

MEASURING UP

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Vayikra

Measuring Up

One of the mitzvot of this week's parashah is (2:13), "On all your sacrifices you shall sprinkle salt." The Gemara (Menachot 21) says: "I might think that you should 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. To prevent this error, the Torah says, "You shall merely sprinkle the salt on it."

R' Yitzchak Blazer z"l (died 1907) notes that this Gemara demonstrates how different we are from our ancestors in Talmudic times. 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 describes a person who is overflowing with wisdom. We can only assume that this 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." This 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")

"A person who will bring close a korban 'mikem' / from among you to Hashem--from the

animals, from the cattle and from the flocks . . ." (1:2)

R' Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson z"l (1880-1950; Lubavitcher Rebbe) writes: If the Torah wanted only to teach us the laws of the sacrifices, it could have said, "A person 'mikem' / from among you who will bring close a korban to Hashem" (rather than, "A person who will bring close a korban from among you . . ."). However, the Torah wants to teach also that when a person wants to become closer to G-d--the word "korban" is from the word meaning "close"--it must come "mikem" / from within the person. It is up to each person, and within his power. Every Jew can challenge himself with the question, "When will my deeds reach those of my forefathers--Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov?" Nothing can hold a person back from coming close to the Divine. At the same time, Hashem does not have unfair expectations of a person; rather, He judges each person according to each one's own circumstances and abilities.

The verse continues: "From the animals, from the cattle and from the flocks." [In the language of the Talmud, cattle are called "beheimah gasah"--loosely translated "large animals," but literally "coarse animals." Sheep and goats, on the other hand, are called, "beheimah dakah"--loosely translated "small animals," but literally "fine animals."] R' Schneerson explains: The verse is referring to variations within man's animal soul. Some people have a coarser animal soul, like a bad-tempered ox, while others have a finer animal soul. But, everyone has one, and everyone is called upon, and able to, bring it closer to G-d. How? Just as a fire came down from Heaven to consume the physical sacrifices on the altar, every person's soul has in it a fire that naturally burns with love for G-d. There are many "waters"--i.e., distractions, such as the need to earn a living--which attempt to extinguish this fire, but these many waters cannot extinguish the love (paraphrasing Shir Ha'shirim 8:7). (Ma'amar Bati Le'gani ch.2)

"A person who will bring close a korban . . . to Hashem . . ." (1:2)

R' Yitzchak Isaac Chaver z"l (1789-1852; rabbi of Suvalk, Lithuania) notes that only the Divine Name Y-K-V-K ("Hashem") is used in connection with the sacrificial offerings; never the name "Elokim." He explains:

"Elokim" refers to G-d as the Master of nature, while "Hashem" refers to His hashgachah / direct involvement with His creations, when He overrules nature. Bringing sacrifices brings us closer to Hashem and allows us to escape the control of nature. Thus, the Name Hashem, not Elokim, is used in connection with sacrifices. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Yad Mitzrayim: Potei'ach Yad)

Pesach

"V'gam / Also the nation that they shall serve, I shall judge, and afterwards they shall leave with great wealth." (Bereishit 15:14; also in the Pesach Haggadah)

What is added by the word "v'gam" / "also"? R' Aharon Teitelbaum shlita (Satmar Rebbe) explains: Rashi z"l (to Shmot 11:2) writes that there were other nationalities in Egypt besides the Egyptians, who helped the latter oppress Bnei Yisrael. Regarding them, Hashem promised Avraham Avinu, "Also the nation that they shall serve, I shall judge . . ." (Quoted in Haggadah Shel Pesach Otzrotaihem Shel Tzaddikim)

"They appointed taskmasters over it [the nation of Bnei Yisrael] l'ma'an / in order to afflict it with their [the Egyptians'] burdens; it built storage cities for Pharaoh--Pitom and Ra'amses." (Shmot 1:11; also in the Pesach Haggadah)

What is added by the word "l'ma'an" / in order? Moreover, why didn't the verse say more simply, "They appointed taskmasters over it who afflicted it with their burdens." R' Tuvia Halevi z"l (Tzefat, Eretz Yisrael; 16th century) explains:

A midrash relates that Pitom and Ra'amses were built on quicksand or very soft soil so that, no sooner had they been built, they had to be built again. The Egyptians received no benefit from Bnei Yisrael's work. Thus, the Torah emphasizes that the sole purpose of this work was "in order to afflict" Bnei Yisrael. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Haggadat Chachmei Tzefat)

"Or has any god ever miraculously come to take for himself a nation from amidst a nation, with challenges, with signs, and with wonders, and with war, and with a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm, and with greatly awesome deeds, such as everything that Hashem, your Elokim, did for you in Egypt before your eyes?" (Devarim 4:34; also in the Pesach Haggadah)

R' Yisrael Belsky shlita (rosh yeshiva of Torah Voda'ath in Brooklyn, N.Y. and a major contemporary posek, particularly in the area of kashruth) writes: This pasuk is one of only two verses in the whole Torah that contains every letter of the aleph-bet. The message is that when G-d reveals Himself, it touches every aspect of the universe which, say Chazal, was created using all the letters of the aleph-bet. Likewise, it teaches that Hashem "personally" supervises every aspect of the universe. (Haggadah Shel Pesach B'tzeit Yisrael)

A Parable About Chametz

"Bedikat Chametz"--typically translated, "The search for chametz"--actually means, "The search of chametz." What does it mean to search the chametz? R' Yissachar Ber Rokeach z"l (Belzer Rebbe; died 1927) answered with the following parable:

A group of merchants was walking home from a successful day at the market, and they decided to rest under a tree. But where could they place their day's earnings for safekeeping? After looking around for a safe place to deposit their moneybag, they decided to hang it among the branches of a tree.

Satisfied that the only witnesses were the cows grazing nearby, the merchants hid their treasure in the foliage. Soon they fell into a deep sleep.

The merchants hadn't stopped to think that where there are cows, there may be a cowherd. From his place in the nearby brush, the cowherd had seen everything. Stealthily, he removed the gold coins from the sack in the tree and filled the bag with an equal volume of dung. He then hid the money in a hole he had dug and concealed himself in the brush until the merchants would leave and he could reclaim his ill-gotten wealth.

Upon awakening, the merchants took their bag from the tree. Feeling that it was much lighter than before, they looked inside and realized they had been robbed. But who had done it? There were no humans nearby!

Obviously, the merchants concluded, the cows were the culprits. But who had ever heard of cows that steal gold coins? Who had ever heard of cows that climb trees? How did the cows put the dung in a bag? No matter--there was no other explanation. With that, the merchants shrugged and went on their way.

These merchants were fools, said the Belzer Rebbe. Had they investigated further, they would have found the real thief, as well as their money!

Our Sages teach that chametz is a metaphor for the yetzer hara/evil inclination, the cause of the great spiritual losses which we suffer on a regular basis. Our duty at this time of the year is to eradicate chametz, and what it represents. However, it is not enough to search for chametz; we must search the chametz itself. We must examine the nature of the chametz within ourselves and ask ourselves how it got there. We may not shrug it off like those foolish merchants shrugged off their discovery of dung in their moneybag. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Sha'arei Armon)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adira'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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