

BREAD IN YOUR BASKET, BUT NOT IN YOUR SOUL

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Parshas Acharei Mos

Bread in Your Basket, but Not in Your Soul

Volume 25, No. 29

Sponsored by Martin and Michelle Swartz in memory of Martin's grandmother Eva K. Lichman (Chava bat Dov Ber) a"h

In one of the last verses in our parashah, the Torah warns, "You shall safeguard My decrees and My judgments, and not commit any of these abominations--the native or the proselyte who lives among you. For the inhabitants of the Land [Eretz Yisrael] who are before you committed all these abominations, and the Land became contaminated. Do not let the Land disgorge you for having contaminated it, as it disgorged the nation that is before you." R' Moshe ben Nachman z"l (Ramban; 1194-1270; Spain and Eretz Yisrael) asks: The mitzvot referred to--refraining from immoral relations--are laws that involve one's self, not the Land [unlike most of the agricultural laws that are dependent upon being in Eretz Yisrael]. Why then does the verse connect these mitzvot to our ability to possess the Land? He explains:

Hashem created the entire world and gave each land to a nation, and he appointed an angel to serve as an "officer" over each land. Eretz Yisrael, however, is Hashem's special land in which He takes a direct interest; there is no "officer" overseeing the affairs of Eretz Yisrael. This is the meaning of the verse (Shmot 19:5), "You shall be to Me the most beloved treasure of all peoples, for the entire Land is Mine." [But what makes the Jewish People special and fit to inhabit Hashem's special land?] He has sanctified the people that reside in His land with the sanctity of moral relationships and with other mitzvot that set us apart. Therefore it says (Vayikra 20:22), "You shall observe all of My decrees and all of My ordinances and perform them; then the Land to which I bring you to dwell will not disgorge you." Furthermore it says (20:24), "So I said to you, 'You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to inherit it, a land flowing with milk and honey,' I am Hashem, your Elokim, Who has separated you from the peoples." As these verses indicate, Eretz Yisrael cannot tolerate idolatry or adultery. (Peirush Ha'Ramban Al Ha'Torah)

"He shall don a sacred linen tunic; linen breeches shall be on his flesh, he shall gird himself with a linen sash, and cover his head with a linen turban." (16:4)

When the Kohen Gadol enters the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur, he does not wear the usual "uniform" of the Kohen Gadol; rather, he wears all-white linen garments. The reason, say our Sages, is that the regular garments of the Kohen Gadol contain gold, which is reminiscent of the sin of the golden calf. Wearing them would violate the principle of "Ain kategor na'aseh saneigor" / "A prosecutor [i.e., gold] may not become an advocate for the defense."

R' Moshe Leib Shachor z"l (Yerushalayim; 1894-1964) notes that the principle of "Ain kategor na'aseh saneigor" was not derived by our Sages from any verse. Rather, it is a matter of decency; one person should not be prosecuting another person unless he is certain in the depths of his heart of the latter's guilt. How then could a prosecutor ever switch sides?! Furthermore, even if the prosecutor now doubts his former certainty and believes the accused is innocent, the lingering vestiges of his past beliefs will limit his effectiveness as a defense counsel. That is human nature. [While these concerns do not literally apply to the Kohen Gadol's garments, the Torah did not "design" the avodah / Temple service in a way that violates principles of decent behavior.]

How does a person become an effective spokesman for the defense of the Jewish People or in defense of individual sinners? R' Shachor writes: One can be an effective advocate if he has previously been in the shoes of the person for whom he is advocating. If he has overcome certain bad traits, he understands the other person's challenges and feels his pain.

Alternatively, an effective advocate is someone who appreciates the beauty and unity of Creation as a whole and therefore values each of its separate parts. He knows that nothing in the Universe lacks a purpose; therefore, he feels obligated to advocate for every person. (Koach Ha'teshuvah p.20)

"Aharon shall lean his two hands upon the head of the living he-goat and confess upon it all the iniquities of Bnei Yisrael, . . . and send it with a designated man to the desert. The he-goat will bear upon itself all their iniquities to an uninhabited land, and he [the messenger] should send the he-goat to the desert." (16:21-22)

The Mishnah (Yoma 66a) teaches that, even though it was Yom Kippur, there were way-stations where food and drink were offered to the man taking the se'ir lazazel to the desert. However, says the Gemara (Yoma 67a), the person never needed the food or drink. This illustrates the principle that "one who has bread in his basket is not like one who does not have bread in his basket," i.e., a person who has the ability to fulfill a particular desire generally does not desire that thing as strongly as does one who does not have the ability to fulfill that desire.

Rabbeinu Nissim z"l ("Ran"; 14th century; Barcelona, Spain) writes that this is the same principle which

states that a mitzvah performed by one who is obligated to perform that mitzvah merits greater reward than does the same mitzvah performed by one who is not obligated to perform that mitzvah. When one is obligated to do a certain good deed, the yetzer hara resists. One who is not obligated does not experience that resistance, just as someone "who has bread in his basket" is immune from the whiles of the yetzer hara.

Ran continues: There is another reason why a mitzvah performed by one who is obligated earns greater reward than does the same mitzvah performed by one who is not obligated. If G-d commands that a certain mitzvah be done by a certain category of people or in certain circumstances, and not others, it is because that is the only way the "secret" behind that mitzvah can be actualized. Even though a person who is not commanded may still be permitted to do that particular mitzvah, his actions do not accomplish the cosmic purpose of that mitzvah. (Derashot Ha'Ran: drush chamishi, nusach bet)

Elsewhere, Ran offers a third reason for why a mitzvah performed by one who is obligated merits greater reward than does the same mitzvah performed by one who is not obligated. If G-d needed our mitzvot, then there would be no difference between one who is commanded and one who is not, for each would have given G-d exactly the same thing. In fact, however, G-d does not need our mitzvot; rather, they were given to us in order bring us merit. That merit, however, can come about only by following G-d's instructions, not by doing things He did not command. (Derashot Ha'Ran: drush shevi'i)

Shabbat Ha'gadol

R' Shlomo Kluger z"l (1784-1869; rabbi of Brody, Galicia) offers an explanation for the fact that today is called "Shabbat Ha'gadol" / "The Great Shabbat." He writes: It is impossible for a ba'al teshuvah to greet the Shechinah unless he has first experienced Shabbat. This is learned from the midrash which states that the reason a brit milah takes place on the eighth day of a boy's life is so that he can first live through a Shabbat. This teaches that experiencing a Shabbat is a catalyst for achieving greatness.

Why then is the Shabbat before Yom Kippur called "Shabbat Teshuvah" while the Shabbat before Pesach is called "Shabbat Ha'gadol"? R' Kluger explains: Pesach, like the High Holidays, is a time to sanctify and purify oneself. However, while the High Holidays is a time of teshuvah / repentance for past misdeeds, Pesach is a time to be forward-looking, focusing on the sanctity, purity and greatness that one can achieve. Hence, we call this Shabbat, which is a prelude to greatness, "Shabbat Ha'gadol." (Kohelet Yaakov: Shabbat Ha'gadol, drush 1)

Bedikat Chametz

The Tikkunei Zohar (Tikkun 21, p. 51a) teaches: "On the night of the fourteenth [of Nissan], we search for chametz by the light of a candle. This light of a candle refers to Torah and mitzvot, as it is written (Mishlei 6:23), 'For a mitzvah is a candle, and Torah is a light.' The candle is in the heart; the light in the eyes. This is the light of a candle."

R' Avraham Abusch Zehnwirth shlita (Yerushalayim) explains: The Tikkunei Zohar is teaching that just as one must search for chametz in his home and destroy it, so one must search for his yetzer hara and subdue it. This can be accomplished only by studying Torah, which is called "light," and performing mitzvot, which are called "candles." (In comparison to Torah study, which gives off strong "light" like a raging fire, a mitzvah that is performed gives off a relatively weaker "light," like a candle.)

What is the meaning of: "The candle is in the heart; the light in the eyes"? R' Zehnwirth explains: Performing mitzvot awakens one's love of G-d, while Torah study awakens one's fear or awe of G-d. [One who has fear/awe of Hashem does not let his eyes wander toward sinful desires.] Together, the traits of love and fear/awe of Hashem can defeat the yetzer hara. (Shulchan Aruch Ha'Zohar im Peirush Even Yekarah, siman 431)

***** Pesach

"Mah nishtanah ha'laila ha'zeh mikol ha'lailot?"

This familiar phrase is commonly understood to mean: "Why (or 'in what way') is this night different from all other nights?" R' Yechiel Michel Epstein z"l (rabbi of Novardhok, Russia; died 1907) suggests a different interpretation. He writes:

The expression "Mah nishtanah" is similar to Tehilim (72:6): "Mah gadlu ma'asecha Hashem" / "How great are Your deeds, Hashem!" and to Bemidbar (24:5): "Mah tovu" / "How good are your tents, Yisrael!" These are not questions, but rather exclamations of wonder and awe. "How different and special is this night compared to all other nights!"

In response to the questions of Mah Nishtanah, we say, "Avadim ha'yinu . . ." / "We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt." R' Epstein writes that this answer must be recited with joy and excitement. [Not, "Alas! We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt." Rather, "Hurray! We were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt."] Why? Because it was our slavery in Egypt that prepared us to become, and remain, subjugated to Hashem. (Aruch Hashulchan: Orach Chaim 473:21-22)

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 [Torah.org](https://torah.org) start with

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