CRITICIZING THE CRAFTSMAN

by Shlomo Katz

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Emor

R' Zerachiah Halevi z"l (the "Ba'al Hamaor"; 12th century) concludes his work on the laws of Pesach

with the following discussion: Because Jews outside of Israel observe an extra day of each yom tov, based on a theoretical doubt as to the correct date, many people have the custom to eat in the sukkah on Shemini Atzeret, even though it is actually the day after Sukkot. However, because the prayers and kiddush for Shemini Atzeret demonstrate clearly that Sukkot is over, the gemara mandates that the berachah over the sukkah not be recited on Shemini Atzeret, lest our actions appear contradictory.

Why then, asks the Ba'al Hamaor, do we not follow the same practice on the second night of Pesach, and count the first night of the Omer without a berachah? After all, is it not contradictory to hold a second seder, on the one hand, implying that tonight may be the first night of Pesach, and to count the Omer, on the other, clearly demonstrating that tonight is the second night of Pesach (for that is when the mitzvah of the Omer begins)?

He explains that on each holiday, we give the Torah mitzvah precedence and relegate the rabbinically-ordained mitzvah to a secondary status. The Torah ordains that after seven days of Sukkot, we observe the holiday of Shemini Atzeret. We cannot let the rabbinic mitzvah (sitting in the Sukkah for an extra day, based on our doubts about the calendar) interfere with or contradict that Torah mitzvah. On the second night of Pesach, however, it is counting the Omer that is the Torah mitzvah, and holding the Seder which is the rabbinic mitzvah. Certainly, therefore, we should not consider counting the Omer without a berachah! [Neither can we skip the berachot recited at the second Seder, most of which are blessings over food.]

> *"The kohen who is greater than his brothers . . . he shall not marry a widow." (21:14)*

The prohibition on the kohen gadol's marrying a widow reminds us how powerful a person's desires are, and how far one must go to distance himself from temptation. How so?

The commentary of the Ba'alei Tosfot gives as the reason for this prohibition that the kohen gadol may find himself attracted to a married woman, and on Yom Kippur, when he enters the Holy of Holies, he may pray for the woman's husband to die.

Of whom are we speaking?! Of the spiritual leader of all of the Jews, and at the holiest and most solemn moment of the year, no less. But such is the power of the yetzer hara! (Shai Latorah)

> *"When you slaughter a todah/thanksgiving offering to Hashem, you shall slaughter it willingly." (22:29)*

R' Raphael Yom Tov Lipman Halpern z"l (the "Oneg Yom Tov"; 19th century) asks: Why is the korban Todah singled out here to be brought willingly? All sacrifices must be brought willingly!

He explains: We read in Tehilim (116:16-17), "Please, Hashem, for I am Your servant, son of Your handmaid; You have released my bonds. To You I will sacrifice a todah/thanksgiving offering and the Name of Hashem I will invoke." King David meant: I am Your servant, the son of a servant; therefore, it should be impossible for me to act against Your will. However, You have released my bonds, and given me free will. Therefore, I must acknowledge You. ("Todah" shares a root with "hoda'ah"/ "acknowledgment.")

What did King David mean? R' Halpern writes: There are certain halachic rules which apply to a person who is classified as a "modeh be'miktzat"/"one who acknowledges owing a creditor only part of what the creditor claims." However, one can be considered a modeh be'miktzat only if he has the opportunity to deny the other part of the debt. If, for any reason, that possibility does not exist (for example, if there are witnesses to the contrary), once cannot become a modeh be'miktzat.

Thus, King David said: "Because You have released my bonds and granted me the free will to deny You, therefore I can acknowledge You." Similarly, R' Halpern writes, the verse in our parashah is teaching: When you bring a thanksgiving offering to Hashem to acknowledge your debt to Him, be aware of your free will. One who acknowledges a debt because he has no free will to do otherwise is not worthy of the name, "One who acknowledges." (She'eilot U'teshuvot Oneg Yom Tov: Introduction; quoted in Yalkut Lekach Tov p. 219)

> *"The son of an Israelite woman went out - and he was the son of an Egyptian man - among the Children of Israel; they fought in the camp, the son of the Israelite woman and an Israelite man. The son of the Israelite woman pronounced the Name and blasphemed." (24:10-11)*

R' Avigdor Nebenzahl shlita (rabbi of the Old City) asks: On the surface it would seem that the introductory pasuk telling us that they fought in the camp is superfluous. One who blasphemes the Name of Hashem is liable with the death penalty; does it really matter to us that prior to his doing so, he fought with another Jew?

He answers: Perhaps we can explain that the Torah was trying to teach us the principle of "aveirah goreret aveirah"/"one sin leads to another sin." (Avot 4:2). This son of the Egyptian fought with his fellow Jew, a sinful act. This initial sin [fighting with another Jew] eventually led to the very severe sin of blaspheming the Name of Hashem.

[How does the sin of fighting with another man lead to blaspheming the name of G-d?] Perhaps we can explain it as follows, says R' Nebenzahl. The mishnah (Avot 4:1) states: "Who is honored? He who honors others, as it is said (Shmuel I 2:30), 'For I honor those who honor Me, and those that scorn Me

will be accursed'." Why does the mishnah, when outlining for us that in order to be honored by one's fellow man, one must honor others, quote a pasuk describing what will happen to one who does or does not honor Hashem? We must explain that honoring one's fellow man is tantamount to honoring Hashem, for Hashem created these people and for that reason they are deserving of honor. This can be compared to an artist who painted a picture; an insult to the painting is an insult to the artist, and so too complimenting the painting is equal to complimenting the artist. Honoring Hashem's creations is the same as honoring Hashem.

The gemara relates a relevant story: A Tanna/sage of the mishnah met a man whom he found extremely ugly. The Tanna stated: "How ugly is that man!". The man responded, "Go and tell the craftsman who made me, 'How ugly is this vessel that you made'." The craftsman in this case was Hashem, and the ugly person was telling the Tanna to go tell Hashem that He had made an ugly vessel. The Tanna regretted what he said, as the gemara relates: "When he realized that he had sinned he got down from the donkey, prostrated himself before him and said to him 'I have spoken out of turn to you, forgive me'." (Taanit 20b). One who ridicules what Hashem created is ridiculing the Creator. (From a lecture delivered at Yeshivat Hakotel, 9 Iyar 5758) [To obtain the full text of the lecture, write to: "ndk@hakotel.org.il"]

R' Shraga Moshe Kalmanowitz a"h
born 1918 - died 20 Nissan 5758 (April 16, 1998)

This week marks thirty days since the passing of R' Shraga Moshe Kalmanowitz, Rosh Yeshiva of the Mirrer Yeshiva in Brooklyn, N.Y. In addition to leading a major yeshiva, R' Shraga Moshe was often found encouraging and assisting students in other New York yeshivot, particularly less-privileged Sephardic and Russian students. Like his father before him (see below), R' Shraga also was an activist for Jews oppressed in other countries, particularly Egypt.

R' Shraga Moshe entered the Mir Yeshiva in Poland when he was ten (!) years old, and later studied in the Kamenitz Yeshiva under R' Baruch Ber Leibowitz. Shortly before the United States entered World War II, R' Shraga Moshe arrived in the United States, where he studied in Yeshiva Torah Vodaas under R' Shlomo Heiman and R' Reuven Grozovsky (son-in-law of R' Baruch Ber).

R' Shraga Moshe's father, R' Avraham Kalmanowitz, was rabbi of Tiktin, Poland, president of the Mir Yeshiva in that country, and, later, founder of the yeshiva's American branch. After arriving in the United States in 1940, he became a major figure in the rescue efforts of American Orthodox Jewry, including organizing aid to European Jewry and lobbying the Roosevelt administration to open America's borders to refugees. (One of R' Kalmanowitz's few allies in the administration was Treasury Secretary Morgenthau, but even that alliance was not forged until R' Kalmanowitz fainted from agitation on the Secretary's office carpet.) In later years, R' Avraham took up the cause of Moroccan

Jewry. (Sources: Yated Ne'eman: 28 Nissan 5758; A Fire in His Soul, p.126)

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at Project Genesis start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the Hamaayan page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.