doesn't walk around all the time in a prophetic state. In order to break him out of his regular pattern, he needs an intermediary to raise him. The angel pulls him out of his regular routine and places him in the prophetic trance, ready to hear God's voice.

One prophet, however, was different. One prophet was always ready for Hashem. He was always in prophetic consciousness, even while not entranced. He was able to talk to people while listening to the word of Hashem. This was Moshe Rabbeinu.

Even Aharon and Miriam could not attain this level. Hashem told them that the prophets they knew were different. Hashem explained, "I speak to them in a dream and with puzzles. To Moshe, though, I speak mouth to mouth" (Bamidbar 12:6-8). This is why Moshe could not live with his wife. He was constantly a conscious prophet. Aharon and Miriam could spend a majority of their time with their spouses and children because they were not in a prophetic trance during those times. Only when they were in a prophetic trance starting with the call of the angel did they talk to Hashem.

Moshe was different. He was called by Hashem. He did not need to be pulled out of his routine by an angel. He was always ready to perceive the Divine. Hashem could speak to him without an angelic intermediary. Hashem could lift him up because he was already elevated.

### **Moshe Shares His Gift**

The Shem Mishmuel explains an amazing secret that was revealed to us by the Arizal, the founder of modern Kabbala. The Arizal explained a puzzling phrase that we

say in the Shabbos prayers: "*Yismach Moshe b'matnas chelko ki eved ne'eman karasa lo*. Moshe is happy with his gift, for You have called him a trustworthy servant." What does this have to do with Shabbos?

The Arizal said that Moshe seemed to be in this world even though he wasn't. He had prophecy twenty-four seven, with his eyes open, while he was looking and even while he wasn't looking. Only Moshe had this gift. Other prophets fell into a prophetic stupor when they had their visions. On Shabbos, though, Moshe Rabbeinu shared some of this experience with every Jew. Moshe is happy with the gift of his portion, which he shares with every Jew on Shabbos.

Moshe took this ability to commune with God while still conscious, walking, talking, eating, and studying and shared it with Am Yisrael on Shabbos.

The experience of Shabbos is incredible, as anyone who keeps Shabbos knows. We walk, talk, eat, and do the things we do the same way as the rest of the week. But internally, these actions are totally different. They are part of our experience of communion with Hashem. We feel Hashem with us every moment of Shabbos. We talk, walk, and simultaneously commune with Hashem! His presence is with us in the seemingly mundane daily things that we do. The pleasure of Shabbos is an amazing experience, both physical and spiritual at the same time. It is akin to Moshe's experience. He gave us this gift. Therefore, in Kabbala and Chassidus, Moshe is considered the tzaddik-soul of Shabbos.

### **Saying Goodbye to Angels**

Chassidus teaches that every energy has a triple expression: in time, in place, and in soul. The soul of Moshe Rabbeinu in time is Shabbos, and in place, it is Yerushalayim. The experience of Shabbos is what Moshe gave to every Jew. "*B'chol beisi ne'eman hu; peh el peh adabeir bo*" (Bamidbar 12:7) applies to every Jew on Shabbos. When we wear our Shabbos clothing, eat the Shabbos food, sing Shabbos songs, and even when we talk on Shabbos, we are face to face with God Himself! This is the gift of Shabbos, the *matnas chelko* that we received from Moshe.

Now we will discuss one of the most remarkable comments the Shem Mishmuel makes in his entire sefer. On Friday night, a Jew comes home and greets the Shabbos angels with the famous song, *Shalom Aleichem*. Then the Jew says "*tzeischem l'shalom*," bidding farewell to the Shabbos angels. He sends them away before the meal even

begins. It seems rude to welcome the angels and then to quickly dismiss them. What is the meaning of this abrupt transition from welcome to dismissal?

The Shem Mishmuel explains that when we come home on Friday night, the Shabbos angels are with us. But then we notice that Hashem's presence, in the form of the Shabbos queen, is also with us. Hashem's Shechinah is with us, so we don't need angels anymore. We are then like Moshe Rabbeinu, interacting directly with Hashem. During the week, we were worldly and physical. On Friday night, the angels came to help us. They met us in shul to help us go from the *chol* week into Shabbos. But once we arrive home, we say thank you to the angels for serving their purpose.

Now we are joined by the Shabbos malka, the queen herself, and we have a face to face meeting with our beloved Almighty Shabbos queen. Therefore, we say *tzeischem l'shalom*, wishing our dear angels goodbye.

### **Giving Until It Hurts**

The Shem Mishmuel has another wonderful discussion about Moshe Rabbeinu's role in the Jewish People, based on a strange Midrash.

When Moshe saw all the gifts that Bnei Yisrael had brought for the Mishkan, he felt sad that he hadn't donated anything to the cause. But then Hashem called to him and said, "Moshe, Moshe, I love you so much. Don't be upset that you didn't donate towards My house. I am talking to you from the house. This is more special than donating to the house."

What is the meaning of this Midrash? Why couldn't Moshe donate towards the Mishkan? Chazal say that Moshe was fabulously wealthy, having attained great wealth when he chiseled the second luchos from a huge, pure gemstone. Hashem told him "*Psal lecha*, Carve the luchos from the stone, and all of the leftovers will belong to you." Moshe became incredibly wealthy from these gem chips. Moshe thus had plenty of money, which he didn't really need. He wasn't involved in the physical world. He gave up everything physical for Hashem. Why couldn't he give some gems for the Mishkan, or perhaps some gold and silver like all the other Jews gave? It would have been easy for him. And if he was upset, why did God have to console him by saying, "My talking to you is greater than your donations?" If Moshe did have the money, why couldn't he donate?

The Shem Mishmuel explains a tremendous idea.

What was the point of giving all of these donations? You may have heard the expression, "Give—until it hurts." As observant Jews, we know what it means to give until it hurts. Why does a parent give so much love to his child that it hurts? Because the parent really loves his or her child. When you give out of love, you give everything, even until it hurts. Parents will give everything for their children: all of their time, love, money, and energy, because of the boundless love that they feel for them. All of these resources are valuable to us, and when we give so much of them, it can be painful, but we do it.

Can we imagine how much the Jewish slaves appreciated and cherished the wealth they had when they left Egypt? As a rabbi, I have come across people who have had the rags-to-riches experience. Such people often find it extremely hard to part with their wealth. They experienced such deprivation in their youth and then, in their adulthood, wealth finally came to them. They feel connected and bound to it to such an extent that they cannot part with it. This is the miserliness of the newly rich. They may spend lots of money on themselves, but it is hard for them to give to the poor. This is a deep psychological principle. "Somehow," the person thinks, "spending money on myself will make up for the deprivation of my youth, but I still need the rest of it for myself, just in case. Maybe the stock market will fall, and I'll have nothing left. I need to keep my money handy for emergencies."

Imagine the Jewish nation, after years of subjugation and poverty, suddenly receiving great wealth. Then they are told to give it to the Mishkan. They actually did give, and they gave much more than expected, because of their love for Hashem. They gave away everything that was precious to them. The rags-to-riches person will share his wealth with his fiancée or wife, because he really loves her. He will give to his children, too. Bnei Yisrael gave to Hashem as a parent gives to his children, because they loved Him. They may have been dreaming of the mansions that they would build in Eretz Yisrael. But then, Moshe told them to give to the Mishkan and, without hesitation, they gave away their money for Hashem. They loved Him so much!

### **Moshe's Wealth—and His Poverty**

There was one Jew, however, who couldn't give everything away. Moshe had no dreams for his diamonds. He had given them up long ago, together with all of his dreams other than to live for Hashem. He even gave up his own

family for Hashem. When Moshe came down from the mountain, he went straight to the people. He didn't go home first. The pasuk says, "*Vayeired Moshe min hahar el ha'am*" (Shemos 19:14). When Moshe came down from Har Sinai, he went straight to Am Yisrael. Chazal comment on that pasuk, "*Pana mikol asakav, el ha'am*. He turned from all endeavors in order to go straight to the people." Chazal say he wasn't interested in even his own personal spiritual advancement.

Moshe knew that he had to be the guardian of Israel. He knew his mission. Therefore, he never went anywhere for himself. He did not care about his money, possessions, personal development, or reaching spiritual heights. He was not even involved with his family. Hashem wanted Moshe to care for Am Yisrael, so that is what he did.

Why couldn't Moshe give the jewels for the Mishkan? Because long ago he had already given them up for Hashem. The point of this collection for the Mishkan was to have the people share their wealth, to dedicate it to Hashem. For Moshe, though, wealth was meaningless. For Moshe, all of his money was already long gone. So, Moshe was upset. He wanted to have something to give away. He knew that when a leader of Israel gives up something precious for Israel and for Hashem, he creates an amazing energy within the people to give up things for Hashem, knowing that Hashem will take care of them. When people are ready to give up their lives for Hashem and are moser nefesh for Him, He takes care of them. But Moshe did not have anything new to dedicate to the Mishkan, since he had already dedicated all that he had to Hashem.

Moshe's greatest wish was to be close to Hashem. He said to Hashem, "*Im ein panecha holchim al ta'aleinu mizeh*, If I don't have You taking care of the Jewish People, what is our life worth? Don't send us without You to Eretz Yisrael" (Shemos 33:15). His greatest dream was that his feelings for Hashem be shared by every single Jew. He gave us the gift of Shabbos as a taste of what it means to be close to Hashem.

Hence, Moshe wanted to donate to the Mishkan, but there was nothing to give. But Hashem told him not to be upset because He would speak to Moshe from the Mishkan. Then Hashem told Moshe about the gift of Shabbos. This would be Moshe's contribution— the soul of Shabbos.

### **The Soul of Shabbos**

We explained earlier that Moshe is the soul of Shabbos.

Shabbos follows the six work days of the week. During those six days, people struggle through challenges and mundane physical and spiritual battles. We struggle against evil urges, whether inside or outside of us. We have to work and struggle mightily for six days to develop a connection to Hashem, for the yeitzer tov to conquer the yeitzer hara. If we do this—*sheishes yamim ta'avod v'asisa kol melachtecha*—then, *yom hashvi'i Shabbos la'Hashem Elokecha*. Then we will be close to Hashem on Shabbos.

Moshe's soul is Shabbos in time; he was the personality of Shabbos. He achieved the goal of a Shabbos-type relationship with Hashem, and he wanted Am Yisrael to do that too. We have to work every week for six days at our level to develop and maximize our spirituality despite the difficulties of mundane life. Moshe, though, was beyond that. He was always with Hashem, even when he was awake and walking around. When we move into Shabbos, whom do we meet? We meet Moshe Rabbeinu, for he is Shabbos and Shabbos is Moshe. He shares the gift of Shabbos with us. Hashem told Moshe Rabbeinu, "You don't have to build the Mishkan; you are the Mishkan, the place of My *hashra'as hashechina*. You are the embodiment of My presence in the world. You are in the soul-form what Shabbos is in time."

Since the Beis Hamikdash was built, the Shabbos in place is Yerushalayim, the holy city. That is where God is found twenty-four seven. It is beyond time and the mundane struggles of the six days of the week. While Bnei Yisrael were in the desert, the Mishkan was the place of God's constant presence. Hashem told Moshe, "You are the Mishkan. I speak to you from the Mishkan, from the Shabbos-place of the world."

Even though Moshe had the holiness of Shabbos and the Mishkan, he knew that all of this was because of the Jewish People. Moshe was a special person, though he remained a person. We don't believe that Moshe was divine; we reject the Christian claim that a human being can become God. But, nonetheless, Moshe had a tremendous level of divinity attached to him.

Hashem wanted someone like Moshe to inspire the Jewish People. Hashem wanted them to see the embodiment of Shabbos. The people looked at Moshe, "*V'hibitu acharei Moshe*" (Shemos 33:8). What did they see? They saw a Shabbos person every day of the week. Their struggles and difficulties with the yeitzer hara were to get to the level of Shabbos. Seeing Moshe gave them

inspiration, encouragement, and direction to continue their struggle towards holiness.

### How to Achieve Moshe's Holiness

We don't have a real-live Moshe today. There was only one Moshe Rabbeinu, and there will never be another one. *Lo kam b'Yisrael k'Moshe od*. However, we can attach ourselves to Moshe by studying the Torah he delivered to us and by keeping Shabbos.

The Torah of Moshe will never leave Am Yisrael. The more Torah we study, the more we live Shabbos, and the more we struggle to achieve spirituality during the week, the more we will have it.

The Gemara sometimes calls Torah scholars "Moshe." They have his spark and aura. Torah scholars experience a communion, a *deveikus* with Hashem. Some even feel this twenty-four seven, even if not on Moshe's level. The Gemara says *talmidei chachamim* are like Shabbos all week

long.

May we be *zoche* to do what we have to do during the six days of the week. He who struggles before Shabbos will enjoy Shabbos (*Avoda Zara 3a*). Let us all have the merit to meet the Moshes, the great *tzaddikim* of our generation, who study the Torah of Hashem that Moshe Rabbeinu gave us. May we succeed—through our struggles in our mundane daily life—to build the holy *Mishkan* out of *chol*. Moshe could not do it. But we can take the mundane and infuse it with spirit and holiness. Moshe is happy with his gift of Shabbos, and we pray that we will be happy with our gift, the gift of building a *Mishkan*, the gift of taking silver and gold and making them *nidvas Hashem*, a donation to Hashem. May Moshe's gift to us inspire us to feel God every Shabbos in everything, and even to bring the Shabbos experience of the Divine into all we do during the week.

## Admitting Our Mistakes

Rabbi Yosef Goldin

In this week's parsha we enter the world of *Korbanot*. The Torah describes various categories of sin, and the resulting *korban* that must be brought to atone for each type of sin.

One scenario described by the Torah is the case of a *Nasi*, a leader of Am Yisrael, who commits a sin and then becomes aware of his transgression. The Torah outlines the particular *korban* that must be brought to atone for this sin. Although the sin was committed by only one individual, his status as a leader of the community makes the transgression a community matter- and therefore a communal *korban* must be brought as atonement.

The commentaries note the peculiar language the *passuk* uses to describe this event. - In place of the standard "im nasi yecheta", which would translate as "if a nasi will sin", the Torah says, "asher nasi yecheta", "that a nasi sins". Why the shift in language specifically here?

Sforno explains that the change in language- the wording of "that" as opposed to "if" comes to teach us that it is inevitable that a leader will sin. Leaders are human beings as well- being in a position of authority or influence does not cause them to be free of the same temptations and impulses that we all have. In fact, the challenges and temptations are often even greater for those in a position of authority- and the reality of sinning is therefore inevitable.

Rashi, however, gives a different explanation. He quotes a Midrash that plays on the *passuk's* opening word, "asher"- "that". The Midrash says, "fortunate (*ashrei*) is the generation whose *Nasi* notices when he makes a mistake, and makes sure to bring a *korban* to atone for his mistakes; *kal vachomer*, how much more so, a leader who regrets the sins that he commits purposefully".

The Midrash's comment here is quite striking. The language of "fortunate is one who..." implies that it is unusual for a leader to notice his mistake and/or to admit it. Yet as we noted earlier from the Sforno, it is inevitable that every communal leader will make a mistake, will commit a sin. So why is it so rare for such a leader to notice and admit his mistakes?

I believe that the answer to this question is based on two factors. Firstly, human beings in general have trouble admitting when they make a mistake, or that they are wrong. Part of our inherent makeup is a desire to be good, and to present ourselves in a positive way. Whenever possible, we would prefer to avoid noticing, and calling attention to, any of our missteps. Yet we often face moments when we cannot ignore the obvious- when circumstances or people around us force us to face reality and "own up" to our mistakes. Given a *Nasi's* position of power, however, he will be given more leeway to ignore his

mistakes, as those around him will hesitate to criticize or critique their leader. He will therefore be more successful at ignoring- either consciously or unconsciously - his sins and mistakes.

Additionally, people in position of authority- particularly community leaders- have an image to uphold. Communities hold their leaders to higher standards- unfair as that might be- and said leaders often feel pressure to live up to those standards, or to at least appear to publicly. Sometimes these leaders will do anything to present a façade of perfection, and hide any imperfection or faults that they may have. We are all well aware of examples of this phenomenon in our communities.

It is for that reason that the Midrash states that any community whose leader notices and admits to his mistakes is extremely fortunate. It is rare to find a leader who is so comfortable with himself and his leadership abilities that he not only overcomes the natural inclination to ignore/deny mistakes but does so in a position of leadership. Such a leader recognizes that everyone makes mistakes, and that a person's true greatness comes from his ability to learn, and grow, from his mistakes or past iniquities.

As parents, whether we realize it consciously or not, we are in a position of authority and leadership vis a vis our children. Often, that reality creates certain expectations that our kids have for us, and that we have for ourselves. When our kids are very young, we parents are perfect to them- we can do everything, are the best at everything, and can make no mistakes. As our kids grow older, they begin to realize that we are human, and not as perfect as they

thought. Yet, even then, we often try to present a flawless image to our kids. Our position as an authority, combined with our desire to be someone that our children look up to, often causes us to work hard at presenting ourselves to our children in a particular way. We focus more on our successes and positive attributes and are less willing to admit past mistakes or errors. Particularly when we argue or have a disagreement with our kids- we will almost never admit that we were wrong, even if we internally realize our mistake.

And yet when we act in this way, we are only hurting ourselves and our ability to properly educate our children. Our children need to grow up with a realistic picture of their parents, leaders, and role models. They need to understand that all parents, and all leaders, are human, just like them- and they therefore make mistakes, just like them. Such an understanding makes it easier for them to relate to their role models, and to learn from them.

In addition, in the realm of child-rearing, children need to learn that their parents are trying their best to raise them correctly, but that sometimes there will be mistakes made along the way. And that is okay. The best thing that we can do as parents is to model for our children how to admit our mistakes, and then how to learn from them

"To err is human...". In this week's parsha, the Torah and Midrash highlight how hard, and therefore rare, it is for a communal leader to admit his faults and mistakes. This is true in all positions of authority- parenthood included. The more that we can be aware of this pitfall, the more realistic and honest we can be in how we present ourselves to our kids- the more prepared for real life our children will be.

## Managing Religious Guilt

*Rabbi Moshe Taragin*

**F**ailure is inherent to human behavior and deeply woven into religious experience. Despite our best efforts to rise above our weaknesses and to transcend our limitations we all, inevitably, fail. Shlomo Hamelech spoke of a tzadik falling and recovering seven times. In general, he was correct, but he grossly understated the number of times we actually fall. We all wish it were only seven.

In the aftermath of religious sin, we experience the heavy but absolutely vital emotion of guilt. Hashem watches our behavior and when we fail, we let Him and ourselves

down. A healthy degree of guilt is crucial for religious growth and for moral conduct. Guilt is the quiet whisper of our conscience prodding us to accept responsibility and to improve ourselves. Without this whisper we risk religious freefall. Hashem endowed us with this precious and delicate emotion, providing us an inner compass to navigate our way through the thicket of human failure. Guilt is a tender and authentic moment of religious integrity, gifted to us from Hashem Himself.

But Hashem also expects us to move on from failure, bear our guilt, and find closure. Moving on from guilt is

vital for inner emotional equilibrium and is also essential if we are to forgive others and accept their imperfections. If we can't forgive ourselves, it is almost impossible to accept the imperfections and frailties of others. Under the suffocating weight of guilt, we have little generosity of spirit to spare. The people in our lives need us to feel less guilty and more charitable.

Managing guilt is easier said than done, and there are many unhealthy byproducts of imbalanced religious guilt.

### **Depression from Guilt**

Too much guilt can thrust us into dark spaces of depression and despair. Reuven, the bechor of Ya'akov, is a tragic figure in part, because he could not manage his own guilt. Twice he intruded upon his father's marital affairs: once intentionally and once unintentionally, by collecting flowers which would ultimately be bartered by his mother for his father's marital attention. Feeling guilty about these breaches, he cannot muster the inner strength and confidence to decisively rescue his brother Yosef from being sold into slavery. Low in self-esteem, Reuven's isn't bold enough to rescue his brother, despite his well-intended intervention. Divested of his courage and suffering diminished self-esteem, he cannot act daringly to defy his murderous brothers.

The Torah legislates a chatat sacrifice to help us better recover from sin and better manage our guilt. Notably, the korban is called a chatat or sin-offering but is not referred to as a korban of a sinner. To move on from guilt we must separate between the deed and the do'er. We may have committed a crime but that doesn't make us criminal. Sin and guilt mustn't define us, even as we face the full brunt of our actions and accept the consequences of failure. Committing a sin doesn't make us sinful people.

Accumulated religious guilt can become so overbearing, that the only escape seems to be the abandonment of religion. It is unpleasant to wake up every morning and feel burdened with guilt, and many walk out of religion to liberate themselves from this weight. The albatross of guilt is too haunting, forcing many to just check out of religion entirely.

Religion doesn't mean getting it all right all the time. It does mean accepting Hashem's will and trying to get it all right. Everyone fails, but religious people wake up the day after failure, wipe off the dust and get back into the ring. Guilt is healthy but feeling perennially guilty is not.

### **Compulsive Religion**

Even when religious guilt doesn't spill over into depression, it can wreak havoc with emotional well-being. Religious people feel duty-bound to adhere to religious expectations and to avoid sin. Steadfast dedication to duty and the accompanying dread of failure can lead to neurosis. Obsession with "getting it right" and the panic of possible religious failure can drive us into compulsive religious behavior. We force ourselves into repetitive behaviors or repetitive mental acts to calm our anxiety. Common examples of compulsive behavior include repeatedly washing hands or repeating prayers for fear of missing a few words. In our frantic attempt to avoid guilt we desperately overperform religious duties. Afraid of failure and guilt, we instead become addicted to uncontrollable and harmful behavior.

Even if guilt doesn't cause compulsive behavior, it can still poison the overall taste of religious experience. Guilt-based religion feels heavy and suffocating rather than grand and beautiful. Religion starts to feel dark and menacing rather than radiant and redeeming. It becomes an obstacle course of potential hazards rather than a horizon of opportunity. Preoccupied with fear and dread there is little room in our imagination for spirit and vision. Guilt is crucial for a healthy religious lifestyle, but it must be carefully managed and should not become overwhelming.

### **Deflecting Guilt**

While some indulge too deeply in guilt, others desperately attempt to flee from it. One of the easiest methods of avoiding guilt is to deflect it, blaming someone else or something else for our failures. By blame shifting we transfer guilt from ourselves to other forces. Blaming is toxic to relationships and can even become abusive. Gaslighting is a modern term which describes people who engage in sustained hostile and manipulative behavior. One aggressive form of gaslighting is constantly shifting blame to someone else, making that person feel perpetually guilty, thereby reducing their self-esteem.

Modern cultural influences have made blame shifting easier. Over the past three centuries we have discovered that we are merely small powerless cogs in a bigger engine, at the mercy of forces larger than ourselves. Whether these forces are political, economic or psychological we aren't responsible for our own behavior. Marx asserted that human history was driven by class warfare over the distribution of wealth. Darwin traced human behavior to evolutionary survivalist instincts. Freud suggested that

we are driven by dark psychological forces beyond our control, namely our hatred of our father and our desire for our mother. Taken together, Darwin, Marx and Freud relandscaped a world of free choice into an ironclad deterministic world where humans cannot determine their fate or their decisions and are therefore not responsible for their choices or their failures. Someone else of something else is to blame for our shortcomings. Given our lack of agency, guilt just gets in the way of happiness and should be banished. It makes us weak or neurotic, and usually both.

### **Replacement Guilt**

An additional modern strategy for avoiding genuine guilt is replacing it with substitute guilt. White guilt is the belief that privileged races should feel guilty for global inequalities predicated upon historical injustices. Often this form of political guilt replaces actual moral guilt,

## **Living a Flavorful Torah Life**

*Rabbi Efrem Goldberg*

**T**he Torah commands, על קרבנך תקריב מלח – that we are to add salt to all our sacrifices (2:13).

The Mei Ha'shiloach (Rav Mordechai Yosef of Izhbitz) explains this mitzva as an allusion to the experience of יראה, awe and reverence for Hashem. Chazal explain that at the beginning of the process of creation, water filled the universe until God made a separation between the “upper waters” and “lower waters,” the waters that remained in the heavens, and those which formed the oceans, rivers and lakes here on earth. The “lower waters” objected, complaining that they were driven far from God. They were compensated by being promised that their salt would return to the heavens by being added to the sacrifices. The Mei Ha'shiloach thus explains that salt signifies דין, God's harsh judgment, the decisions He makes which are not to our liking, and our need to humbly and reverently accept those decisions. The Torah requires adding salt to our korbanos to symbolize the need to include a healthy dose of יראה, fear and reverence, in our avodas Hashem. The word קרבן signifies closeness (קרוב), our building a close, intimate relationship with the Almighty. The obligation to add salt reminds us that although we are encouraged to strive toward building a close, loving bond with Hashem, we must maintain a degree of fear, recognizing that He is the King over the

freeing people to behave without moral constraint or without personal introspection. After all, if I am consumed with guilt for the underprivileged, I must possess moral integrity. Adopting fake guilt for entire races of oppressed people is a manner of virtue-signaling by which people convince themselves that they are ethical people. Sadly, people become so absorbed with guilt over classes of people they haven't met and don't live alongside, that they don't have time to feel guilty about actual moral and religious failures in their private lives and in their personal relationships. In an age of globalism, political morality sometimes replaces actual moral behavior and white guilt is just one example.

Guilt is one of our most precious emotions and mustn't be ignored or denied. Just the same, overindulgence in religious guilt can deflate our spirit and degrade the quality of religious experience.

universe.

The Tiferes Uziel adds a different insight into the meaning behind this mitzva. Without salt, he explains, food is bland and unappealing. The Torah commands us to add salt to korbanos to teach us that we must “spice up” our religious observance, injecting it with excitement and enthusiasm. Yiddishkeit must not be bland and unexciting; it needs to have “spice” and “flavor.” Every mitzva we perform, every piece of Torah we learn, and every tefila and beracha we recite, must be accompanied by energy and enthusiasm.

This is especially critical when it comes to chinuch. Parents and educators have an obligation to include “salt” in their efforts to educate their children and students. The Torah that they teach and show their charges must come to life, it must be full of “flavor” and zest. Only if we properly “season” our Torah life will it be appealing and draw the children's interest. על כל קרבנך תקריב מלח – every mitzva and every piece of Torah must be “salted” and made exciting and enjoyable.

## Giving & Taking

Mrs. Michal Horowitz

This week's sedra, Vayikra, opens up the third book of Torah. With the opening of Sefer Vayikra, we enter a world of mitzvos far removed from our lives today. Korbanos (animal sacrifices), avodas ha'Mishkan (the service of the Kohanim in the Tabernacle), tumah and ta'harah (ritual, spiritual impurity and purity), avodas Yom ha'Kippurim, laws of the metzora, zav and zavah, and even tumas ha'yoledes (ritual impurity of a woman after childbirth), are all mitzvos and aspects of Jewish law that are very foreign to us, as a result of almost 2,000 years of exile. With the Temple in ruin and Har Ha'bayis desolate, bereft of her people, the House of G-d and the Divine Presence, it may seem difficult for us to relate to this third book of Torah, also known as Toras Kohanim (a Book of Instruction to the Priests).

In the words of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks z'l, "Vayikra, the third book of Torah, is markedly different from the others. It contains no journey. It is set entirely at Sinai. It occupies only a brief section of time: a single month. There is almost no narrative. Yet, set at the centre of the Mosaic books, it is the key to understanding Israel's vocation as 'a kingdom of priests and a holy nation' (Shemos 19:6), the first collective mission statement in history. This parasha, with which the book opens, details the various kinds of sacrifices the Israelites brought to the Tabernacle. There were five: the burnt offering (olah), the grain offering (mincha), the peace offering (shelamim), the sin offering (chatas), and the guilt offering (asham)" (*Covenant and Conversation*, Leviticus, p.51).

These korbanos (from the root word K.R.V. - to come close), were the most integral part of the avodas kohanim in the Mishkan, and through this daily service, the nation had a means to come close to Hashem.

While there are many ways to understand the avodah of korbanos, and in his commentary to Pirkei Avos, Rabbeinu Yona writes that for this avodah the entire world was created (Avos 1:2), what lessons and meaning can we derive for our day and age? Does G-d 'need' our offerings (keviyachol!)? How can we understand that our sacrifices are a 'pleasing fragrance before Him'? As the RS"O is the Kol Yachol (All-Able), and He creates, fashions, sustains and owns all, how do korbanos 'work'; how can we offer to G-d what is His in the first place?

Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z'l offers a meaningful and relevant answer. R' Sacks writes, "My late father sold schmattes, offcuts of cloth, on Commercial Road, the London equivalent of NY's Lower East Side. He was a proud man, born at the wrong time. Having come to Britain as a child fleeing persecution in Poland, he had to leave school at the age of fourteen to help earn money working with his father to support the family. He was not one of nature's businessmen. He had a fine mind and excellent taste in music, art and literature, in all of which he was completely self-educated. In another life, he would have been a successful professional. But none of us chooses when to be born, and we are not all equally lucky. Like many of his contemporaries, he dedicated his life to giving his children the opportunities he lacked. That was the blessing he gave us, his four sons.

"There was one gift that to me, the eldest, meant more than all others. From almost as soon as I could walk, we used to go to the synagogue together every Shabbat. On the way back I would ask him questions about what we had done or said during the service. He always gave me the same answer, and it was this that shaped my life. He used to say: 'Jonathan, I didn't have an education, so I can't answer your questions. But one day you will have the education I did not have, and when that happens, you will teach me the answers to those questions.'

"If I achieved anything in my life," comments R' Sacks, "it was because of that reply" (*Covenant and Conversation*, Leviticus, p.61-62).

What was so deeply moving and impactful in his father's words that inspired Rabbi Sacks to become the person, statesman, scholar, author, leader and teacher that, in fact, he did become? So often, bordering on almost always, it is the parent who gives to the child. From the moment of conception, the mother is giving to her unborn baby. Blood, nutrients, air, sustenance, life, and love, are transferred from the mother to the growing embryo, fetus, baby. And from the moment of birth, the parent instinctively takes upon him/herself, with unwavering commitment to provide, care for, raise, and give to the child. The giving is never-ending, all-encompassing, and often, to some degree or another, continues as long as parent and child both live.

What, truly, can the child give back to the parent? A picture scribbled in nursery school. A smile, laugh, hug and kiss. An occasional card of appreciation and a note of thanks. Can the child ever repay - or even come close - to giving back to the parent what the parent has bestowed upon his child? It is in this vein that R' Sacks explains one approach to understanding Korbanos; our offerings to the All-Encompassing G-d.

“What my late father showed me was that there is a way out of this tension (between the father and son), but it needs exceptional humility on the part of the parents. What my father gave me was the opportunity to give back to him. This is very rare. Children know how dependent they are on their parents. They know that when they give their parents a present, it is usually only a token gesture. It is a supremely risky move on the part of the parents to genuinely empower a child to give them something of real worth. It is the ultimate act of humility, and it confers on the child a dignity and self-worth like no others ...

“Why then does the Torah permit, indeed require,

sacrifice? ... The answer seems obvious once we appreciate the central image of G-d as Father and the Israelites as His children. The greatest gift a parent can give a child is the dignity of being able to give. It is not that the parent lacks anything or that the child has genuinely given something he owns. Its significance is that it is a gesture of love - of acknowledgement and thanksgiving and reciprocity. The child knows that he has nothing of his own to give, yet he seeks to answer love with love. For a parent to give a child that possibility is a monumental act of humility. As R. Yochanan said, G-d's greatness is His humility (Megilla 31a), and never more than here” (*Covenant and Conversation*, Leviticus, p.62-66).

In life, it is important to remember that sometimes, the ultimate act of giving is taking. Hashem, Who is the Provider and Sustainer of all life forms, allows us to be givers, and He to be the taker. And in His taking from His children (keviyachol), the RS”O gives us the greatest gift there is. The dignity and elevation that comes from giving back to our Father, our King.

## The ‘Sacrifice’ that Lasts Forever

*Rabbi Ephraim Z. Buchwald*

**O**n this Shabbat, synagogues around the world, commence reading of the book of Vayikra—Leviticus, the third book of the Five Books of Moses. Much of the content of the book of Leviticus deals with the rituals and rules related to the responsibilities of the כֹּהֲנִים—Cohanim—the Priests, and the לְוִיִּם—Leviim—the Levites, with special focus on the sacrificial offerings that were brought in the Tabernacle in ancient times.

The laws of animal sacrifice are extraordinarily complex, filling many tractates and scholarly tomes. Despite the extreme complexity of the subject matter, in many Jewish communities there is still a quite prevalent custom for even very young children to begin their Torah study with parashat Vayikra.

The Midrash in Vayikra Rabbah, 7:3, therefore asks: Why, when we begin teaching children, do we begin with Torat Cohanim, the section of the Torah that deals with the Temple service? The Midrash answers: “Because children are pure of sin, and the offerings purified those who brought them. Let the pure children come and involve themselves in the study of the purifying offerings.”

The Avnei Azel cited in Otzar HaTorah—the Torah

Treasury of ArtScroll, notes that young children begin Torah study with a portion that discusses sacrifices,

in order to inspire parents to willingly make sacrifices on behalf of their children's growth in Torah. If parents [truly] want to inculcate their children with passion for, and commitment to, Torah and mitzvot, the parents must be willing to show sacrifice. Parents must be prepared to bear the effort and the cost that goes into educating their children, even if it means forgoing pleasures, comforts or even some [basic] necessities.

It is told of Rabbi Yehuda Meir Shapiro, that it was his mother's extraordinary commitment and devotion to Torah that encouraged him to become the great scholar and disseminator of Torah. Rav Yehuda Meir Shapiro was just a young lad in the last decade of the 19th century, but his mother was determined, even at that young age, that he receive the finest education. Although his family was not wealthy, Yehuda Meir Shapiro studied Torah with a private tutor in his parents' home, as was customary for many children of people of means. His hired tutor would remain with his family throughout the year, and return to his own home only for brief visits during the Jewish holidays.

On the night after Pesach, Rav Yehuda Meir Shapiro was awakened by his mother's plaintive sobbing. Upset that even a single day had gone by where Torah had not been taught in her home, she was praying and reciting psalms because the tutor had not yet returned after the holiday. Furthermore, she was concerned that the tutor would not return, perhaps because they had not paid him enough.

It is this type of sacrifice on the part of parents that blazes the way for children to be inspired by their parents' commitment to Torah.

The Midrash (Shohar Tov, on Psalms 8) records that when G-d came to give the Torah to the people of Israel at Sinai, the people responded enthusiastically (Exodus 24:7): נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע, "We will do and we will understand!" "Who will be the guarantors that you will uphold the Torah?" G-d demanded. "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be our guarantors," the people responded. "I will not accept them," said the Al-mighty. "Then our prophets will be our guarantors." "No," said G-d. "Then our children will be our guarantors," said the people. G-d immediately accepted the children as the guarantors and gave the Torah to Israel.

It is not uncommon for people to shrug off their own responsibilities by saying: "Our parents and our grandparents will keep the Torah. It's for the older generation." At other times people say, "It's for the prophets and the rabbis, let them worry about it." But unless our Jewish children are "saturated" with Torah, there is no hope for a Jewish future. And, unless the adult Jewish community is prepared to "sacrifice" in order to ensure that the children are given a proper intensive all-encompassing Jewish education, then the people of Israel are doomed.

It is not only the physical animal sacrifices that is the theme of this week's parasha, parashat Vayikra. It is the willingness on the part of the Jewish people to make the every-day, mundane sacrifices that is the central and essential message of this week's parasha. For it is only through these kinds of "sacrifices" that the perpetuation of our people is guaranteed.