

SPRINKLED WITH WISDOM

by Shlomo Katz

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Vayikra

One of the mitzvot of this week's parashah is (2:13), "On all of your sacrifices you shall sprinkle salt." The gemara (Menachot 21) comments: "I might think that you shall fill it with understanding; therefore the Torah says 'You shall sprinkle'." Rashi explains: I might think that a sacrifice should be saturated with salt, just as a person is saturated with wisdom and understanding. In order to forestall this mistake the Torah says, "No! You shall merely sprinkle the salt on it."

R' Yitzchak Blazer z"l (died 1907) notes that the gemara quoted here demonstrates how different we are from our ancestors of Talmudic times. He explains:

When trying to explain something that is not readily apparent, one ordinarily chooses a metaphor whose meaning is obvious. How strange it is that when choosing a metaphor for something that is "saturated" or "dripping" with salt, the gemara would describe a person who is overflowing with wisdom. We can only assume that that description fit the typical person of that period, such that the gemara's metaphor would have been readily understood. In contrast, notes R' Itzele (as R' Blazer was known), common idioms today describe something that makes no sense as "lacking salt" or "lacking taste" (in Hebrew: "chasar ta'am"), rather than saying that something that has no salt is lacking sense. It seems that in our generation, salt is more readily available than wisdom, unlike in Talmudic times, when wisdom was the more common of the two.

A similar change in human nature is seen in the Mishnah (Avot ch.2): "One who borrows from man is [bound to pay] just as if he had borrowed from G-d." The language of this Mishnah suggests that, while people of Mishnaic times were sometimes lax in paying their earthly debts, they all recognized clearly their debts to Heaven. Therefore, the Tanna (sage of the Mishnah) teaches us that our obligation to man is no less than our obligation to G-d. How different it is in our times, for we much sooner forget to repay our debts to G-d than we do our debts to our banks and our neighbors. (Kochvei Ohr: chapter 50, Ma'amar "Mah Bein Dorot HaRishonim L'Acharonim")

(Ohel Yehoshua: D'rush 1)

"A soul that will sin unintentionally against any of the laws of G-d. . ." (4:2)

Because we are unable to bring korbanot chatat (sin offerings) when the Bet Hamikdash is not standing, R' Moshe Isserles z"l ("Rema") writes that if a person has unintentionally sinned in such a manner that he is obligated to bring a korban chatat, he should give a certain sum of money to charity in place of the offering. The Mishnah Berurah adds that such a person should also read a section of the Torah which describes the korban chatat.

(Shulchan Aruch, O.C. 334:26; Mishnah Berurah, ibid. para.80)

R' Yosef Chaim of Baghdad (died 1909) once was asked: Does donating a sum of money to charity (or reading the Torah portion which describes the chatat) replace the sin offering, or does the unintentional sinner remain obligated to bring a korban chatat at such time as the Bet Hamikdash is rebuilt? He answered that the unintentional sinner indeed remains obligated to bring a sin offering when the opportunity arises, and he proved the correctness of his view by citing the following Talmudic sources:

The gemara (Shabbat 12) relates that one Shabbat, the sage R' Yishmael ben Elisha became so

engrossed in his learning that he unwittingly tilted the lamp in front of him to improve the flow of the oil to the wick. Realizing what he had done, he noted in his diary: "I, Yishmael ben Elisha, am obligated to bring a sin offering upon the rebuilding of the Temple." If, in fact, one can fulfill his obligation merely by giving charity or reading relevant verses from the Torah, why did R' Yishmael ben Elisha not do so?

Another proof can be brought from the gemara (Nedarim 10a) which states that many tzaddikim wanted to bring sin offerings [see explanation below], but, even when the Bet Hamikdash was standing, they never had the opportunity to do so because G-d protects the righteous from unintentional sins. What did these tzaddikim do? They took the vows of a nazir, and thus became obligated to bring the sacrifices - including a chatat - that a nazir brings upon completing the period of his nezirut/vow (see Bemidbar 6:14). This story, too, demonstrates that one cannot fulfill his obligation solely by reading from the Torah or giving charity, for if one could, why did these tzaddikim have to take the vows of the nazir in order to bring a sacrifice? They could have read the appropriate verses and in that way get "credit" for "bringing" a chatat!

(She'eilot U'teshuvot Torah Leshmah, No. 120)

Why would the tzaddikim referred to above want to bring sin offerings if they were not obligated to do so? When a korban chatat is brought, it incidentally atones for minor sins that are themselves not of the type that warrants bringing a sacrifice. Although the tzaddikim knew that Hashem protected them from serious sins that would necessitate their bringing a chatat, they were afraid that they had nevertheless transgressed minor sins that required atonement, and they hoped that this atonement could be achieved by bringing the chatat of a nazir.

(Commentary of Rabbenu Nissim: Nedarim 10a)

Pesach

We read in the Torah that Hashem foretold to Avraham that the Jews would be exiled. [Some commentaries say that the exile was a punishment for Avraham because he questioned G-d's promise that he would inherit Eretz Yisrael.] On the other hand, Chazal tell us that the exile in Egypt was caused by Yosef's brothers selling him as a slave. Which is the real reason? Similarly, the gemara teaches in one place that the Bet Hamikdash was destroyed because of the prevalence of murder, adultery and idolatry. In another place, the gemara states that the Bet Hamikdash was destroyed because the Jews did not study Torah. Again, which is the real reason? R' Yisrael Reisman shlita explained (in one of his Motzaei Shabbat Navi classes) that Hashem runs the world the way a person does a jigsaw puzzle. How does one decide where to place each piece of the puzzle? The

answer is that there are often multiple reasons for placing a particular piece in a specific location, i.e., the right side fits the piece on the right, the left side fits the piece on the left, etc. So, too, we should not look for one reason for why Hashem acts the way He does. There may be multiple reasons.

A young man in Israel married into a family which did not have the custom of stealing the afikoman. When he had a son who was old enough to "steal" his grandfather's afikoman, the latter insisted that such behavior violated the Torah's prohibitions on theft and extortion. This dispute was then brought before R' Chaim David Halevy z"l (see page 4), who wrote as follows:

The gemara (Pesachim 109a) mentions a custom of "grabbing" the matzah in order to keep the children awake. As explained by Rashi and Rashbam, this does not refer to a custom that children steal the afikoman, but rather that the matzah was stolen from the children. Why was this not prohibited as stealing? Apparently, writes R' Halevy, because it is justified as one more strange thing that we do on the seder night to highlight for the children the uniqueness of the night.

The gemara (Bava Metzia 61b) states that stealing is prohibited even if one does not desire the object of the theft, but merely intends to pain the victim. Interestingly, Rambam does not quote this law in his Code. Instead, Rambam writes that one may not steal, even in jest. Why doesn't Rambam quote the gemara's law? Also, what is the source for Rambam's law that one may not steal in jest?

R' Halevy explains: Since we know that Rambam did not invent laws, nor did he ignore laws that were found in the Talmud, we may assume that Rambam was merely reformulating the law that one may not steal in order to pain another. Why did Rambam do that? Because he wanted to teach us, incidentally, that the only time that stealing in jest is prohibited is when it is intended to cause pain. However, stealing the afikoman at the seder is not that type of theft. Stealing the afikoman is intended only to "liven-up" the seder and interest the children.

(Aseh Lecha Rav Vol. VI, No. 35)

The past few weeks have seen the loss of three prominent rabbis and roshei yeshiva. These three are profiled here:

R' Chaim David Halevy z"l was the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv for the past 25 years. He was known to many as the author of the multi volume responsa Aseh Lecha Rav. In that work, he examined, in Hebrew vernacular, many contemporary halachic and hashkafic issues. ["Hashkafah" literally means "outlook," and refers to the way one looks at events and issues in light of the Torah's teachings.]

R' Halevy passed away on 12 Adar at the age of 74. In addition to the above-mentioned work, he was the author of a six-volume halachic work entitled Mekor Chaim.

R' Moshe Aharon Stern z"l was the mashgiach/dean of students at the Kaminetz Yeshiva in Yerushalayim for the past 20 years. Born in 1926 in New York, he was a grandson of the famed tzaddik, Reb Yaakov Yosef Herman (subject of the book All for the Boss). (R' Moshe Aharon's mother, Esther, passed away just six weeks ago.)

In his youth, R' Moshe Aharon studied at Yeshiva Torah Vodaas. At age 18, he traveled to Eretz Yisrael and enrolled in the Kamenitz Yeshiva, where he remained for the rest of his life. Eventually he became a maggid shiur/lecturer in the yeshiva, and then the mashgiach.

In addition to his formal education at the Kamenitz Yeshiva, R' Moshe Aharon was close to leading sages such as the Brisker Rav (R' Velvel Soloveitchik), R' Yaakov Kamenetsky and R' Chatzkel Levenstein.

Besides his official role, R' Moshe Aharon was readily available for other institutions and causes that sought his time. He was particularly known as a successful marriage counselor. R' Moshe Aharon left no writings, as his manuscripts were recently stolen.

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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.
