



תורת חיים Torat Chayim

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Tazria

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We expect to publish the next issue of Torat Chayim after Pesach. Chag kasher v'sameach!

Ramban on Our Parshah: The Kohen on Your Team

Hashem conveyed the korban manual in exclusive conversations with Moshe; see Vayikra 1:1, 4:1, 6:1, 6:12, 6:22 and 6:28, for example. Our parshah of Tazria opens with laws of *tumah* and birth; again, it's only for Moshe's ears. But when Hashem introduces the *tumah* of *tzaraat* in Vayikra 14:1, Aharon is present alongside Moshe. Why?

Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra and other commentators explain that this is because kohanim are responsible to examine *tzaraat* and declare it *tamei* or *tahor*. Aharon's presence highlights the task of the kohanim [For another approach, see Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch.]

But Ramban raised a question. It is true that Aharon receives direct instruction regarding *tumah* of *tzaraat*, but when Hashem teaches the process of *taharah* (purification) in 14:1, Aharon is no longer in the audience. What happened? The role of the kohen in *taharah* is as crucial as the role of the kohen regarding *tumah*!

Ramban explained that Aharon's presence wasn't only because the mitzvah was in his jurisdiction; Aharon was present because the honor of a Divine audience would **energize** the kohanim toward their task. When did the kohanim need that incentive? It was only necessary for their

role in diagnosing *tumah*, generally an unhappy activity of delivering painful news. On the other hand, helping people to become *tahor* would be fulfilling, and the kohanim would not need any special inspiration to pursue that.

Ramban's comment helps address a classic talmudic question (Yoma 19a-b) about kohanim: whose side are they on? Are they Hashem's delegates to us, or our agents to lobby Hashem? If they were on Hashem's side, then I might expect them to be alacritous in declaring people *tamei*, carrying Hashem's rebuke for misconduct. They would need no incentive. But in Ramban's view, the kohen is a human being, interceding with Hashem on our behalf. He feels for the people who come to him. Therefore he draws no joy from declaring someone a *metzora*, and Hashem needs to urge him to play that role. But the kohen is thrilled to declare *Tahor*! For that he needs no incentive at all. [Perhaps this is consistent with the berachah of *birkat kohanim*, which mentions that the kohanim bless the Jewish people lovingly.]

May we learn from the love of the kohanim for us, and find our satisfaction not in identifying *tumah*, but in detecting and declaring each other's *taharah*.

Parshah Riddles for Kids (answers on the back)

Age 4-8: Why do we dip *karpas* in salt water at the Seder?

Age 8-12: Which of these is **not** acceptable as *karpas*? A) Banana B) Romaine Lettuce C) Watermelon

Age 12+: Are we obligated to lean when eating *karpas*?

Journey Through Tanach: Shoftim Perek 1

Sefer Shoftim opens with the Jews taking action after Yehoshua's death. As instructed in Bamidbar 27:21, they ask Hashem for guidance: who should lead the battle against the remaining Canaanites for Eretz Yisrael? Hashem responds that Yehudah should lead; Yehudah recruits Shimon, whose cities are within the land of Yehudah, to fight alongside them. (1:1-3) [Ralbag writes that the Jews always consulted Hashem via the *urim v'tummim* before a war, but the text highlights it here as a special occasion. The stakes in this first war for their morale, and for the morale of the enemy, were high, and so a lot was riding on their success.]

Most of the chapter (1:4-21) recounts Yehudah's military victories. Of particular note is the first one, against the city of Bezek. The Jews capture the king and sever his thumbs and big toes. The king acknowledges that this is Divine measure-for-measure, as he did this to the kings **he** conquered; but that doesn't explain why **we** did it. Ralbag contends it was to intimidate other kings, and Abarbanel says it was to punish the king for fleeing the battle as a coward (see 1:6). Malbim says Hashem inspired the Jews to do this, since the king deserved it.

Yehudah also conquers Jerusalem, but they don't settle there, as it belongs to Binyamin. Also, we are told – as we were in Yehoshua 15 – that a man named Otniel ben Kenaz conquered Kiryat Sefer on behalf of his half-brother, Kalev ben Yefuneh, and married Kalev's daughter Achsah. As we noted when we first read this, commentators read this story in two ways: either this was about a military conquest of a difficult city, or a spiritual 'conquest' restoring Torah that was forgotten after Moshe passed away; see Temurah 16a. We also see Yitro's descendants, the Keini, move to be with Yehudah; Rashi says they wanted to learn Torah with Otniel ben Kenaz.

Menasheh and Ephraim go next. Hashem helps them defeat a city named Luz; a local man helps them gain access to the city, and they allow him to escape. But then their conquests fizzle out; the text lists many cities which remained, and became Canaanite fortresses. (1:22-29)

The chapter concludes with a survey of other tribes who chose to live alongside the Canaanites; some took tribute, and others simply lived with Canaanites. (1:30-36)

The 613 Mitzvot: #28, 29 - Bowing and Worshipping

Shemot 20:5 warns, "You shall not bow to [sculptures], and you shall not serve them." This verse is understood by Rambam as expressing a single prohibition against accepting gods other than Hashem. However, Rambam counts these as two prohibitions banning bowing and worshipping, two distinct types of actions toward a purported god (even if one does not accept the god itself). (Minchat Chinuch 26:1) Sefer HaChinuch follows Rambam, and counts these as the Torah's 28th and 29th mitzvot.

Per Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 28 ("You shall not bow") prohibits any bowing to idols, regardless of purpose. "Bowing" includes all forms of lowering one's self, whether bowing from the waist or lying on the floor. Additionally, the biblical juxtaposition of "bowing" and "serving" teaches that this mitzvah prohibits other activities which are normally associated with ritual service: slaughtering a sacrifice, burning an offering, pouring libations and presenting blood from an offering.

On the other hand, Mitzvah 29 ("You shall not serve") prohibits any act toward an idol which the worshippers of that idol consider a form of "service". There have been idols worshipped by stone-throwing and defecation, and performing such acts before those idols would constitute prohibited worship.

Israel's Chief Rabbis: Yom Tov Sheni in New Israeli Towns, Rav Herzog

Rav Yitzchak HaLevi Herzog was born in Poland in 1888. In 1898, his family moved to the UK. He was ordained in 1908; one of the ordaining rabbis was Rav Meir Simchah of Dvinsk. By age 25, he had completed an M.A. and a doctorate in literature, at the Sorbonne and the University of London. As part of his studies Rav Herzog explored renewing *techelet*, from the perspective of both Halachah and chemistry.

Rav Herzog became Rav of Belfast, and then Dublin, and in 1922, all of Ireland. In 1934, Rav Herzog made his first trip to Eretz Yisrael, where he met with Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook. Highly impressed by Rav Herzog's Torah knowledge, Rav Kook encouraged him to ascend to Eretz Yisrael. Later that year, Rav Kook passed away, and Rav Herzog was appointed as Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi. He later became the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel; he served in this role until he passed away in 1959.

In 1949, the great Rabbi Yechiel Michel Tukaczinski sent Rav Herzog a question: Should newly established Israeli communities observe two days of Yom Tov? During the era when the beit din sent out agents to notify communities of Rosh Chodesh, the agents would not have gone to places without Jews, so perhaps they should have the same status as communities outside of Israel! Rabbi Herzog's answer appears in his *Heichal Yitzchak* (Orach Chaim 55).

Yom Tov Sheni was originally instituted because of concern that communities far from Jerusalem might not know when Rosh Chodesh took place. It continued even after the fixed calendar was instituted, as an enactment continuing a centuries-old practice. (Beitzah 4b) Rav Herzog cited a debate about how this enactment worked:

- The Rambam wrote (Hilchot Kiddush HaChodesh 5:9-12) that communities which were not visited by agents of the beit din observe two days. The issue is not location, but whether there was an accessible Jewish community there. Therefore, communities observe two days unless they have a tradition of hosting an established Jewish population in the beit din era and observing one day.
- The Ritva (Rosh Hashanah 18a) contended that Yom Tov Sheni was established based on majorities. Most communities in Israel received agents of the beit din, and so all Israeli communities observe one day. Most communities outside Israel did not receive beit din agents, so now all communities outside Israel should observe two days.

Rav Herzog stated that Jews have historically followed the Ritva, and he ruled this way as well. Among other points, he noted that the issue is rabbinic rather than biblical, and it hinges on uncertainty (as to whether these places were visited by the beit din's agents), so we rule leniently.

Upcoming Learning!

All classes are open to men and women and free of charge, unless otherwise noted

7:30 PM Shabbat April 13

Roast and Rav Kook and the Korban Pesach, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, at Eitz Chayim

8:30 AM to 9:15 AM Sunday April 14—Last class before Pesach

Fourteen Centuries: Rav Hai Gaon, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, in the lobby at Eitz Chayim

8:30-9:15 PM Monday April 15 Haggadah Night!

Seder-ready divrei torah by Rabbi Efrem Schwalb, Mrs. Beaty Menchel and Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, at ECDP
With a segment on Marking the War at your Seder

Monday night Halachah in Healthcare Settings and Tuesday night Gemara Makkot do not meet until after Pesach

Age 4-8 So that children will ask why we are dipping
Age 8-12 B: Romaine lettuce. Any *borei pri ha'adamah* qualifies, but not one which is eligible for use as Maror.
Age 12+ This is a machloket; most authorities say we are not obligated to lean for karpas

Answers to Parshah Riddles

Torat Chayim does not include the Name of Hashem but should be disposed of respectfully, such as in paper recycling.

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