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# **PENINIM ON THE TORAH**

## **PARSHA BOOKLET**

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### **PARASHAT SHEMINI**

*Moshe said to Aharon: come near the Altar... then perform the service of the people's offering and provide atonement for them. (9:7)*

Moshe Rabbeinu calls to his brother, Aharon, designating him to be the Kohen Gadol who is to offer the sacrifices and perform the Divine service in the Sanctuary. Rashi cites the Midrash, which quotes a compelling statement Moshe made regarding his brother, Aharon: "Aharon, my brother, is more worthy and important than I, for through his offerings and his service will the Divine Presence rest upon the people." This is a striking statement. Is it possible that Aharon had achieved greater stature than Moshe? Was Moshe not the most outstanding individual that has ever lived?

The Torah makes two statements concerning Moshe's supremacy, which clearly excluded everyone else: "A prophet will not arise like Moshe, who knew G-d face to face" (Devarim 34:10). "The man Moshe was the most humble of all men upon the face of the earth" (Bamidbar 12:3). Apparently, Moshe superseded Aharon in every respect, from prophecy to humility. Nonetheless, in his commentary to Sefer Shemos 6:26, Rashi writes, "There are some instances where Aharon is mentioned prior to Moshe, and others where Moshe is mentioned prior to Aharon. This teaches that they were equal." Rashi means that concerning the Exodus and in terms of being agents of Hashem they had equal status, but clearly, regarding their innate abilities and qualities, Moshe was superior to Aharon.

In an alternative exposition, the Shem MiShmuel suggests that the equality between Moshe and Aharon that Rashi suggests refers to the circumstances prior to the Exodus and the Giving of the Torah. After these seminal events, however, Moshe emerged as an entirely different person on an unparalleled plateau. This was a consequence of his direct contact with the Almighty which catapulted him into an unprecedented spiritual realm. Indeed, the Yalkut Shimoni writes that Moshe was like G-d from the waist up and like man from the waist down. Because he had experienced the Divine, Moshe was unlike any other human - even Aharon. We once again revert to our original question: How could Aharon be considered more worthy than Moshe at the inauguration of the Mishkan?

Furthermore, Chazal teach us that Moshe and Aharon's humility surpassed even that of Avraham Avinu. He said, "I am but dust and ashes" (Bereishis 18:27), while they went so far as to say, "What are

we?" (Shemos 16:8). How could Moshe's level of humility have exceeded even that of Aharon? Aharon answered that he was nothing. How could Moshe have been more humble than that? How could he have been less than nothing?

The Avnei Nezer distinguishes between two forms of humility of which Moshe and Aharon each espoused a different form. One can live a life of humility with the feeling that he is insignificant. In another type of humility the individual recognizes his capabilities, his lofty achievements and exemplary spiritual plateau. Yet, in comparison with the unfathomable greatness of Hashem, he realizes that he is infinitely inconsequential. This second variety of humility is an attribute from which the greatest men on earth can benefit, for the only true existence is that of the Almighty; the only true reality is that of Him.

We now understand what motivated Moshe's sense of humility. Moshe was the greatest person, the consummate human being, the quintessential leader and teacher of the Jewish People. Certainly, he was aware of his significance, his distinction, his exalted position. How could he possibly have retained his humility in light of this awareness?

Apparently, Moshe knew who he was and the outstanding role in which he functioned, but -- specifically because of his closeness to Hashem, Who would always be infinitesimally greater -- he felt insignificant. Moshe understood that he could never achieve even a minute fraction of Hashem's greatness. Indeed, as is quoted in Avos D'Rabbi Nassan 9, "Moshe was the humblest of all men, but not of the ministering angels, who were even more humble than he." The higher one is, the closer to Hashem he becomes, the less he thinks of himself, because he sees that in comparison to the Almighty, he is nothing. Moshe maintained his humility because he always kept the majesty of Hashem on his mind.

Aharon was quite different. His humility was more of a direct nature. He really believed himself to be insignificant and unworthy of any distinction. His role in the sin of the Golden Calf never left his mind. This incident perpetuated his lowly self-image to the point that he perceived the Altar to be in the shape of a bull due to its protracted "horns." In his mind, he had sinned and he could not erase that reality. He felt that as a result of his part in the eigoal, he would be deficient in achieving atonement for the Jewish People at the Altar.

Two brothers reflected two types of humility: Both had said, "What are we?" This is where, however, the similarity between them ends. Moshe achieved humility with respect to Hashem. Aharon felt that he was intrinsically worthless.

When the Torah describes Moshe as the humblest of men, it refers to his ability to achieve humility in an unparalleled manner, particularly in relation to Hashem. This was an unprecedented form of humility. In this respect, Moshe was greater than Aharon, who did not have the opportunity to develop such a connection with the Almighty, and, hence, could not perceive this form of self-assessment. On the other hand, in his own way, Aharon was as great as Moshe -- and perhaps even greater than he -- in the way that he was able to view his own deficiencies and the compelling impact they had on his total demeanor.

*And they (Nadav and Avihu) brought before Hashem an alien fire that He had not commanded them. A fire came out from before Hashem and consumed them. (10:1,2)*

Rashi cites Chazal who say that Nadav and Avihu perished because they rendered a halachic decision in the presence of their rebbe, Moshe Rabbeinu. Others cite Chazal who relate that Nadav would say to Avihu, "When will those two elders (referring to Moshe and Aharon) pass on, and you and I will lead the generation?" These statements are certainly true, but they apparently are not consistent with the Torah's description of their sin. The Torah clearly states that they perished as a result of offering an alien fire which Hashem had not commanded them to bring. Why do Chazal cite different reasons? Furthermore, is it possible that Nadav and Avihu, who were both righteous individuals to the point that Moshe attested to their superseding even himself and Aharon in greatness, could be guilty of such sinful behavior?

Horav Reuven Elbaz, Shlita, explains that, indeed, their sin was eish zarah, offering an alien fire. Everything else which Chazal cited were outgrowths, ramifications of this sin. Alien fire is a reference to intense fiery passion and fervor in serving Hashem. They went, so to speak, overboard, beyond the limits. Nadav and Avihu went too far, such that they overstepped the perimeters of religious observance. Their extremism caused them not to marry, because they wanted to pour out all of their love to the Almighty. There was not enough room in their hearts to share this love with a wife and children. This brought them to drink wine in order to increase and heighten their sense of joy, and this intensity brought them to rule in the presence of their rebbe, Moshe. In other words, they became carried away, and this led to a number of egregious errors.

Thus, while they questioned, "When will those two elders pass on?" they were not speaking from a malevolent heart. There was nothing evil about them in any way. They simply could not tolerate Moshe and Aharon's passivity with regard to the people. They complained that the nation was rude, the people were disrespectful. Yet, Moshe and Aharon responded, V'nachnu mah, "(and) What are we?" Their incredible humility and their outstanding sense of self-effacement were too much for Nadav and Avihu. They wanted action. This was not the way a strong leader should respond. The people had gross chutzpah and should, therefore, be punished. A leader must be strong. A leader must not tolerate any form of infraction. Nadav and Avihu's attitude towards leadership was unlike that of Moshe and Aharon. A leader must lead - not follow. A leader must be strong and dynamic - not obsequious. The members of the nation who had complained needed to be dealt with immediately. One does not complain.

Hashem did not agree with Nadav and Avihu. The only way to lead is with love and tolerance, patience and sensitivity. Humility is to be the guiding force, the moral compass by which one leads, inspires and achieves an enduring legacy.

*Moshe heard and approved. (10:20)*

On that auspicious-- but fateful day-- three he-goats were offered as Sin-offerings. One was the special offering of Nachshon ben Aminadav, the Nasi, Prince, of Shevet Yehudah. The second offering was in honor of the Chanukas, Inauguration, of the Mishkan. These two were considered kodoshei shaah, holy for the current time, since they would never again be offered. The third sacrifice was the Korban Rosh Chodesh, in honor of the new moon. Prior to this, Moshe Rabbeinu had instructed the Kohanim to eat the Meal-offerings, which were kodoshei shaah. The Kohanim did this. This was an exception to the rule of mourning in which an onen, mourner prior to the burial of the deceased, may not eat of the offerings. The question confronting Aharon and his sons was: Does Moshe's command regarding the Korban Minchah, Meal-offering, apply to the meat of the Sin-offerings as well?

Furthermore, if, in fact, it did apply, did it apply to all three of the offerings?

Hashem did command the Kohanim to eat, even during their status as onenim. It was now up to Moshe and/or Aharon to determine if this command applied under all circumstances. Moshe was of the opinion that the command was unequivocal and should apply to all sacrifices, even the Korban Rosh Chodesh, which was kodesh l'doros, holy for all the generations. Aharon, however, felt that since the direct command was initially made concerning the Meal-offerings, which are kodoshei shaah, only the first two sacrifices, that of Nachshon and the Inauguration of the Mishkan, were to be eaten. The Korban Rosh Chodesh was kodesh forever. It, therefore, should not be eaten during animus, the period of mourning.

The Kohanim burnt the he-goat which was designated for Rosh Chodesh, because they felt that as a kodoshei doros, it was not to be eaten. Moshe became angry with them. Chazal tell us that since Moshe became angry, he erred in the halachah. Aharon was actually correct in his p'sak, determination of the law. Aharon's sons did not respond to Moshe, as it would have been disrespectful to speak up in their father's presence. Aharon explained the halachah to Moshe, who conceded that he had erred.

Moshe Rabbeinu demonstrated his true humility, as well as the reason that he was selected to be Klal Yisrael's quintessential leader. His humility was the essence of his greatness. Rather than defend his position, he realized his error and conceded to Aharon. This is the mark of a true gadol, great Torah leader.

Horav Isser Zalman Meltzer, zl, was an individual of such strength of character. Whenever he was in a dispute with another individual regarding a Torah law or logic, he never insisted that he was right. Rather, he would say, Efsheir zeit ihr gerecht, "Perhaps you are correct!" He never insisted that he was correct. He always looked for a way to validate the other person's point of view. This applied even when the other point of view was that of a young man, many years his junior. Once, as he was giving a shiur, Torah lecture, one that he had prepared and worked on for quite some time, a bachur, student, asked a compelling question. Rav Isser Zalman said, "This young man has asked a very good question. He is correct in his understanding of the subject. I have no more to say." With that, he closed his Gemorah, volume of Talmud, and bid everyone a good day.

Moshe could have told Aharon that he had never heard the halachah. Instead, he said, Shomaati v'shochachti, "I heard, but I forgot." Furthermore, he publicized his error throughout the camp, telling everyone that he had erred and his brother had been right.

The Baalei Mussar, Ethicists, explain that the greatest deterrent which prevents the individual from being modeh al ha'emes, conceding to the truth, is the loud voice and screaming associated with presenting his point of view in a dispute. All of the screaming backs the individual into a corner from which he cannot retreat. It is very difficult to concede an error after one has just loudly vocalized his position. It is more embarrassing and degrading than people can tolerate. Moshe Rabbeinu was not "most people." This is why he was selected to be our consummate leader.

If people dispute quietly, respectfully, pleasantly, then it is no challenge to concede to an error in judgment. Under such circumstances, when one discovers that he has erred, he is not yet on a high pedestal, elevated by his loud voice. He has spoken quietly, patiently. He is now ready to admit that he has made a mistake.

The individual who loses his cool during a dispute finds it difficult to back down from his position. Chazal teach us that Bais Shamai and Bais Hillel were in dispute for three years, each one claiming that the halachah was as they had stated it. At the end of three years, a Bas Kol, Voice from

Heaven, decreed that both the words of Bais Shamai and Bais Hillel were divrei Elokim Chaim, words of the Living G-d. Nonetheless, the halachah concurred with Bais Hillel. Chazal question why the halachah was in agreement with Bais Hillel? They explain that Bais Hillel were people of tolerance and acceptance. Indeed, when they rendered their decision, they would first quote Bais Shamai, followed by their own point of view.

Maharal M'Prague questions the reason for adjudicating in accordance with Bais Hillel simply because they were nochin va'aluvim, easygoing and forbearing. Since when is this a basis for rendering a halachah opinion? The Maharal explains that a person's ability to think cogently coincides directly with his middas ha'savlanus, capacity for tolerance. The thought process of one who possesses a calm and relaxed personality, who is not easily given to anger or to losing his cool, reflects this state of composure. His logic will be clear and astute, not garbled and anxiety-laden. On the other hand, the individual who is ill-tempered and irritable, who quickly resorts to fits of rage--regardless of his acumen, his sagacity notwithstanding-- will err in judgment. It is as if his brain suddenly short circuits. The tools are present, but the wiring is faulty.

Someone who is cool-headed and amicable, who accepts a challenge without falling apart, who is easy-going and of a mild temperament, has an enhanced capacity for judging a situation with greater clarity and objectivity. Bais Hillel exemplified this level of character refinement. We find in Meseches Edyos that Bais Hillel reversed their p'sak, halachic decision, a number of times. Closer to our own times, the Chazon Ish, zl, who was one of the most celebrated and erudite poskim, halachic arbiters, writes: "I am constantly beset with errors. At times, it is in logic or in my understanding of the Talmud. I am not ashamed of this, because there is nothing for which to be ashamed. On the contrary, one who is ashamed demonstrates a lack of respect for the halachah."

Modeh al hae'emes, conceding to the truth, accepting that one is wrong, is especially necessary in one's relationship with students. A rebbe who errs should be able to admit his error, whether it is concerning p'shat, explanation of the subject matter, or regarding an incident in which the rebbe has made the wrong judgment call. It happens, and when it does, one should be big enough to concede his faulty judgment. One who is a modeh al ha'emes earns the respect of his peers and, ultimately, merits their trust.

We allude to this idea in our daily tefillah: L'olam yehei adam yerei Shomayim b'seisar u'vagalui, u'modeh al ha'emes, v'doveir emes bilevavo. "Always should a man fear Heaven, in private and in public, and speak truth within his heart." The Minchas Elazar interprets the word l'olam, always, as meaning l'olam, because of/for the world. This means that his words should be heard and accepted by the world community. This is possible only if he is modeh al ha'emes. It is not enough to speak the truth privately. One must be willing and able to concede the truth publicly, even if it hurts. Then people will respect him and accept what he has to say, l'olam - for the world - and for himself.

*Moshe said to Aharon: of this did Hashem speak, saying, "I will be sanctified through those who are nearest to me... and Aharon was silent." (10:3)*

Aharon HaKohen had just sustained a loss that was both personal and national. According to the Ramban, at first, he began to weep. Then, upon hearing Moshe's consolation, he became still and silent. He was able to find comfort in the knowledge that his sons had reached the zenith in spiritual

ascendancy. Hashem rewarded him for his silence by introducing the law concerning intoxicants for Kohanim through him exclusively. The Chasam Sofer focuses on Aharon's reaction, on his silence, and he tries to understand it in the context of the natural reaction to tragedy. There are people who remain silent during a tragedy because they are in a state of shock and disbelief. From the fact that Aharon was rewarded, the Torah seems to be indicating that his silence was not a natural one. The grief was there; he just held it back. Let us try to understand exactly what it is that he refrained from expressing.

When Iyov heard the tragic news of the death of his sons, he said, "Hashem gives; Hashem takes, may the Name of Hashem be blessed." When Rabbi Meir's son died, his wife consoled him by saying, "The Owner of the pikadon, deposit, took back His deposit." She was intimating that their son was never "theirs." He was a deposit, a gift from Hashem for a short time, a gift that Hashem was retrieving. Rather than grieve over his loss, they should have been happy with the amount of time they had been privileged to have with him. It was now, after he had been taken away, that we realize that he had only been a pikadon, a short-term deposit. He had never been ours to keep.

This, explains the Chasam Sofer, was Iyov's comment. Hashem gave - it is only now, after Hashem had taken back, that he realized and could truly be thankful for His gift. It is only after the gift had been taken away that he could truly appreciate the gift.

There is a problem, however, with this form of expression, since the realization and penetrating reflection into the nature of the gift can invariably intensify one's struggle with the reality and finality of its implacable loss. In other words, it is specifically due to his deep appreciation of the gift that his loss becomes even greater and more demanding. Perhaps this is why the pasuk emphasizes Iyov's righteous acceptance of Hashem's decree. This was a time when the perception of Hashem's "giving" could wreak havoc on the emotional acceptance of Hashem's "taking away."

This is why Aharon did nothing. He did not praise Hashem, as Iyov did, because the conflict of the two opposing emotions of "Hashem nassan" at a time of "Hashem lakach," can be overwhelming. When Moshe Rabbeinu extolled the virtue of Aharon's sons, Aharon knew it was a time to be silent, because his deeper awareness of their elevated status would make the hurt even greater. The void that they left was now deeper and darker. He was silent, realizing that at this moment it was the more appropriate reaction.

*Moshe and Aharon came to the Ohel Moed, and they went out and they blessed the people - and the glory of Hashem appeared to the entire people. (9:23)*

Rashi cites two reasons that Moshe Rabbeinu entered with Aharon into the Mishkan. The first reason is that he went in to show Aharon the maasei haKetores, procedure for burning the Incense. In an alternative explanation, he says that Aharon was dismayed and embarrassed. He saw that all of the korbanos and rituals of the Mishkan service had been performed, and the Shechinah had yet to descend to Klal Yisrael. Aharon was distressed and said, "I know it is because of me. Hashem is angry with me [for his part in the sin of the Golden Calf], and because of me He does not want to descend to the nation." Aharon turned to Moshe and said, "Moshe, my brother! Thus have you done to me. I entered to perform the service upon your instructions, and I was embarrassed because the Shechinah did not descend." Immediately upon hearing this, Moshe went in to the Ohel Moed with Aharon and they sought Hashem's favor as they entreated Him for mercy. Hashem then descended to Klal Yisrael.

Rashi adds that a similar incident occurred concerning the people, when they saw that during

the seven days of the Inauguration Moshe would raise up the Mishkan and then dismantle it because the Shechinah did not rest in it. The people were embarrassed that Hashem wanted no part of them as a result of the sin of the Golden Calf. Therefore, Moshe told them, "Aharon, my brother, is worthier and more important than I, for through his korbanos and his service the Shechinah will repose among you. You will then know that the Shechinah has chosen him."

Let us analyze what was going on. Moshe refused to enter the Mishkan. After all, there was a pall over the proceedings. Aharon was involved in the sin of the Golden Calf, albeit not intentionally. His korban was not being accepted. Aharon sensed this, and he turned to Moshe and pleaded. He understood that he was at fault. He was humiliated in public. At that moment, Moshe rescinded. When he heard that Aharon was embarrassed, Moshe decided to enter the Mishkan and spare Aharon further humiliation. What happened?

Horav Baruch Mordechai Eizrachi, Shlita, explains that while Moshe may have felt that Aharon's involvement in the Golden Calf engendered a negative reaction from Heaven, he could not allow his brother to be publicly censured. Moshe drew the line at Aharon's humiliation because *bein adam l'chaveiro*, relationships between man and his fellow man, maintain a separate weight - one that outweighs the scale of justice. Yes, there is the after-effect of the sin of the Golden Calf. It cannot be ignored - unless it means infringing upon *bein adam l'chaveiro*. If it means embarrassing Aharon, then Moshe was obligated to overlook the sin and do his part to bring down the Shechinah.

Likewise, when the people saw that the Shechinah did not acquiesce to be among them, when Moshe saw the people's embarrassment, he relented. He could not allow the people to be humiliated. *Bein adam l'chaveiro* plays such a pivotal role. This was the greatest sin, the ultimate rebellion so soon after their liberation from Egypt, the rescue at the Red Sea, and their receiving the Torah: They sinned with a Golden Calf, an idol of molten gold. How do you overlook such a transgression? You do not. If it means allowing another Jew to be embarrassed, however, you put the sin aside and do whatever is necessary to circumvent any further humiliation.

*Bein adam l'chaveiro* is the measure of greatness in a man. The Alter, zl, m'Kelm writes: "What makes a person great? One is considered great if he includes within himself the entire Jewish nation. How does one do this? By thinking of others and feeling for them all of the time. A true person is one who does for others without desire for financial remuneration, flattery or honor. Love of oneself is nothing more than falsehood and idolatry. Since the Torah is absolute truth, only someone who himself is true can comprehend it. Compelling oneself to be concerned for the needs of others leads him to love them more and himself less, thus uprooting the falsehood within himself, making him into a true person. Only then does one have the ability to understand the profundities of Torah."

Our *gedolei Yisrael*, Torah leaders, used this standard for themselves as they reflected care and sensitivity for their fellow man in their everyday relationships. If one peruses the life of the Chazon Ish, zl, one of the greatest Torah luminaries of the past generation, we note a life replete with *bein adam l'chaveiro* at its apex. His self-sacrifice for others was legend. He was prepared to assist anyone in need at any time - day or night, despite his own feeble state of health. Allowing himself no rest, he himself became saddled with huge debts out of his sense of responsibility to help others. He strained every bit of his brilliant mental faculty to search for ways to solve problems confronting individuals and communities. Yet, this was not his greatest contribution. The zenith of his *gemillas chesed*, devotion to offering kindness to others, was the loss of time and the strain it placed on his mind - a mind that from birth was consecrated for Torah study. Torah was his very lifeblood. His love and insatiable thirst for Torah superceded everything - but the *bein adam l'chaveiro*. How did he do it and why?

A student once lamented that his own involvement with helping another Jew was depleting his time from Torah study. The Chazon Ish told him, "You are wrong. What you are doing is not bitul Torah, wasting precious time from Torah study. Our holy Torah is unlike any other wisdom. It is inextricably bound up with the neshamah, soul. When one performs a kindness for his fellow Jew, his soul becomes uplifted, thus making it a better receptacle for absorbing Torah knowledge."

Horav Mendel Kaplan, zl, was a European Torah scholar who became a legendary American Rosh Yeshivah. He constantly stressed the significance of bein adam l'chaveiro. He would say that taking on other people's problems and extending help to them is what makes a person great. He noted that Rashi did not write his commentaries because he longed to see his name in print. He did it, rather, to take the Jewish People by the hand and show them the meaning of each piece of Talmud. Indeed, every word of Rashi indicates his overwhelming kindness. The Chafetz Chaim, zl, was no different. Everything that he wrote was his form of chesed, kindness, to Klal Yisrael, enabling them to learn to build a greater understanding and awareness of the halachah.

Rav Mendel's sensitivity extended to both observant and non-observant Jews. A student once commented about a wedding which he had attended in which the chassan's, bridegroom's, parents refused to attend, because his sister's gentile husband had not been invited. The student asked Rav Mendel, "Can you imagine the pain and embarrassment the son must have felt at not having his parents attend his wedding?"

Rav Mendel responded sadly, "You are viewing this from the wrong perspective. You have no idea the pain and sadness the parents must have sustained in not being at their son's wedding. You are forgetting that they have been led to believe that religious Jews are like a cult. They honestly think that their son is marrying into some kind of religious faddism. In this case, it is not so simple to write off the parents."

Upon davening, praying, for someone who was ill, he would say, "The troubles of the Jewish People have to be a part of you. Just Davening in its own right does not necessarily help that much. In order for prayers to have power, one must feel the sick person's travail, literally place himself in his situation. As it says concerning Moshe, 'Va'yechal Moshe,' Klal Yisrael's pain began to burn within him like an illness. (Berachos 12b) (Va'yechal is derived from choleh, illness). If you cry and scream as if you are the choleh, sick person, then you can accomplish something. This is the definition of a 'great man': not to be selfish, but to open your coat and wrap everyone within."

*The daah and the ayah according to its specie. (11:14)*

In the Talmud Chullin 62a, Chazal say that the daah, ayah and raah are all one specie of fowl. Why is it called raah? Because it sees very far. It stands in Babylon and sees a neveilah, carcass, in Yerushalayim. Horav Meir Shapiro, zl, notes the "character" and possibly the reason for this bird's siman tumah, sign distinguishing it as a non-kosher food, is its tendency to be in the spiritual filth of eretz ha'amim, the land of the pagan nations. Yet, it notices the tumah, the carcass in Eretz Yisrael. It does not see the tumah of the environment of which it is a part of. It sees the tumah in the Holy Land. This is a character defect. An individual who can stand amidst tumah, but notice only the tumah of others, especially those who are in a holy place, is an individual of a flawed character.

Rav Meir Shapiro interprets this into the pasuk in Zecharyah 3:2, Yigaar Hashem becha ha'Satan v'yigaar Hashem becha ha'bocher b'Yerushalayim, "May Hashem, denounce you, O' Satan!

May Hashem, Who chooses Yerushalayim, denounce you!" Why are two denouncements necessary? The answer is that there are two types of "satans." There is the individual who is always finding fault, always presenting a critique, but does not distinguish between the holy and mundane. He finds fault in everyone. For him, one denouncement will suffice. There is, on the other hand, a satan who only finds fault with Yerushalayim, who only maligns the holy, whether it is the people, the city, the Torah, anything that is reserved for sanctity. It is specifically in this area that his perverted and malignant mouth finds a place. For him, two denouncements are necessary.

*For I am Hashem Who elevates you from the land of Egypt to be a G-d unto you. (11:45)*

Hashem liberated us from Egypt for a purpose: so that we should serve Him by observing His commandments. Rashi comments that the choice of the verb *maaleh*, elevate, as opposed to *hotzi*, take out, implies that the laws of *kashrus* were established in order to spiritually elevate the nation. Indeed, Chazal teach us that Hashem said, "If I would not have taken out the nation from Egypt only so that they would not ritually contaminate themselves with insects, as do the other nations, it would have been sufficient (reason)." It is to our distinction that these insects are forbidden to us. In other words, there are foods that cause spiritual harm to Jews due to the Jew's elevated status, which otherwise have no effect on others.

Horav Nosson Wachtfogel, zl, derives from here that we, as Jews, have an imperative to elevate ourselves, to maintain a high level of *shtoltz*, self-respect and class, because that is what Hashem has instilled within us and it is what He wants us to perpetuate. Rav Nosson adds that when one elevates himself he has a ripple effect on his surroundings, on his friends and students. He relates that he heard from Horav Aharon Kotler, zl, an incredible story concerning the famous *ger tzedek*, righteous convert, of Vilna, Avraham ben Avraham, zl, Count Graf Pototsky, who was put to death *Al Kiddush Hashem*. When the Gaon, zl, m'Vilna heard about this, he told him that he could procure his release. The Count replied, "If Hashem chooses to spare me, so be it. If not, I am prepared to die *Al Kiddush Hashem*." Moreover, the Count's father was able to effect a pardon from the Russian Czar, but the Catholic priests refused to allow it. They wanted to set an example of him. Fools that they were, they set an example of how a committed Jew is prepared to die for his convictions. He was burned at the stake, and his ashes were buried next to the Gaon.

As he was being led to the stake, the officers who were in charge of him gazed at his peaceful and tranquil countenance. They saw an individual who was clearly of an elevated spiritual status. This inspired them to ask his forgiveness for any undue pain they were causing him, using the famous jargon that the cruel Nazis used, "We are only doing our job." The Count calmly responded with a parable.

A king whose palace was on the outskirts of the city had a problem finding young friends for his son. The only family that lived within close proximity to the palace was a successful farmer who had a son the same age as the prince. The boys became best friends. They would play together and also fight together, as little boys often will. One day, the two boys became embroiled in a fist-fight that got out of hand. The farmer's son laid a few well-placed punches on the prince's face that would not be quickly forgotten. This fight coincided with the king's decision that his son had reached the age to attend a private school catering uniquely to royalty. There he would learn the ins and outs of the life of a monarch. The two boys parted with the little spat in which the prince took a beating as his good-bye present. They did not see each other again.

Years went by. The king died, and his son became his successor. His name spread far and wide. The farmer's son had also ascended to his father's position, becoming a successful farmer himself. As he heard about his boyhood friend who was now king, he felt bad that they had parted under such negative terms. After all, their last experience together was a fist-fight in which the prince was pummeled considerably. He decided he would make an appointment to see the monarch and beg his forgiveness. It took some time and resourcefulness, but he was able to obtain an appointment. After clearing heavy security, he finally embraced his boyhood friend. They talked about the past, the good times they had, and shared with one another their current successes.

Finally, the farmer stated his reason for coming to visit, "I have come to beg forgiveness from your highness for the fist-fight we had before you moved away. I apologize for hitting you so much." The king looked at his friend incredulously, "I do not understand what you are saying. Do you realize that I am now the king of the entire country? I speak daily with ministers and generals about matters that affect millions of people. Do you think I care or even remember that childish fracas that we had? I certainly have more important issues with which to concern myself," the king replied.

The Count turned to his jailors and said, "The same applies to me. I am now about to take leave of this world and enter a world of truth, where I will bask in the Presence of the Almighty. Do you think I have nothing else to do but think about something so petty as the afflictions to which you are subjecting me? This means absolutely nothing to me. I have more important things to occupy my last moments on this world."

A person can rise above the issues and problems that gnaw at him, by elevating himself, by realizing who he is and the mission he has been sent to execute. Why concern ourselves with petty, insignificant matters? We consume our time and ourselves with matters that are foolish, trivial and meaningless, most of the time for no relevant reason, other than our obsession with "ourselves." If we could raise "ourselves" above all of this, we would be much happier, more fulfilled people.

He (Moshe) said to Aharon: Take yourself a young bull for a Sin-offering... Take a he-goat for a Sin-offering. (9:2,3)

The Targum Yonasan comments that Aharon Hakohen's korban was brought as atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf, and the korban brought by the people was to expiate the sin of mechiras Yosef, the sale of Yosef by his brothers. One wonders why it was precisely now after yetzias Mitzrayim (the exodus from Egypt), Krias Yam Suf (the splitting of the Red Sea), and Matan Torah (the Giving of the Torah), that Klal Yisrael needed to atone for the sale of Yosef. If it did not prevent the other miracles from taking place, why should it be brought to the fore now, of all times?

The Meshech Chochmah gives a practical explanation. Up until now, Klal Yisrael could have maintained an excuse to justify their ancestors' sale of Yosef: he would bring evil reports about his brothers to his father. Rather than speak disparagingly of their activities, he should have personally rebuked them. Now, after the sin of the Golden Calf, when Chur was killed for condemning Klal Yisrael's actions, they could no longer justify the sale of Yosef. Apparently, they were unable to accept reproach. Especially now, their actions indicated that their long-standing excuse was not valid.

Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, notes that we are all like that. Everyone attempts to gloss over his sins, seeking to justify his indiscretions with flimsy excuses that he might even personally believe. There will come a day when our excuses will not be valid, when we will have to confront the

Heavenly Tribunal and the hypocrisy of our actions will become clearly visible. This is the meaning of the words we recite in the Tefillah of U'nesaneh tokef, "You will open the Book of Chronicles - it will read itself, and everyone's signature is in it." We, by our actions, sign our own verdict.

We go through life deceiving ourselves, refusing to concede that we might be wrong. While this is a problem in regard to our relationships with our peers, it is an insurmountable barrier in our relationship with the Almighty. As Horav Shlomo Freifeld, zl, points out, the stellar dialogue between man and Hashem begins with the words, Shema Yisrael, "Hear, O Yisrael." The initial word of Krias Shema is, Shema, hear/listen. The relationship can begin only after we are willing to hear, to listen, to accept. We must listen to each other, but we must first listen to ourselves. We must listen with honesty, with humility, with courage and without fear. We must listen to who we are, what our goals are, and how we expect to achieve them.

Regrettably, many of us do not want to listen as we delude ourselves, living a life of illusion, until the day that the bubble bursts. We would rather live a life of blissful ignorance than confront the implications that accompany facing the truth. The burden of truth can be very cumbersome. Klal Yisrael did not hear that there might have been two sides to the Yosef story. They did not realize that Yosef might have had a good reason for not rebuking his brothers. He felt it would not have accomplished anything. For many years, this was the belief, an opinion that was accepted throughout the generations. Then Chur tried to get a word in edgewise. He attempted to rebuke Klal Yisrael. They killed him. This indicated that Yosef had been justified in his assumption. Now, they listened.

*And they died before Hashem. (10:2)*

What is the meaning of dying "before Hashem"? Is that not a given? Horav Yitzchok Zilberstein, Shlita, tells a story about an elderly Jew that lends insight into the meaning of this term. He was approached by an old man and asked if he would study Mishnayos with him. The man's face made it obvious that he was quite serious in his request. Rav Zilberstein asked the man what had prompted this request. The man's response should have a compelling effect on all of us. "I am a survivor of the concentration camps. I was beaten, persecuted and the subject of a number of heinous medical experiments," he said. "At war's end, I had survived, but the Nazis made sure that I would be the last member of my family. I could never have children after the war. I became older and began to realize that, before long, I would have to confront my mortality. I began to think about the future, and I became concerned about who would learn Mishnayos for my neshamah, soul, after my death? I then decided that it would be me; I would learn Mishnayos for myself. Rebbe, I am preparing myself for that time when I will have no one to learn for me. That is why I ask you to study with me."

This is the meaning of "dying before Hashem." One who "lives before Hashem," who understands during his lifetime that he always stands before the Almighty, that he is never alone. About him, it can be said that in death he died "before Hashem."

*Do not leave your heads unshorn and do not rend your garments. (10:6)*

The period of the Chanukas ha'Mishkan, Inauguration of the Sanctuary, was a time of great joy and festivity. In order not to interfere with this joy, Hashem prohibited the usual expression of grief, even for the brothers of Nadav and Avihu. In the Musrai Ha'Shalah, cited by Horav Yitzchok Shraga

Gross, Shlita, it is written that if we are exhorted not to tear the garments that cover the body, certainly we must be careful to protect the neshamah, soul, to insure that it remains whole and complete without any tears. In his Mesillas Yesarim, The Ramchal writes that hesach ha'daas, distraction, from reflecting on the two truths that one must keep in mind constantly in order to acquire the middah, attribute, of yiraas Shomayim, fear of Heaven, results in attenuation of yiraah.

One must always be aware that the Divine Presence is everywhere and that He looks upon all things, great and small, and nothing is hidden from Him. If one is masiach daas from this awareness, he is in danger of losing his yiraas Shomayim. Indeed, the Melech Yisrael, Jewish king, was to have with him his personal Sefer Torah from which he would read everyday of his life, so that he would learn to fear Hashem.

Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, comments that this enjoinder is not only for a king, but for each and every Jew: not to become distracted from the Torah and our avodas Hashem, service to the Almighty. The reason that so many fail to reach the summit of Torah erudition is hesech ha'daas, distraction. For example, a new z'man, semester, begins in the yeshivah, and every student charts his course for exemplary achievement. Regrettably, as we all know, it does not happen. What happens? It is always the same problem. They come across a difficult passage in their learning or encounter a difficult situation. Instead of rising to the challenge, they defer, pushing it off until "another time" or the next zman. This goes on all the time. Every time there is a "bump" in the road to success, we push off the problem, claiming that next time it will be different, we will work harder. The Baalei Mussar, Ethicists, compare this to a person who is heating water for coffee. Every time, just before it boils, he removes the pot from the flame. He can do this one thousand times and, in the end, he will not have a cup of hot coffee, because it never has the chance to boil!

The Chazon Ish, zl, would say, "It is easier to learn eighteen hours a day than to learn six hours." The reason is simple. In a period of six hours, one still has a good part of the day remaining during which he can push off or get around the mandatory six hours. In an eighteen-hour seder, however, there is no time left over. After all, one must sleep. The only alternative to learning is - learning.

A distinguished kollel fellow came to the Chazon Ish and poured out his heart to him: "My whole purpose in getting married when I did was that I could continue pursuing my Torah studies, uninterrupted and unimpeded. Yet, ever since my wedding, my wife, who is truly a special person, constantly interrupts my studies. She is always encouraging me to go places with her or sending me on errands. If it is not that, she finds things for me to do around the house, activities that are innocuous, but, nonetheless, interfere with my studies."

The Chazon Ish looked deep into the man's tear-streaked eyes and began to smile. "My dear young man," the Chazon Ish began, "there are two who know whether a man's intentions are sincere: Hashem Yisborach and his wife. If your spouse senses that you truly want to study without interruption, she would be the first to help you achieve your goal. She would sacrifice everything for you. However, I am certain that she feels that your intentions are not as noble as they may seem. Most likely, she is aware that you leave your studies for a few minutes here and there for no apparent reason, wandering aimlessly about the house. When she sees this, she thinks to herself, 'If he is not going to study, he might as well help me!'

"Trust me," the Chazon Ish concluded, "if you apply yourself to your studies genuinely, with sincerity and diligence, you will quickly see that your wife will rush to support you."

The young man took heed of the Chazon Ish's words and accepted upon himself to study Torah,

unhindered and uninterrupted. His wife took note of the change in her husband's study habits and made every effort to be supportive of him. This young man eventually developed into one of Yerushalayim's outstanding Torah scholars.

This dual lesson concerning Torah study and the husband-wife relationship is both timely and practical.

*Do not make yourselves abominable by means of any teeming thing; do not contaminate yourselves through them lest you become contaminated through them. (11:43)*

The aleph is missing from the word v'nitmeisem and it can, therefore, be read as v'nitamtem, "lest you become dulled." This causes Chazal to posit in the Talmud Yoma 39b that one who consumes forbidden food causes his spiritual potential to become limited. In his Moreh Nevuchim, the Rambam writes that the reason that the Torah forbade ingesting non-kosher/unclean animals is that the nature of the animal will "stick" to the person who eats it, and these creatures have a nature that is not desirable for Klal Yisrael. Chazal suggest a number of catalysts for Elisha ben Avuya's apostasy. His transformation from being the rebbe of Rabbi Meir to becoming an apikores, heretic, was attributed to one factor: when his mother was pregnant with him, she walked by an avodah zarah, idol, and whiffed the aroma of the sacrifices that were being offered. Another Tanna contends that she ate a small piece of meat. In any event, whatever she consumed traveled through her body like a poison, compromising the spiritual development of her yet unborn child. He was born with a spiritual defect: an intense desire to sin. Imagine the devastating impact of forbidden food! It goes so far that the Shach posits that in the event a woman legally partook of non-kosher food, such as if she were critically ill, she should nonetheless not nurse a Jewish child due to the effect of the food she ate on the child. Last, the Zohar Hakadosh writes that there is a ruach ha'tumah, spirit of contamination, that hovers over forbidden foods, which causes the mind of one who consumes them to become unclear and indecisive.

Horav Chaim Soloveitzhik, zl, would often relate the following incident that occurred concerning the Rambam. A similar version is written in the Sefer Degel Machne' Ephraim.

When the Rambam visited Yemen, he met with a great gaon, Talmudic scholar, with whom he later started a correspondence. In one of the first letters from the rav, a question was presented that struck the Rambam as very odd - almost sacrilegious. He wondered how such an erudite and pious Jew could ask such a philosophic question that bordered on heresy. There was only one excuse: the man had an impure soul. The letters kept on coming, and the Rambam's response was always the same: inspect the shoachim, ritual slaughterers, of your community. The matter was taken under strict advisory after which it was discovered that for the past thirteen years a number of indiscretions had taken place and, from a halachic standpoint, the people of that community, including the rav, had been eating non-kosher meat! The Rambam's observation had been correct. For a person of this stature to present heretical questions could mean only one thing; his soul was spiritually compromised due to the food he was ingesting.

A similar incident occurred in contemporary times as related by Horav Chaim Kanievski, Shlita. An elderly man, who had been a successful professor and had raised a family of bnei Torah, came to Rav Chaim and related, "I have been troubled by the following thoughts for over seventy-seven years. When I was a young boy, I was reputed to be an illui, genius. I was proficient in Talmud, grasping and retaining the material quicker and longer than anyone else. The yeshivah that I attended would have

vacation once or twice a year. One day after we returned from the Shavuot "break," shortly after my Bar-Mitzvah, I could no longer learn as I had before. My brilliance was suddenly a thing of the past. My secular proficiency however, increased, regrettably at the expense of my Torah studies. No secular subject was too difficult, but my ability to achieve any kind of proficiency in Torah studies had reached its limit.

"This went on for years," he continued. "I made some brilliant investments that paid off handsomely, allowing me to support my family in great wealth. I was successful in everything, except Torah study. I could not learn a blatt Gemorah, page of Talmud.

"Recently, I read a story in the Sefer Yerushalayim Shel Maalah which relates how a woman came to seek advice from Horav Akiva Eiger, zl, concerning her son who had suddenly, for no apparent reason, ceased to have a desire to learn Torah. What should she do? He was refusing to go to the bais hamedrash. Rav Akiva Eiger thought for a few moments and replied, "Probably he ate something that was unkosher, and it affected him." The woman's response was to be expected, "It is impossible. We only keep kosher in our home. There is no way that my son could have even come in contact with unkosher food."

The woman returned home and began to search for clues regarding the true kashrus of her home. After some investigation, she discovered to her dismay that the rav of her community, upset by the moral rectitude of the community's shochet, had invalidated his shechitah. The shochet was a mechutzaf, insolent, and disregarded the rav's decision. Hence, the people of that town who continued to eat his meat were actually eating unkosher food. It happened that a member of the community had made a wedding and - in order to defray the cost of the food - ordered the meat from the disputed shochet. This woman's son had attended the wedding!

"Keeping this story in mind, I reminded myself of an incident that took place in my youth, shortly before I lost my ability to study Torah," the man continued. My family was staying at a hotel, and one day I went out for a short stroll. I met a group of non-Jewish teenagers who began to taunt me for being different. The pressure was building up as they began calling me all kinds of names due to my religious leanings. I contended that I was no different than they were. They put me to a test: 'You must eat some pork,' they demanded. I sought every excuse to dissuade their demand, but they persisted. I finally agreed to take a piece of pork home to eat. They did not fall for my ruse and insisted that I, at least, suck a bone. Regrettably, I agreed. When I returned home I related the incident to my parents, who became upset with me. I remember until this day the patch, physical reprimand, I received from my father that night. When I think about it, ever since that day I have not been able to understand a blatt Gemorah."

This is an incredible story that carries with it a compelling message.

Because of the love which You adored him and the joy with which You delighted in him, You name him Yisrael and Yeshurun.

Klal Yisrael is referred to by two names: Yisrael and Yeshurun. Not only do these names have disparate meaning, they are also written differently. Yisrael is written in lashon yachid, the singular, while Yeshurun is written in lashon rabim, plural form. How are we to understand this distinction? The Baruch Taam gives the following explanation. It is the natural tendency of a father to exhibit greater love to his only child than to any one child in a family of many children. The reason is simple: He channels all of his emotion and love to his one son, while one who has a large family has to divide his love among all of his children. On the other hand, one who has only one son is always nervous lest something happen to him, so that the father will be left with only memories. Certainly, one son does not

ever replace another; nonetheless, one who has a large family will not be left bereft of children. In other words, one who has an only child will have greater love, but it will be a love filled with a certain amount of tension. On the other hand, one who has a large family might have to spread his love around a bit, but his joy is greater than his counterpart.

Hashem loves Klal Yisrael, and He experiences great joy from them. It is simultaneously, as one who has one child and as one who has many children. When it comes to love, the singular is used to demonstrate the great love Hashem has for Yisrael, His only son. In regard to the joy Hashem has with Klal Yisrael, the plural is used to emphasize the great joy that accompanies a large family.

*Moshe said to Aharon: "Come near to the Mizbayach...and provide atonement for yourself and for the people." (9:7)*

Aharon HaKohen was selected to represent Klal Yisrael to provide atonement for himself and the people. Why was Aharon chosen to represent Klal Yisrael? What unique quality did he manifest that made him worthy of being Kohen Gadol? The Targum Yonasan cited by Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita, in his sefer, Aleinu Le'Shabeach, on Parashas Ki Sisa writes that Moshe Rabbeinu, in his hesped, eulogy, for Aharon HaKohen cried out, "Woe is me for you, Aharon, my brother, the pillar of prayer of Klal Yisrael."

The Netziv, zl, questions Moshe's description of Aharon as Klal Yisrael's "pillar of prayer." Was not Moshe the one who constantly entreated Hashem on behalf of the Jewish People? Let us just look back at their history and we will see that it was Moshe, not Aharon, who should be characterized as the Amuda d'tzelusa d' Yisrael: There was the Yam Suf, followed by the manna, the quail and countless incidents during their forty-year sojourn in the desert. Each and every time, it was Moshe who prayed and interceded on their behalf - not Aharon. Why then is Aharon crowned as the Jewish People's great "supplicator?"

To explain this, the Netziv distinguishes between two foci's of prayer: Prayer for great miracles, for the rendering of the supernatural, such as was the case at the Red Sea, the manna, and all the miraculous events that occurred in the desert. A second focus is prayer for the everyday, mundane life - necessities such as health, livelihood, success in raising children and harmony between husband and wife. Every individual has his own "peckel," personal baggage, his own list of requests, which bother him. They may not be important in the overall scheme of things, but, to this person, they are everything! Many assume that the most significant power of prayer is the prayer one makes for wondrous miracles. It is not. It is the prayer uttered on behalf of the "little guy," the common Jew, the housewife, the teenager in need. The daily prayers expressing Klal Yisrael's needs - that is what counts.

Each and every Jew deals with personal challenge in his own individual way. To some, making a livelihood is the most important obstacle to overcome. To others, it is the health and welfare, both physical and spiritual, of their children, that plays a significant role. Yet, to others, it is shidduchim, seeing to it that their child marry the appropriate mate and be happy. There is health, both physical and emotional, which weighs heavy on the minds of some. This was Aharon's function, his area of expertise, the magnet that drew every Jew to him. What better basis for his very selection as the people's representative?

*These shall you abominate from among the birds, they may not be eaten...the chasidah. (11:13,19)*

What a beautiful name - chasidah! Rashi says that the chasidah truly was a bird that performed chesed - with members of its own specie. This is not an admirable trait. We Jews do not believe in selective, discriminatory, chesed. Rashi's use of the word chavrosehah, its "friends", seems to lend itself to a deeper thought. The term chaver/chibur means connection. When two people are connected with each other, they are considered chaveirim. The connection is of an equal and positive nature. There is something in common between the two. A reyah is a stronger form of friendship. In any event, the term chaver refers to someone who sees things in the same manner that I do. We are connected because we agree with each other. This implies that the chasidah acts kindly only with those it can call a chaver, with whom it sees "eye to eye."

The chasidah represents the individual who acts kindly with those that are like him: they dress like him, they pray in the same shul where he prays, they believe in the same approach to serving Hashem as he believes. In short, they are of the same weltanschauung, they share the same perspective and world view.

Is that so bad? After all, there is just so much money and time to go around. Why not stay focused on one particular group - "my people"? First of all, this is not chesed. Chesed means to act benevolently towards others. One who discriminates, does not act kindly towards others - he acts kindly towards himself!

I think Rashi is emphasizing another point with the word chaver. What is the greatest chesed we can perform for another Jew? Even greater than physical chesed is spiritual chesed. Should we ignore another Jew just because he is not as observant as we are? What are we doing about his lack of observance? Is the Jew who is not shomer Shabbos, Shabbos observant, any better off than the observant Jew who is living in a state of poverty? There is no greater form of abject poverty than the Jew who is "empty of mitzvos!" Perhaps, if we would view our non-observant brethren in this light, as Jews in need, we might reach out to them and perform the ultimate chesed- spiritual chesed. We have to remember that our "chavrusashaft," connection, with all Jews is the fact that we are all bnei Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.

The Klausenberger Rebbe, zl, was a towering tzaddik whose overwhelming love for all Jews was legend. It was after the war, after the accursed Nazis had decimated so many of our people, that the Rebbe's boundless love came to the fore. The American liberators supplied him with a vehicle and a driver. The Rebbe went to all the little villages surrounding Feldafing, the DP camp where he was stationed, with the slogan, "I am looking for my brothers." There were Jews there that were hidden during the war who had completely given up hope of ever being reunited with their people. The Rebbe gave them hope; he gave them courage to carry on.

Many survivors followed the Rebbe to Feldafing with no real desire to go. They had food given to them by the Americans. They had support. Why would they want to follow the Rebbe? Many even went so far as to say that they had suffered long enough as Jews. They no longer had any desire to continue living as the oppressed people. The Rebbe convinced them, slowly - very slowly and with great patience - that it was the right thing to be with other Jewish survivors.

Once, the Rebbe encouraged a young teenager to come with him to the camp. The boy resisted because he was sure the Rebbe would not let him go to the movies. The Rebbe was not deterred. He promised the boy that when life returned to some sort of normalcy and a movie theater was opened for the survivors - he would give him the money to purchase a ticket. The boy joined the Rebbe, who later kept his word and bought the boy a ticket to the movies. The Rebbe's love eventually brought the boy

back to Yiddishkeit.

The Rebbe did not lecture the survivors. He understood their questions and inner struggle. He showered them with love and kindness and these were the keys to opening their hearts and souls to return to Hashem. The Rebbe comforted everybody. His motto was: "If you are a Jew, you are my brother! I will do everything that I can for you."

There were dozens of young orphans in the camp with no one to care for them. The Rebbe felt it was his obligation to see to their physical and spiritual needs, in the same manner that a biological father cares for his child. The story is told about a young girl who, due to her abject poverty, walked around the camp without socks. Upon seeing her one day, the Rebbe took off his own socks in the middle of the street and gave them to her. "It is unbecoming for a Jewish girl to walk around this way," he said. While this narrative demonstrates the Rebbe's love and caring, it also underscores his love for the Jewish People. A Jewish girl does not walk around without socks!

As mentioned before, the greatest chesed is the one that stretches across the great divide that exists between those that are observant and those who, for whatever reason, have not yet been fortunate enough to see the true way a Jew should live. The Rebbe did not care about a person's past or present - only his future. An American official once related to the Rebbe that there was a group of Hungarian Jewish girls in one of the DP camps who were acting inappropriately, in a manner indicating that they had completely forgotten their roots. The Rebbe spared no time, and he immediately left for the camp in search of these girls. He spoke to them like a loving father. With compassion and understanding, he was able to convince them to leave the camp and return with him. The Rebbe established a school for these girls, all of whom had been raised in observant homes. At times, when depression took hold of them, and the girls would cry bitterly about their lives and the losses they had experienced, the Rebbe would listen intently and offer soothing words that healed and encouraged. Probably the greatest tribute to the Rebbe was the fact that all the children called him by one name - Tatte, father. They were attached to him like a child to a father, since, indeed, he was truly a spiritual father to them.

It would have been so easy to let apathy take control, and religious differences continue to breach Jewish unity. It took a great man to tower over these differences, to see beyond the petty and inconsequential, and look at the Jewish neshamah, soul, in its pristine beauty. Indeed, it takes a great person to focus upon the areas that unify us, rather than our differences.

*And these shall be impure to you among the creeping things that creep upon the earth; the rat and the mouse, and the tortoise according to its variety. (11:29)*

There is an intriguing Midrash that comments on the word "v'zeh," "and these," with which our Pasuk begins. Chazal tell us Hashem showed Moshe Rabbeinu four things with His finger because Moshe was puzzled by them. He showed him how the shemen ha'mishchah, oil of anointing, was made. Second, He showed Moshe the work of the Menorah. Third, He showed him the creeping things that are ritually impure. Also, He showed him the moon, so that Moshe would know when the new month was to be sanctified. In each case the word "zeh," this, was used to indicate a special emphasis made by Hashem in showing Moshe the intended subject. The Midrash ends with the following statement: "He stirred up the fire and showed him the salamander, for it says in Sefer Tehillim, 29:7, "Kol Hashem chotzeiv lahavos eish," "The voice of Hashem hews out flames of fire." When did He do this? When He said, "And these are they that are ritually impure to you."

What is the Midrash teaching us with the last statement concerning the salamander? Horav Mordechai Rogov, zl, in his *Ateres Mordechai* has a compelling explanation of this Midrash. Hashem was intimating to Moshe that Klal Yisrael would be subject to trial by fire. There would be difficult and trying times in Jewish history when we would encounter persecution and tribulation of the worst kind. The "stirring of the fire" which the Midrash mentions, is a reference to the periods of affliction when our enemies would burn our bodies and destroy our lives. Yet, it was at this very time that Hashem showed Moshe the "salamander," a creature which Chazal in the Talmud Chagiga 27a say, is created and formed from fire. Consequently, this creature is immune to the effects of fire.

Fire destroys everything but fire. Klal Yisrael is likened to the salamander for they will not be consumed by the flames of persecution. Those who attempt to annihilate us will not succeed. We have been in galus, exile, for over two thousand years. How many fires have been set to destroy us? Torquemada did not succeed and neither did Hitler. Nations have come and gone, but Klal Yisrael will live forever. A nation forged in fire will not be destroyed by fire. The Navi Yirmiyahu says, "So says Hashem; is not My word like fire." We have the power of the salamander within us as we cling to the Torah, Hashem's word.

Rav Rogov offers a powerful insight. When was the message regarding the salamander revealed to Moshe? In what context was it related to him? It was in connection to the laws of kosher foods that Hashem stressed our relationship to the salamander. If, in fact, the Torah is still adhered to even after our long and agonizing exile, it is on account of our care and concern specifically to the laws of prohibited foods. These spiritually defiled foods contaminate one's heart, thereby breaking down one's resistance to the effects of the fires of exile.

What a powerful statement! Our bodies are not simple bodies. They are the repository of the holy neshamah, soul, given to us by Hashem. This container must be cared for by following the "directions" given by its "Maker." A vital factor that is necessary if our bodies are to retain their holy spirit, be strong, and able to resist the harmful spiritual and physical challenges of the exile, is by scrupulously adhering to the laws of Kashrus.

*Aharon was silent. (10:3)*

Aharon accepted Hashem's decree. Thus, he became the standard bearer of he whose faith in Hashem dominates personal emotion. In *Avos D'Rabbi Nassan* 14:6, it is recorded that when the venerable sage Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai lost a son, his students all came to comfort him. Each one cited another great individual who had lost a child. To each he responded, "You are not comforting me. You are, instead, giving me more to cry about." In the end, Rabbi Eliezer ben Azaryah was the one who comforted him. He presented the following analogy: A king once deposited a very special object with a trusted subject. Every day, the man would anticipate the moment when he could return the precious object. He was apprehensive that he might not return it to the king in perfect condition. How happy was he when the awaited day arrived, and he was able to return a perfect item to the king. "So, too," Rabbi Eliezer told Rabbi Yochanan, "Hashem gave you a precious deposit. You nurtured it. You taught him Torah, and he left this world sinless, a pious scholar who took leave of his earthly abode much in the manner that he arrived - perfect. You should feel good that you returned the 'King's' deposit in such exceptional condition."

What a remarkable thought! No one should ever be tested in such a tragic manner, but this is a profound understanding of tragedy. The *Chafetz Chaim* manifest a similar approach when his son, Rav

Avraham, passed away in his prime. At the time, the Chafetz Chaim was in Warsaw attending to the publication of one of his seforim. The Shabbos of his son's death, the Chafetz Chaim begged his host to excuse him from the meal, since he did not feel well. He remained in his room for the duration of the Shabbos, explaining that he should really fast for a bad dream which he had in which a Sefer Torah fell out of his hands.

On Motzoei Shabbos, he received a telegram to rush home. He arrived in Radin, his home, as the people were returning from the cemetery, mourning and grieving the tragic loss of the Chafetz Chaim's son. The Chafetz Chaim did not utter a word. He entered his home and sat shivah for the next seven days. He did not cry; he did not wail. He expressed the profound loss of a brilliant Torah scholar. He did not reflect upon his personal loss - only that of Klal Yisrael's.

When he arose from shivah, he cited the story of the Jewish mother whose two beautiful, precious young sons were slaughtered before her eyes by the heinous murderers of the accursed Inquisition. After the tragedy took place, this righteous woman raised her eyes heavenward and declared, "Hashem! Until now, I have always loved You, but I shared my love for You with the love I had for my two sons. Now that my children have been taken from me, my entire love is devoted only to You! I can now fulfill the mitzvah of loving Hashem 'with all your heart and with all your soul'"

"Ribono Shel Olam," passionately proclaimed the Chafetz Chaim, "the overwhelming love I heretofore had for my son, I now give to You!" Aharon HaKohen set the standard. In every generation, special people have demonstrated their love for the Almighty in the manner in which they accepted His decrees. May Hashem no longer find reason to test us.

*And your brethren the entire House of Yisrael shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited.  
(10:6)*

Horav Yaakov Neiman, zl, explains why the Torah enjoins the entire House of Yisrael to grieve for this tragedy. True, the death of a Torah scholar has a far-reaching effect, and every Jew should feel a personal loss in the void left by his demise. Yet, the pasuk seems to imply that the grief is more than theoretical; it is real, as if each Jew personally sustained a particular loss. How are we to understand this? Horav Neiman cites the pasuk in Devarim 32:4, "The Rock! Perfect in His work, for all His paths are justice; a G-d of faith without iniquity, Righteous and fair is He." This pasuk both introduces and summarizes the theme of the poignant prayer we recite when we bring the departed to burial. Basically, the prayer expresses the acceptance of the belief that all of Hashem's ways are just. In the totality of His work, at the "end of the day," -- when the infinite contribution of good fortune and failure, success and disappointment, happiness and sadness, are all tallied up, -- there is a harmonious aggregate, a balanced whole. Every piece fits together, even though the whole picture is beyond human comprehension. What is the meaning of "a G-d of faith without iniquity"? Does the fact that Hashem is without iniquity constitute praise of Him?

Hashem's Heavenly Justice is different from the justice meted out in man's judicial system. In the human system, if one is found guilty of a crime, he is punished. We do not take into consideration the fact that his family might suffer during his period of incarceration. If the guilty verdict is accompanied by the death penalty, then he is executed. The widow and fatherless children that he will leave behind do not affect the court's decision. Heavenly Justice, on the other hand, weighs every factor. No one will be affected unless they themselves warrant some part of the decree. In other words,

if Hashem decrees that one must leave this world as a result of his actions, everything is taken into account - even the pain that will be sustained by his friends! The decision is activated only after everything and every person has been considered.

This is the meaning of the pasuk. Every Jew must grieve the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, because if even one individual Jew did not in some way warrant this grief, then Nadav and Avihu would not have died! Consequently, we are all somehow responsible for this premature demise. Accordingly, we should repent our sins which contributed to catalyzing this tragedy. Perhaps we should reiterate that this statement does not apply only to the deaths of Nadav and Avihu; it applies equally to every event that occurs in our lives.

*Everything among the animals that has a split hoof, which is completely separated into double hooves, and brings up its cud - that you may eat. (11:3)*

A woman who was unhappy with the financial situation at home frequently quarreled with her husband about it. Eventually, the couple came to Horav Moshe Aharon Stern, zl, for advice. He gave them Chazal's time-proven advice that the key to happiness is to be satisfied with one's lot in life and not chase after luxuries. He cited the Chafetz Chaim in his Mishnah Brurah, who writes that the curse of the generation (this was written decades ago) is that when people spend beyond their means, it leads to theft, robbery, shame and disgrace. We read in the Toras Kohanim (Parashas Acharei Mos) in which Rebbe says, "The Torah teaches us how to live properly: A person should not partake of meat on a regular basis, so that he will not become poor. One should, instead, accustom himself to act like a hunter who eats only when he comes across game." The Tur (Orach Chaim 223) writes, "The joy of a poor person who is content with his circumstance is much greater than the satisfaction a rich man feels from his possessions."

This same idea may be gleaned from our parsha. In his Even Shlomo, the Gaon M'Vilna observes that one of the signs of a kosher animal is that it chews its cud. He explains that the fact that the animal regurgitates and re-chews the food already in its stomach demonstrates that it is satisfied and does not seek more. In contrast, the non-kosher animal immediately seeks more as soon as it has digested its food. The continual desire for more is an inherent sign of a non-kosher animal. As a result, the Torah deems it unkosher, so that we will not assimilate this characteristic into our beings.

If we think about it with an open mind, we will note that man's penchant for material excess is at the root of endless problems and misfortunes. An individual's insecurity and low self-esteem take their toll on him. The constant drive to fulfill one's passions, to satisfy one's "supposed" needs, destroys lives - individuals and families.

*These shall you abominate from among the birds, they may not be eaten...the chasidah. (11:13, 19)*

Rashi translates chasidah as the stork. "Why is it called chasidah?" Rashi asks. He answers his own question, "Because it displays chesed, kindness towards others of its species by sharing food with them." One wonders why such a compassionate bird would be stigmatized as a non-kosher fowl? The commentators explain that the chasidah is selective in its chesed, singling out only its own species and refusing to act kindly to "strangers," thereby earning the distinction of a non-kosher fowl. The lesson is

clear: there are no parameters to chesed. It must be performed for everyone, not just for our friends.

There is another aspect of chesed to which I feel Rashi is alluding when he says the stork displays kindness by sharing food with them. What is the significance of sharing food? Perhaps it is the type of chesed with which we should be concerned, rather than with whom the chesed is performed. An old anecdote tells about a poor man who comes to a wealthy man's home on a Monday morning, begging for alms. The wealthy man looks at him and says regretfully, "It is such a shame that you did not come to me yesterday, because Sunday is my charitable day. Monday is my day for bikur cholim, visiting the sick. I devote myself to a specific chesed on each of the various days of the week. I am sorry I cannot be of assistance to you today." It is a cute story which defines a form of hypocrisy that exists among some self-centered "chesed-givers." They decide for whom to do chesed and when to do chesed, and what type of chesed to do. This is not Torah-oriented chesed. The care-giver is only interested in placating his own conscious. He is not really concerned about his fellow man.

Ibn Ezra alludes to another self-centered aspect of the stork's perverted chesed perspective, when he says that the chasidah performs chesed "l'moadim," at specific times. There are people who love to perform acts of kindness - on their own terms, at their own convenience. Shabbos and Yom Tov are wonderful times to be altruistic. Visit the sick and elderly on Shabbos, stop by on Yom Tov, dress up like a clown on Purim and sail through the hospital corridors bringing joy to a sad heart. These are wonderful acts of kindness - if they are not exclusive to the specific times. Shabbos and Yom Tov are times when people have plenty of free time, and the lonely are especially in need during these festive periods. If we allow our "Shabbos chesed" to justify our neglect of those in need during the rest of the week, however, then we are not being kind to them. We are only placating our own emotions. The chasidah teaches us that a "baal chesed" is truly a "baal", in control of his chesed. He does not act kindly because he has to - he performs chesed because he wants to. It is Hashem's way.

Chesed is for all people, regardless of their age, background or religious affiliation. While it is not my place to lecture about chesed, I have recently been moved by the need to reach out to the elderly. Many people are alone. This does not mean that they have no family. It is possible to be surrounded by people and still feel alone - if one does not feel needed or important. It is up to us to reach out to those who are alone, to perceive who might be in need and give them the opportunity to feel needed.

I had occasion recently to spend a few weekends in a large hospital which is under Jewish auspices. I was impressed by the overwhelming chesed performed, both by well-meaning individuals and through the local bikur cholim society. I was inspired by the many observant physicians and their Torah-oriented approach to patient care. I was stirred by the care that some family members are giving their parents. Interestingly, I saw many middle-aged children tending to the needs of their parents. I was surprised, however, at the dearth of grandchildren who were there for their grandparents. Then I was reminded of a comment made to me by a friend after one of my many trips to visit my mother when she was ill, I mentioned that I was exhausted. He said, "Remember, your children are watching you." He was right. Our children will learn by example - the example that we show them.

Speaking about chesed to the elderly, we might take note of a wise statement made by General George S. Patton, "A lot of people die at forty, but they aren't buried until thirty years later." This is a sad, but true, statement. I recently read about a woman in Yerushalayim who was a firm believer that one is obliged to act kindly to everyone -even/especially the elderly. It was 1983, and this highly respected teacher was outraged at all the elderly beggars on the streets of Yerushalayim. She would then go to school and hear her students wonder, "Why does my grandmother just sit around all day?"

She understood that both the children and adults had a misconstrued perception of what it meant to get old. The misconception was leading to tragic confrontations between the generations. The old people felt worthless, robbed of their self-esteem. Rather than feeling a sense of pride in a life of accomplishment, a life of experience and success, they felt unwanted, unloved and unrespected. Was it any wonder that they sat on the streets begging for their daily sustenance?

This energetic and enterprising teacher was determined to change the status-quo. She set up a small workshop. After some prodding and cajoling, she was able to convince some of the beggars to work for her. Her next stop was the nursing homes where some of the patients would sit by the window staring out all day. She started a bookbinding workshop, getting books from schools throughout the city and repairing them at prices far below what the schools were paying. She taught the elderly to feel a sense of self-esteem, self-worth. Her "Lifeline" project, as it became known, spread to ceramics, leathercraft, metal and woodworking. She opened a store called The Elder Craftsman, where she sold Lifeline products. They did well. By 1988, Lifeline employed over 500 elderly people from all nationalities and walks of life. Many were Holocaust survivors who had given up on life and were just waiting for the summons of the Malach ha'Maves, Angel of Death. She had taken elderly, depressed people, who had felt dejection and despair, and given them a new lease on life. They were now happy, energetic, productive and enthusiastic about life, looking forward to the future with hope and excitement. She had a dream - a dream to do chesed with all people. It is easy to perform chesed with the exotic cases - disease, severe illness, broken homes. But what about the old man or woman around the corner for whom their children do not have the time? What about the lonely man or woman whose daily interaction with the outside world is to stare blankly out of the window? What about the "grouchy" old man or woman with whom no one can seem to get along? Does anybody wonder why he is grouchy; What was his past? The chasidah is not a kosher fowl for a reason. Hashem does not want us to develop its evil character traits. For once, we should learn from the birds!

*A fire came down from before Hashem...and they died before Hashem...and Aharon was silent.  
(10:2,3)*

As the joy surrounding the inauguration ritual reached its zenith, tragedy suddenly struck. Aharon's two oldest sons died during their performance of an unauthorized incense service. Aharon's classic response - or lack thereof - attests to his greatness, his nobility and his resolute faith in Hashem. He accepted Hashem's Divine decree. He was silent. He did not exhibit any form of emotion. Hashem's decree is not to be questioned, because the answer is above us. Chazal tell us that misas tzaddikim, the death of the righteous, is "me'chaper," atones for our sins. This idea is derived from the fact that the Torah juxtaposes the laws of the Parah Adumah, Red Heifer, upon the death of Miriam. We infer from this that just as korbanos, sacrifices, atone, so does the death of a tzaddik. Horav Gedalya Eiseman, Shlita, commented on this Chazal, when he spoke shortly after a G-d-fearing woman was brutally murdered during an Arab terrorist attack.

If the Torah is conveying to us the idea that a tzaddik's death atones as completely as a korban, why did it not record Miriam's death in those parshios that address the laws of korbanos intended for atonement, such as the sin-offering or burnt-offering? Why is her death chronicled adjacent to the Parah Adumah, which serves essentially as a vehicle for taharah, ritual cleanliness? He explained that the Parah Adumah is the classic example of a "chok," mitzvah whose rationale and meaning are beyond our understanding. We accept it just because it is Hashem's command. We do not ask, because we will not receive an answer. We accept the reality because that is part of being a Jew: we accept Hashem's

decree - unequivocally.

This same idea applies to the death of a tzaddik. We hope that no one dies. We pray that tragedy not befall anyone, but when it occurs to a tzaddik; when someone who is devout, pious, virtuous and saintly is taken from our midst, usually under heartbreaking circumstances, we ask: Why does tragedy befall such a special person, such a young soul, such a saint who has already suffered so much? The only response is that it is a Divine decree, and we do not question the Almighty. The Parah Adumah is an anomaly. Just as it defies human rationale, so, too, do the deaths of the righteous raise questions for which there is no logical human response. It is a test of our faith and trust in the Almighty. That is the essence of Judaism.

Aharon HaTzaddik set the standard for response to tragedy. It was a day of heightened joy in which he, as Kohen Gadol, was intimately involved. Others have learned from him not to permit personal tragedy to override the joy and sanctity of Shabbos or Yom Tov, Hashem's days of joy. A very poignant example is provided by the following inspiring story:

The Rema in Orach Chaim 288:2 writes, "One who feels pleasure (i.e., finds relief) when he cries, in order to soothe his heart's pain, may do so on Shabbos." Nonetheless, many great and simple Jews would not give into emotion and have not expressed their grief on Shabbos, so as not to disrupt the joy and sanctity of the holy day. Horav Rephael David Auerbach, Shlita, was one such person. A terrible terrorist explosion rocked Yerushalayim. His son, Aharon Meir, and another young man, Arye Yosef Sheinfeld, were two of its victims. They were rushed to Hadassah hospital on Erev Shabbos - both mortally wounded.

As night fell and the Shabbos Queen was ushered in, Aharon Meir Auerbach lay in his bed suffering indescribable pain. Hundreds of splinters of glass riddled his body, terrible burns tortured his skin, as the blood so vital to life was continually ebbing from his wounded body. In a nearby room, his father welcomed Shabbos with what seemed to be his usual serene and enraptured self. Earlier that day, his whole life had been shaken at its very core when he heard the news of the explosion. Knowing that his son would be on his way home exactly at that time, he could barely control himself through the hours of worry and uncertainty. His fears were confirmed: his son lay mortally wounded in Hadassah. He rushed to the hospital, only to be told by the doctors that there was no hope for his son's life. Many yeshivah students came to give blood for their friend, but it was to be of no avail.

Shabbos arrived, and Reb Raphael David donned his Shabbos clothes to welcome the Shabbos with joy. "Shabbos is not a time for tears," he said, his voice filled with faith and reassurance. He ate his Shabbos meal, sang zemiros, the traditional Shabbos songs, his face radiating an inner glow, a joy endemic to one who serves Hashem with love.

The hospital staff would peer into the room, shocked in disbelief. Here was a man singing Shabbos songs, while his son's life slowly ebbed away. Just minutes before he had been filled with worry and anguish over his son's condition. How could he have transformed so radically? They did not understand what Shabbos meant to Reb Rephael David.

He sat by his son's bed all through the night, praying silently - never weeping. In a nearby room, Aryeh Yosef Sheinfeld, the other victim, breathed his last breath. Everyone was in shock - except Reb Rephael David, who told them how to move the body and care for it on Shabbos. In the morning, Reb Rephael David and his wife stood by their son's bed, reciting Shema Yisrael as their son's holy neshamah, soul, rose and soared Heavenward. He did not cry - and he instructed all those present that it was Shabbos. One should not cry.

Suddenly, he began to sing Ein K'Elokeinu, There is no one like our G-d. As he sang, memories rose up before him. His son was only fifteen years old, but he had accomplished so much. An exceptional student, he was the apple of his father's eye. A budding Torah scholar, he had mastered hundreds of pages of Talmud. He had had a bright future, but now his brief life had come to a tragic end.

Yet, Reb Rephael David's faith in Hashem was not shaken. He was resolute in his belief. His voice continued firmly: Mi K'Elokeinu, Who is like our G-d? Reb Rephael's older son arrived after a long walk. But it was too late. He could not see his brother alive. His father greeted him with the bitter news, immediately adding, "Remember, you cannot cry. It is Shabbos Kodesh."

The hours went by and Reb Rephael constrained himself. He did not allow his emotions to overwhelm him. He ate Seudah Shlishis, as he always did. After all, it was Shabbos. He waited a little longer. The Shabbos Queen withdrew: Shabbos was over. Only now did a fountain of tears stream forth, as fifteen years of love - pent up throughout the Shabbos - poured from him. This was Aharon's student.

*And your brethren the entire house of Yisrael shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited. (10:6)*

The Rambam in Hilchos Aveilus 13:10 writes, "One does not weep for the deceased more than three days. But for a Torah scholar, it depends upon their level of wisdom. Nevertheless, one does not weep more than thirty days. There are clearly defined parameters for the length of time one may express emotional grief upon the death of another Jew. Yet, the Torah does not seem to place a time limit concerning the weeping for Aharon's sons. When Moshe Rabbeinu - the quintessential leader and rebbe of Klal Yisrael - died, Klal Yisrael was instructed to mourn for thirty days. For Nadav and Avihu, Aharon's two sons who died tragically, the Torah does not seem to have mandated a limit for the mourning period. Why?

Horav Nachum Percowiz, zl, in his eulogy for his father-in-law, the venerable Rosh HaYeshiva of Mir Yerushalayim, Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz, zl, distinguishes two types of weeping: weeping as a sign of mourning, a component to the aveilus experience; and weeping throughout the generations, bechiah-l'doros, as an educational, inspirational experience for the "Sreifah asher soraf Hashem," conflagration that Hashem ignited. When Divine Justice is manifest, Hashem's Name is magnified and becomes more awe-inspiring. His Name becomes sanctified when people take to heart the punishment incurred by a tzaddik for his slightest infraction.

There is no time limit to Kiddush Hashem, sanctification of Hashem's Name. When Moshe passed away at the end of a long, fruitful life, it was a great loss. Klal Yisrael wept and mourned for thirty days, an appropriate time for feeling the loss of such a great leader. They were not commanded to cry. They cried because they felt the void; they sensed the loss. When Nadav and Avihu died tragically, it was like fire from Hashem; it was an expression of Divine justice which stimulates reflection and cogitation. Thus, Klal Yisrael could come to grips with the experience and the profound, enduring message it was conveying. This cogent experience should evoke an emotional awakening for all times.

*Do not leave your heads unshaven and do not rend your garments that you not die...and your brethren*

*the entire House of Yisrael shall bewail the conflagration that Hashem ignited. (10:6)*

Aharon HaKohen's two eldest sons died in a terrible, tragic fire that consumed their souls, yet left their bodies intact. It was to be a day of heightened joy, the greatest simchah for Hashem, for Aharon and for all of Klal Yisrael. It was the day that the Mishkan was to be dedicated. The festivities were tragically marred. Yet, Aharon and his sons were commanded that, as Kohanim, they could not exhibit any outward signs of mourning. It was Hashem's day. Their personal grief was not to detract from Hashem's simchah. On the other hand, Klal Yisrael was adjured to mourn to the point that if they were to act as the Kohanim and not mourn, Hashem would be angry with them. Two distinguished tzaddikim, righteous scholars, had perished, and everyone was obligated to mourn their loss. Everyone, except the Kohanim.

There are a number of issues that should be addressed. First, we do not find elsewhere the expression, "the conflagration that Hashem ignited," in regard to the death of the righteous. Furthermore, in regard to other tzaddikim, there is a specific time frame for observing the mourning period for them: seven days, thirty days, one year. Regarding the sons of Aharon, it seems to be an ongoing period of mourning. In fact, Chazal teach us that if one weeps during Minchah on Yom Kippur, when the deaths of Aharon's sons is read, he will merit that his own sons will not, chas v'shalom, Heaven Forbid, be taken away during his lifetime. In other words, the obligation to mourn for Nadav and Avihu is unremitting. Why?

Horav Elchanan Sorotzkin, zl, explains that the grief and weeping we are to undergo is not for the deaths of Aharon's sons, per se, but rather, for the cause of their premature passing from this world. Chazal cite a number of reasons which, in accordance to their lofty, spiritual status, manifested a deficiency. Whether it is because they entered the Sanctuary after having imbibed; or they had not yet married; they were not wearing all the necessary vestments; they rendered a halachic decision in the presence of their rebbe, Moshe; they walked behind Moshe and Aharon saying, "When will those two old ones pass on and we will become the leaders of the nation?" These are some of the spiritual shortcomings attributed to Nadav and Avihu. It certainly does not mean that they actually erred in these areas. Chazal are telling us that Nadav and Avihu acted in such a manner that others following them a generation or two later might act inappropriately, based upon the way they acted now. Nadav and Avihu's minor indiscretions would be magnified by others, who would actually be guilty of these sins. This is something to cry about. This is truly a reason to mourn - all the time. In every generation, whenever a death like Aharon's sons' - a spiritual death in which the body remains intact, only the neshamah is lost - is experienced, we must mourn. It is our function and obligation throughout time to educate our youth, to imbue them with the necessary values and virtues, so they do not become guilty of the shortcomings manifest by Aharon's sons. When we notice a problem, it is a reason for weeping. Indeed, if we will take those problems to heart; if we will grieve when a Jewish neshamah is faltering; when we will conquer the indifference and apathy that reigns within us; when we will stop raising up our hands to Heaven in defeat when we confront children who are "at risk" and instead grieve and do something about it - we will merit that the deaths of Aharon's sons, the spiritual loss of our young people, will no longer occur.

*And the pig...it is unclean to you. (11:7)*

Professor Daniel Chavelson was a living tragedy. A brilliant scholar, who became an apostate and converted out of the faith in order to advance his secular status, he enjoyed the respect and friendship of a number of rabbinic leaders. He continued to study Torah on a consistent basis, maintaining an active correspondence of halachic responsa with these rabbis. When the Netziv, zl, was questioned about this enigma, an individual who, although a heretic, was still held in esteem by many observant Jews, he sighed, responding with the following story:

One day the wife of the town's wealthiest man became seriously ill. This woman was very special and G-d-fearing. They sent for the greatest physicians, the most erudite specialists to find some cure for her illness. The doctors all came to the decision that in order for her to live, she must eat meat from a pig. Understandably, both husband and wife vehemently refused to listen to such a cure. Unfortunately, the situation appeared to be very bleak, as her health slowly digressed. She was literally at death's door.

When the rav of the community heard this, he immediately went to the woman and insisted that she partake of the forbidden food. "Not only are you permitted - you are obligated to eat from the pig if it will cure you," exclaimed the rav. "Hashem wants us to live, not to die."

Reluctantly, the woman accepted the rav's ruling, and said that she would eat from the pig. As the rav was leaving, the woman asked, "I have one request. I would like, at least, to have the pig slaughtered by a shochet, ritual slaughterer." The rav held back a smile and agreed to permit the pig to be slaughtered. The shochet slaughtered the pig. The woman now requested that the lungs be examined to make sure there were no adhesions that would "disqualify" the shechitah. Indeed, there was a questionable adhesion on the lobe of one of the lungs. The shochet did not know what to do. He went to the rav, who carefully examined the lung. He said, "This is a difficult decision to make, for if this were the lung of a kosher animal, I would not hesitate to render a decision of kosher. This is the lung of a pig, however. How can I say kosher on a lung, if the rest of the animal is not kosher? When all is said and done, this is a pig! I cannot say kosher on a pig."

It was not necessary for the Netziv to explain the implication of this story regarding the "scholarly" apostate. A kosher lung does not render a pig kosher.

*Moshe said to Aharon: Come near to the Mizbayach and perform the service of your Sin-offering and your Olah-offering. (9:7)*

Rashi explains that the introductory phrase, "Come near to the Mizbayach," was necessary in order to encourage Aharon to come forth. Aharon hesitated to come forward to serve at the Mizbayach as a consequence to his involvement in the sin of the Golden Calf. Targum Yonasan says that Aharon saw an image of the Golden Calf before his eyes as he approached the Mizbayach. This vision elicited his shameful response. Moshe told him, "Why are you ashamed? This is why you were chosen." A number of explanations elucidate this statement. Horav Yitzchak Volozhiner, zl, explains that Moshe told Aharon that, specifically, his profound humility in feeling himself not worthy of this august position qualified him for the position. "Because of this - your humility - you were chosen."

Nachlas Tzvi cites the Talmud in Sanhedrin 7a, which recounts Aharon's emotions preceding the creation of the Golden Calf. He saw Chur, his cousin, lying dead, murdered at the hands of the wild crowd clamoring for a god. He conjectured, "If they kill me too, they will have gone too far. There will be no repentance, no hope left for them." He decided that although it would be wrong to assist them in

making the Golden Calf, it was better for them to sin in this manner than to kill him and be eternally condemned. Aharon made an aveirah lishmah, a transgression for the purpose of saving Klal Yisrael. He "sinned" with mesiras nefesh, self-sacrifice. He risked his own spiritual future in order to protect the nation that he loved so much. Moshe told him, "Because of your overwhelming sense of achrayus, responsibility, your willingness to relinquish spirituality for Klal Yisrael, you were selected to serve and offer korbanos on the Mizbayach." At times, one must see the greater good and act accordingly. We must add that a decision of this sort may be decided only by a gadol, Torah giant, whose non-biased opinion will reflect true daas-Torah.

In the city of Kalinkuvitz, a suburb of Minsk, an incident occurred that had repercussions throughout Lithuanian Jewry. On Erev Yom Kippur, a group of prisoners were brought to the city. Among them were murderers and thieves on their way to be incarcerated in the main jail. The Jews found out that one of the prisoners was a Jew. They implored the officer in charge to permit him to be released for Yom Kippur. They would assume all responsibility for the man. The official deferred to their request, and the prisoner joined the community donned in a borrowed Tallis and Kitel to pray on Judaism's holiest day of the year.

During Shemoneh Esrai, when everybody was hunched over covered by his Tallis, the prisoner asked the guard if he could go out to the "bathroom." Before the guard could even respond, the prisoner had disappeared somewhere among the Talleisim and could not be found. One can imagine the fear that gripped the Jewish community when the congregation discovered this situation. Soon, everyone began to search throughout the town and the surrounding villages, but to no avail. In an effort to cover his own negligence in permitting the prisoner to be released temporarily, the mayor immediately incarcerated the rav and five of the most distinguished members of the community, along with the guard who had failed to watch the prisoner adequately. The next morning pandemonium broke out in the town when the guard's body was discovered hanging from the ceiling of his jail cell. He could not wait to hear the death sentence that would surely have been pronounced against him for his dereliction of duty. Now the only ones left were the rav and the five members of the community who were languishing in jail, afraid for their lives.

Knowing full well the mayor's lust for money, the community attempted to bribe him. He accepted! The price, however, was so exorbitant that they had no hope of ever raising that sum of money. The Jews of Kalinkuvitz decided to secretly send an emissary to the famous Zundel Zonenberg in St. Petersburg, an orthodox Jew whose connections in the government were well-known. His devotion to his People, and his personal piety, were exemplary. If anyone could intercede in their behalf, it was Zundel ha'gadol, Zundel the great. Travel at this time of the year was treacherous, as a result of the rains that had flooded the roads. Jewish lives were at stake. People had no time to feel sorry for themselves. They drew lots, and the lot fell upon the aged dayan, head of the rabbinical court, to be the emissary. Everyone wished him well as he left on this dangerous journey.

He stopped along the way in Minsk to visit with the famous sage Horav David Tebli, zl. After relating to him everything that occurred and where he was going, he asked the great tzadik for a blessing. Rav David told him, "Go in peace, May the Almighty grant you success. Remember that nothing stands in the way of human life - even Shabbos."

The dayan could not understand the meaning of the rav's cryptic message, but "filed" it away in his mind in case he would need the advice one day. Meantime, as it began to rain, the ground became almost impassable, and it was getting closer to Shabbos. What should he do? He remembered Rav David's instructions that human life takes precedence over everything. Therefore, he told his driver to

keep going. He arrived on Shabbos, exhausted, broken and filthy. He immediately ran to the main shul where Reb Zundel was engrossed in his Shachris prayers and cried out to him, "Reb Zundel! Save the Jews of Kalinkuvitz!" The dayan could not contain himself, breaking down from physical and emotional exhaustion.

After relating the entire story and Rav David Tebli's instructions, Reb Zundel himself trembled with awe. He immediately removed his Tallis and went out, going from agency to agency, beseeching those in authority to free the hapless Jews. The Minister of Interior placed all of the onus of responsibility upon Zundel's head if anything went awry in the Jewish community. He made him sign an affidavit attesting to the fact. The only thing that bothered the dayan was the fact that he had desecrated the Shabbos. He told the dayan, "It was the name Rav David Tebli that prompted me to go. Otherwise, I never would have been mechalel Shabbos."

The old dayan returned home by way of Minsk, once again stopping at the home of Rav David Tebli. The rav then explained to him the significance of his chillul Shabbos on behalf of Klal Yisrael. He cited the Rambam who writes in Hilchos Shabbos, 2:3, that when one is compelled to desecrate Shabbos to save a Jewish life, this act of chillul Shabbos should not be executed through a gentile, a slave or women, but rather by gedolei Yisrael, Torah leaders. Rav David Tebli concluded his remarks saying, "If your heart still bothers you regarding your chillul Shabbos, then take for you any and every Shabbos that I have observed and give me in exchange only one Shabbos - the Shabbos that you desecrated in order to save the Jews of Kalinkuvitz!"

*Moshe said to Aharon, "Of this did Hashem speak, saying, "I will be sanctified through those who are close to Me"...and Aharon fell silent." (10:3)*

The commentators render a number of explanations regarding Aharon's silence. The Chafetz Chaim says that Aharon accepted Hashem's decree with love. He did not exhibit any outward indication of depression. He was "va'yidom," inanimate like a stone: no movement, no expression, nothing that would in any way allude to his pain or protest. The Tzor Hamor explains that Aharon's silence in its own right did not constitute an indication of his acceptance, of his tziduk ha'din, accepting/justifying Hashem's judgement. He could have been silent as a result of depression, a feeling of dejection. In his heart, however, he might have harbored pain and resentment for the tragedy that had befallen him. No, Aharon harbored no ill will; he accepted Hashem's judgement with love. In support of this, we see that Hashem addressed His speech to Aharon alone, in instructing him in the laws that deal with Kohanim who are intoxicated. Hashem does not appear to an individual who is depressed or saddened. Aharon's conviction, his love and trust of the Almighty, enabled him to transcend pain and sorrow in order to "see" the truth.

Nachlas Tzvi cites an incident involving the Divrei Chaim, Horav Chaim Halberstam, zl, M'Tzanz, whose son, Horav Meir Nossan, zl, father of the first Bobover Rebbe, zl, passed away at a very young age. The funeral took place on Erev Shabbos. That night, the Tzanzer Rav came to shul and davened with the same warmth and enthusiasm that had been his hallmark. The chasidim could not get over the fact that just a few hours before he had laid his dear son to rest.

During the Rav's tish, table, when the chasidim gathered together with the Rav to hear words of Torah and sing zemiros, inspirational songs, the Tzanzer explained his behavior: "When a person walks along the street," began the Rav, "and someone gives him a strong slap across the back, his first reaction is to turn around and see if the slap is from a friend or foe. If it is from an enemy, his reaction

will be anger, and perhaps even a blow in response. If he sees that it was his good friend that slapped him, however, he realizes that it is not an angry blow. I received a slap from Hashem, a difficult and painful slap, but I know that it came from Hashem - who is my friend."

This response to the tragic loss of a child is unusual, reflecting a sense of conviction that is beyond the scope of the average person. The Tzanzer Rav, however, was no ordinary human being. Indeed, his wife could not reconcile herself to this overwhelming tragedy. She would sit and cry constantly. One day the Rav came over to her and said, "If you would have any idea of the spiritual satisfaction and ecstasy that takes place in Heaven when our grandson recites Kaddish, you would not be so distraught." These powerful words consoled the rebbetzin. Certainly we are not on this level, but we can now have a better understanding of the resolve that Aharon HaKohen manifested in remaining silent.

*Moshe said to Aharon, "Of this did Hashem speak, saying, "I will be sanctified through those that are close to Me..."and Aharon fell silent. (10:3)*

In Toras Kohanim, Chazal state that the righteous are used to being matzdik es ha'din, accepting Hashem's judgement, regardless of its harshness. They support this statement citing three instances of tziduk ha'din: David Ha'melech, when he accepted the onus of guilt that caused his suffering; Avraham Avinu, who, in his profound humility, declared, "I am dust and ashes;" and Yaakov Avinu, when he said that he was too small, unworthy of Hashem's kindness. The question that arises from Chazal is apparent: David suffered, while Avraham Avinu and Yaakov really did not. How are they "accepting" G-d's judgement? All they were doing was expressing their unworthiness in receiving Hashem's favor. Is that tziduk ha'din?

Horav Chaim Goldvicht, zl, derives from Chazal a profound lesson regarding our relationship with the Almighty. During much of a person's life he is blessed with good health, a livelihood and nachas from his children. Such a person, unless he is a fool and is always looking to see what his neighbor has, should be satisfied with his lot in life. Thus, he serves the Almighty amid happiness and joy. In the event the "wheel of fortune" turns against him, suddenly changing his situation for the worse, he becomes disconcerted, wondering why he is suffering. If he is a G-d fearing, Torah-oriented Jew, he will introspect to see where he could have gone wrong. He will search for a reason to "accept" Hashem's decree.

This is the simple way of looking at tziduk ha'din. The individual realizes and accepts Hashem's judgement. Under normal circumstances, he has expected to live life in a positive manner, with health, wealth and happiness. This is his error. Who asserted that he "deserves" a life of happiness and joy? Perhaps it is a special gift from Hashem: Moreover, did he ever stop to think that everything he enjoys - even waking up in the morning - is a gift from Hashem? Why does he remember Hashem, why does he "accept" His judgement, only in times of crisis? We must remember and reflect constantly on the fact that everything we enjoy is a gift from Hashem. Every breath of air that we breathe warrants our boundless praise to the Almighty. Regrettably, only when that breath of air is at risk, do we remember its source.

We now have a new perspective on the life that we take for granted. It is a gift, a very special gift. The reason the righteous never complain when something "bad" happens to them is that they realize that the "good" which they enjoy is a gift. Tziduk ha'din is a profound understanding that every kindness we receive from the Almighty is just that - a kindness, a gift. We are eternally in debt to Him. For the righteous, accepting Hashem's judgement is routine; it is a moment in which one delves deeper

in his understanding of the many favors he receives all of the time. Avraham and Yaakov were constantly mindful of Hashem's beneficence. Hence, even in "good times," they reflected a sense of tziduk ha'din.

*For distinguishing between the impure and the pure, and between the creature that may be eaten and the creature that may not be eaten. (11:47)*

Rashi comments that the Torah need not tell us to be proficient in distinguishing between a cow and a donkey. The distinction is obvious. Rather, the Torah demands that we be expert in differentiating between that which is impure to us and that which is pure to us. This refers to an animal or fowl that has had half of its windpipe severed by shechitah, slaughtering, compared to one that has had most of its windpipe severed. In other words, it takes no expertise to distinguish between species. The Torah demands our expertise in distinguishing a kosher animal that has been properly slaughtered, from one that has not.

Horav Baruch Sorotzkin, zl, notes that the difference between a kosher and a non-kosher animal is in a mashehu, a fraction. That is what it takes to make the difference between chatzi, half, and roy, majority. There is much to be derived herein from both a halachic and ethical perspective. One must eat a kazayis, specific measurement, of matzoh. If he eats a fraction less, he does not fulfill the mitzvah. This applies to all cases where the Torah prohibits certain foods. If one eats a kazayis, he is guilty and will receive kares, spiritual excision; if he eats a fraction less, he is not liable.

It would seem that this entire idea applies only to the shiur, correct measurement. It either fulfills a shiur, or it does not. Rashi, however, teaches us a profound lesson: He implies that a mashehu completely transforms the form and essence of an object. One fraction can alter the basic nature of an animal from impure to pure, non-kosher to kosher. A man begins to shecht, slaughter the animal, and makes it half-way. He has accomplished nothing. He shechts a little more. Now it is a new animal; it is kosher. It was that extra bit of effort, just a little bit longer, just a little bit better, just a little bit more enthusiasm. That is all it takes to create something from nothing, to make a kosher animal from one that would otherwise be not kosher.

This same idea applies to one's personal avodas Hashem, service to the Almighty. One thinks that he has done enough, but in reality he has not. He needs to do a little more to make the difference. That fraction of time, of effort, of enthusiasm, can oftentimes create the difference between mediocrity and excellence, between literacy and scholarship. Two students may attend the same yeshivah and have the same rebbeim, while only one of them succeeds as a scholar. Superficially, it looked like both had been expending the same effort in prayer and study. Regrettably, it just appeared to be the same. One of them worked a little bit harder; one of them davened with a little bit more feeling. That little bit made a big difference in the end-product.

*A fire came forth from before Hashem and consumed them...Moshe said to Aharon, "Of this did Hashem speak saying, "I will be sanctified through those who are dearest to Me...and Aharon fell silent. (10:2,3)*

This is one of the most compelling statements in the Torah. For a father to witness the

devastating death of his two sons -- men who had exemplified service to the Almighty, who had brilliant futures before them -- and to remain silent as stone is incredible. How are we to understand this? Indeed, throughout the generations parents have suffered grievous losses and have accepted it as Hashem's Will. Where does one conjure the temerity, the superhuman strength, to transcend human emotion to accept Hashem's edict in such a manner? Apparently, these have not been ordinary people with an ordinary perception of Hashem's guiding-hand throughout our every endeavor. They believed in the Almighty in such a manner that accepting His decree, however difficult, is a natural response.

Chazal say that Hashem is not content with silence alone. In the Talmud Berachos 60b, Chazal relate that one must bless Hashem for the bad as well as for the good. Silence is not a sufficient response; we must welcome the bad, as we would the good. This is, indeed, a reaction that goes beyond the norm. Yet, this is the ideal that is expected of us. We should bear in mind that the Almighty gives strength to withstand His decrees. He does not demand from a person more than he is capable of handling. He certainly knows us better than we know ourselves.

There is a very moving story told about the Aderes, Horav Avraham David Rabinowitz Tumim, zl, regarding his reaction to the tragic death of his son. He was known to be punctual in his conduct with the community. They rarely had to wait for him. It was the day of his young son's funeral, and the entire community was waiting outside his home for him to come out. They waited and waited, but the Rav did not come out. After two hours, he came out and recited the brachah, "Baruch dayan ha'emes," after which they began the funeral. After awhile, his students asked him what had delayed him in the house.

He explained the delay in the following manner: We are told to make a blessing over bad news, "k'shem" - "like" we make a blessing over good news. The emphasis on the word "k'shem" - "like" - indicates that one must accept bad news with the same joy with which he accepts good news. When I prepared to recite the brachah of "Dayan Ha'Emes," praising Hashem as the True Judge, accepting His verdict, I could not arouse in myself the same sense of joy I felt when I had recited the brachah at my son's Bris. I remained alone in the room for awhile in order to bring myself to that level of emotion.

Horav Avrohom Grodzinski, zl, was a baal yissurim, one who went through life amidst great suffering. Never did it dampen his spirits. He drew strength from his suffering, becoming a better person for it. Shortly after he was appointed Mashgiach of the Slobodker Yeshiva, he was struck by waves of troubles. His wife passed away, leaving him to care for eight young children. It was characteristic of the Mashgiach not to recite the brachah of Dayan Ha'emes immediately upon hearing the tragic news, for he felt that he would not recite it with the proper kavahah, concentration. If Chazal required one to be in a proper state of mind to perform Tzidduk Ha'din, proclaiming the justness of punishment, he must wait until he could accept the terrible decree with an affirmation of joy. He waited two days before reciting the brachah with complete intent and awareness.

We must remember that these stories are not about people who lived hundreds of years ago, but rather in the past generation. These stories demonstrate how Torah study refines one's character and enhances his perspective.

*Moshe said to Aharon: Of this did Hashem speak... "I will be sanctified through those who are nearest to Me, thus I will be honored before the entire People." (10:3)*

In this parsha, the Torah recounts the tragic loss of Aharon's two sons, Nadav and Avihu. The

tragedy in itself is overwhelming; the fact that two such remarkable young men were taken from us under such circumstances makes it even more difficult to accept. Yet, this is part of the Divine plan. Who are we to question the Almighty? Indeed, Chazal state a number of reasons to explain the punitive divine measures against Nadav and Avihu. They are to be considered spiritually deficient only in the context of their lofty plateau of holiness. "Bikrovai Ekadesh;" "I will be sanctified through those who are nearest to Me," seems to be the stated rationale for such severe justice. When a great saint suffers, Hashem has imposed punishment upon the righteous. Through this act, He conveys a message to the rest of the community. If this is how the righteous suffer, surely the punishment in store for the wicked will be much more severe. Nadav and Avihu were selected to be the two paradigms who would sanctify the Mishkan. Moshe told Aharon, "I knew the Mishkan would be sanctified by someone in whom the glory of Hashem rests. I thought it would be one of us. I see now that they are greater than either one of us."

We now have some idea of the madreigah, spiritual plateau, which Nadav and Avihu attained. This makes the circumstance even more enigmatic. Was the lesson that Klal Yisrael would derive from their deaths more important than the lives of these two precious tzaddikim? Can we imagine how much we could have learned from their lives? They were greater than Moshe and Aharon. The Torah and chesed that they might have taught would have been amazing! The opportunity was wiped out in one moment. Their deaths circumvented any possible "living" lesson. Is not the incurred loss greater than the benefit derived from their deaths?

Horav Avigdor Halevi Nebentzhal, Shlita, suggests that it must have been worth it: for Hashem, for Klal Yisrael and for Nadav and Avihu. Chazal tell us that this deficiency was the only flaw on their spiritual character. Their deaths served to atone not only for their generation, but for all ensuing generations! Indeed, Chazal say that one who weeps on Yom Kippur -- when the deaths of Nadav and Avihu are read from the Torah -- is guaranteed that his sins will be forgiven, and he will not outlive his children.

Yet, Hashem saw fit to remove these two tzaddikim from the world. Apparently, they had a greater purpose in death, a greater merit in leaving this world the way they did, than in remaining here. Their Kiddush Hashem, sanctification of Hashem's Name, is greater than the entire Torah and all of the mitzvos that they would have fulfilled during their lifetime.

Kiddush Hashem is the purpose of life. Every creation is created to sanctify Hashem's Name. Performing mitzvos and studying Torah are all for the purpose of glorifying the Almighty. Hashem felt that teaching the people the idea of Morah Mikdash, reverence and awe for the Sanctuary, was of supreme importance. We understand this from Moshe. He thought that his death would be mechanech, dedicate/inaugurate and sanctify the Mishkan. He realized that whatever he would accomplish as Klal Yisrael's leader would pale in significance to the benefit of Kiddush Hashem. He understood that the esteem in which we hold the Mikdash is the foundation of our religion. Respect and fear, reverence and awe, define our relationship towards the Sanctuary.

Horav Nebentzhal takes this idea a step further as he explains the concept of Kiddush Hashem and its underlying rationale. We have a halachic axiom that there are three cardinal sins for which one must give up his life rather than transgress. They are: murder, immorality and idol worship. We can rationalize including murder and immorality; in both circumstances one betrays or hurts another Jew, but why should idol worship be included? As long as the individual knows in his heart that bowing down to this idol is an involuntary act of submission, he should not be compelled to give up his own life. Imagine, a great sage: one whose death will leave a great void in the spiritual landscape of our

People; one who would inspire and minister to the spiritual needs of thousands. His positive influence would be eliminated by his unnecessary death. Why should he go through with it?

One must understand that kavod Shomayim is the supreme act of service to the Almighty. The honor we accord Him takes precedence over every Torah-related endeavor we could ever do. If that basic reverence is lacking, then nothing else has value. This principle is demonstrated by Moshe's willingness and readiness to die in order to dedicate the Sanctuary, to teach Klal Yisrael the compelling importance of kavod Shomayim. Furthermore, although Nadav and Avihu's act of Kiddush Hashem was a public occurrence, it does not have to be that way. The very same obligation applies to an individual in the privacy of his own home - in hiding like so many of our ancestors during pogroms and inquisitions. Kiddush Hashem begins in the heart of each individual. Does the Almighty have ultimate value in your eyes? Does He take precedence over everything? Does it have greater importance than your life? Whenever we attribute greater value to anything than we do to the Almighty, it is a blatant desecration of Hashem's Name - regardless if our action is public or private!

In summation: First, Kiddush Shem Shomayim is the purpose of Creation and should be the objective of humanity. One who does not have this in mind, who does not place his greatest emphasis on this point, does not fulfill his purpose in life, and, in essence, has no inherent meaning in his life. Second, Kiddush Hashem does not necessarily mean to give up one's life for Hashem. One does not have to die to be mekadesh Shem Shomayim. There is kiddush ha'chaim, the sanctification of life, in which every aspect of our lives reflects the greatest reverence and value to kavod Shomayim. After all, this is the way our ancestors lived for thousands of years.

*These shall you abominate from among the birds, they may not be eaten - they are an abomination...the chasidah. (11:13,19)*

One would think that with a name as impressive as chasidah, a derivative from chesed, kindness, this bird would rate a high standard of kashrus. Why is it included as a non-kosher fowl? Commenting on the Talmud Chullin 63a, Rashi attributes the name chasidah to the kindness it displays towards members of its species by sharing food with them. Yet, its comparison is not recognized. The Chidushei Ha'Rim explains that it directs its kindness only towards its own species / fellow. In other words, chesed is not a commodity that we control at our pleasure. If someone does not fit into our criteria for chesed, if he is not one of our fellows, then we do not perform chesed for them. That is not the Torah's perspective on giving. Chesed is a G-d-given mandate. Those whom Hashem has made fortunate enough to do chesed to benefit others, should view themselves as a conduit for helping all who are in need.

We may add another lesson to be derived herein. Performing chesed is not necessarily a sign of kashrus. The fowl must conform to the laws of kashrus, it must have the necessary signs that deem it kosher. Perhaps this might serve as a lesson for us. While performing humanitarian acts of kindness is certainly a valuable trait, it does not mitigate non-conformance to Jewish law. One will receive his due reward for his act of benevolence. Unfortunately, he will also have to answer for ignoring the rest of the Torah.

*If an animal that you may eat has died, one who touches its carcass shall become contaminated. (11:39)*

We can derive some thoughtful lessons from the laws of tumah and taharah, ritual purity. Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, contends that the various cases of ritual contamination are derived from the principal source of tumah, the *avi avos ha'tumah*, "father of the fathers of contamination," the human corpse. Death is the ultimate expression of the separation of the soul and spirit from the matter which we call the human body. Hence, the corpse represents the physical dimension in its totality, in its most absolute form, severed from the moral freedom that life offers us. The freedom to choose between right and wrong, between good and evil, is the basis of our relationship with the Almighty. It gives the ability to rise above the mundane to serve Hashem. The closer a creature is to the human condition, such as mammals, or the more an object or garment brings to mind his presence, the greater the susceptibility to contamination.

Horav Hirsch suggests that clothing, vessels, and tools implement the most direct indication of man's activity and presence. Thus, the laws of tumah, contamination, regarding these objects are identical with those which apply to man. This is consistent with the halachic axiom of "*cherev, harei hu k'chalal*," a sword is like, (contracts tumah) the actual corpse. By avoiding tumaas- keilm, contamination of our vessels and the objects of our social and individual activity, we elevate and consecrate them to our holy ideal.

Another important lesson to be noted from the laws of tumah may be derived from the fact that contamination spreads to any article through the vehicle of simple contact. This is in stark contrast to holiness which is transmitted through actual absorption of the holy object. Horav Eli Munk, zl, draws a parallel to good and evil. While evil is spread easily, travelling like an unleashed disease, holiness and good require real penetration in order to be transmitted to others. While it is true that exposure to good is in itself a wonderful opportunity for inspiration, if it is to endure, one must assimilate this virtue into his psyche.

*And Moshe spoke to Aharon: Approach the Altar and offer your (korban) Chatas and your (korban) Olah. (9:7)*

*Chazal* explain why it was necessary for Moshe to speak emphatically to Aharon saying, "Approach the *Mizbayach*." Aharon was "shy," afraid to approach the *Mizbayach*. He saw the likeness of an ox with its horns in the *Mizbayach*, and he was afraid. Moshe told him, "Take courage and approach the *Mizbayach*." Aharon was anxious, reflecting a fear that ought to take hold of any conscientious leader who assumes his position. He understood the heavy responsibility of his position and the lofty mission of being leader, teacher, and interpreter of *d'var* Hashem.

His fear, however, had an additional aspect. The image of an ox brought back memories of the fateful day upon which the Golden Calf was made. As Horav Shlomo Breuer, zl, comments, Aharon knew only too well the effect of an offense which a *Torah* leader commits. Regrettably, he experienced the tragic results of an error which one who stands at the forefront of *Klal Yisrael* commits. While a leader's positive actions may not necessarily inspire widespread enthusiasm, his weakness, his deference to overwhelming pressure, can have tragic repercussions. Aharon knew experientially the sad outcome of his misinterpreted action concerning the Golden Calf. Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl, explains Aharon's reason for making a calf: Aharon sought to channel the people's rebellion into an innocuous outlet. The people clamored for a leader. Initially, they said they were seeking a replacement for Moshe *Rabbeinu*; in truth they wanted a new divinity. In order to confine the rebellion, Aharon selected a

member of the calf family. In the vernacular of sacrifice, the calf represents servitude as opposed to mastery. It would serve as an insignificant outlet for the people's insurrection. By selecting the weak, subordinate calf, over the strong, more independent ox, Aharon sought to downplay the people's rebellion.

The people did not accept the *eigel*, calf, as Aharon had intended. They danced before it and bowed to it, as if it were a G-d. They transformed the *eigel* into a *shor*, ox. They took what was intended as an illusion of divine intermediary and transformed it into Divinity. The *shor* represented full-fledged idolatry. The nation that Hashem had selected to be His People, the nation that had achieved nobility, abdicated its achievements for a *shor*--a new god.

Aharon brought two sacrifices when he assumed office as *Kohen Gadol*--a *shor* and an *eigel*. He was required to bring both of these animals as an act of atonement so that he would confront the devastation that can result when one accepts any concession in the representation of the Divine truth--the *eigel* turns into a *shor*!

Is it any wonder that Aharon was overcome with anxiety and humility as he approached the *Mizbayach*? As *Horav* Breuer so beautifully puts it: Aharon's appearance before the *Mizbayach*, the central site of his new duties, vividly recalled for him the darkest hour of his past. In the Altar he saw the shape of an ox, implying the heavy burden and awesome responsibility of *Torah* leadership. Moshe asked him, "My brother, why do you fear? It is the specific fact that you are nervous; your very reticence bespeaks your fitness for the position. Only a leader who fears the results of error, who places before himself the overwhelming responsibility of his position, is qualified to lead. This is probably true in every area of endeavor. One who does not fear the result of his error should not be in a position of leadership. True success is achieved when one has the ability to acknowledge and confront error.

*And Aharon was silent. (10:3)*

Ramban explains that Aharon actually did cry. Aharon silently accepted Hashem's decree only after Moshe consoled him by telling him of the enormous *kiddush* Hashem, sanctification of Hashem's Name, which Nadav and Avihu had effected. Aharon's response to the tragic deaths of his two eldest sons serves as a paradigm for those who confront tragedy. He was silent, accepting the decree. Did Aharon exhibit the loftiest form of acquiescence, or is there another -- more exalted -- way of confronting Hashem's decree?

Tiferes Shlomo, the Admor m'Radomsk, zl, comments that *Chazal* laud Aharon *Ha'kohen* for his "silent" response to his sons' deaths. In fact, we find that Hashem singled out Aharon, speaking directly to him about the laws concerning *Kohanim* serving in the *Mikdash* after having imbibed intoxicants. There is, however, yet a higher plane of acceptance, one more praiseworthy than silence, one that David *Ha'melech* employed during his most painful and afflicting times. David sang! In *Tehillim* 30:10, where David *Ha'melech* says, "So that my soul might make music to You and not be stilled, Hashem my G-d, forever will I thank You." To be silent, not to criticize what is unmistakably a painful and overwhelming decree, is truly a level that most people cannot attain. To be able to sing praise to Hashem, expressing love and devotion amidst pain and sorrow, reflects an attitude that only David *Ha'melech* exhibited. We must endeavor to understand the difference between Aharon and David. Indeed, *Chazal* seem to characterize Aharon's response as being the most impressive.

We may suggest that the difference lies in the type of tragedy. To lose a child, especially two sons of such remarkable caliber on the most joyous day of one's life, is an unparalleled tragedy. That is

not the reason, however, that Aharon kept silent and did not sing. A feeling of guilt accompanies the crushing pain and debilitating sorrow of losing a child. Were the parents in any way responsible? Was it something that they did or did not do that effected this terrible punishment? In most instances, such emotions are ridiculous, but that is human nature. Thus, while Aharon apparently accepted Hashem's decree, his role as a parent might have restrained him from exhibiting a more positive response.

We must always bear in mind that everything that occurs comes directly from Hashem. Consequently, it is only to Him that we can turn for hope and salvation. This writer had occasion recently to visit with Horav Eliezer Levi, Shlita, *rebbe* and distinguished member of Telshe Yeshivah's faculty, during his recent illness. Upon entering the room, I encountered *Horav* Levi sleeping. A few minutes later he woke up. After acknowledging my presence he said, "Do you know the meaning of 'Hope to Hashem, strengthen yourself, and He will give you courage; and hope to Hashem'? Why do we repeat the phrase '*Kaveh el Hashem*'? The answer is that it is not sufficient to simply say, One must infuse "Hope to Hashem" into one's heart and very being, so that he really means it. It must be an expression of the heart. It should strengthen and encourage someone. Only then does it really have meaning."

What powerful words! How often do we say, "*Got vet helfen*," the *Ribono Shel Olam* will help, simply as a figure of speech, without really believing it in our hearts? The feeling that Hashem is with us at all times and can respond in the blink of an eye must be something more than a statement we make by rote; it must be part of every fiber of our being.

An interesting vignette was heard recently regarding the phrase "*Got vet helfen*": Someone came before Horav Shraga Feivel Mendelson, *zl*, seeking a *brachah*, blessing, for someone who was ill. *Horav* Mendelson responded, "*Got vet helfen*." A distinguished student, himself a great *talmid chacham*, was sitting nearby and said, "*Got vet nisht helfen!*"--"Hashem will not help!" Everyone looked at him puzzled. "What do you mean that Hashem will not help?" The *rav* responded, "Hashem does not help--He does everything --Himself!" We must open up our eyes and see through the maze of ambiguity, so that we realize that it is only to Hashem that we can turn. Perhaps the sooner we acknowledge this fact, the less frequently we will have to be taught this message.

*The camel, for it brings up its cud, but its hoof is not split, the hyrax, for it brings up its cud but its hoof is not split..., and the hare, for it brings up its cud and its hoof is not split.*  
(11:4, 5, 6)

The *Torah* identifies those animals that have only one *siman*, sign, of *kashrus*. Interestingly, the *Torah* seems to employ the three tenses concerning the lack of split hooves in describing the animals: past, present, and future. The *Torah* says, --"*it does not have split hooves*," in the present; --"*it will not have split hooves*," the future;

-- "*it's hooves were never split*," in the past. What is the significance of these three expressions? *Ma'ayanah shel Torah* cites one of the *gedolei ha'mussar*, who infer a noteworthy lesson from this *pasuk*. When one is about to declare an individual or an organization *tamei*, spiritually unclean, it is imperative that we take everything into account--not simply the present situation. All too often we are quick to pass judgment, criticize, and perceive the present negativity of an individual.

The *Torah* exhorts us to view people and issues in a total context. Let us look at the past! Do certain factors in one's past mitigate his present status? Is he merely a victim of circumstances, or did

his past influence his present behavior? Even if the past looks bleak, if we cannot ameliorate his present activities by looking back at his past, then we should look to the future in order to ascertain whether one still exists. Perhaps sometime in the future, this individual will perform *teshuvah*, repentance. Before rendering a decision of *tumah*, we should confirm that all hope has been lost.

We may add that in dealing with circumstances involving a person's life, it is imperative that we be aware of all of the issues. Just because an individual did not do well in the past in a specific scenario--school, teacher, home, or community, we should not accept this as a definitive indication for the future. We should not smugly pass judgment upon a student simply because we have not been a successful teacher. Perhaps we are not the best teacher for that student. Others might have succeeded where we have failed.

This writer once heard a fascinating thought from Horav N.Z. Dessler, Shlita, who related it in the name of Horav Leib Chasman, zl. A carpenter works with wood. Consequently, during the course of the day, wood chips will fall to the ground. As he walks around his shop or work-site, the carpenter will be stepping upon wood. Thus, the glazier, who works with glass, will be stepping upon glass. A *mechanech*, Torah teacher, works with *Yiddishe neshamos*, Jewish souls. If he is not careful, he will step upon the *neshamos* that fall by the wayside! As transmitters of *Torah* from one generation to the next, we must reflect upon our awesome task and its overwhelming component responsibilities.

*You shall hallow yourselves and be holy...For I am Hashem Who took you up from the land of Egypt to be your G-d, you shall be holy for I am holy. (11:44)*

This *pasuk*, which concludes the *parshah*, comes at the end of the Jewish dietary laws. *Kashrus* is one of the areas in which the Jew distinguishes himself from the rest of the world. The message of this *pasuk* reveals the significance of this distinctiveness. Horav Moshe Swift, zl, notes the words, "*For I am Hashem Who took you up from the land of Egypt.*" Elsewhere in the *Torah* and in our *tefillos*, prayers, we say, "*Who brought you out of the land of Egypt.*" The *Torah* emphasizes here that we were brought up--elevated--to a higher level, so that Hashem would be our G-d, that He should be seen in us. We are to be holy because He is holy. We are to reflect His presence in our total demeanor. The Jew is to be distinct from the nations of the world. This distinctiveness is the symbol of his inherent *kedushah*, which should be his source of pride.

We must view our distinctiveness as a source of pride and honor. It raises us up; it consecrates our lives, as it sanctifies us. The Jew who is ashamed of his Jewishness, probably has many other sources of shame.

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