

HABITS

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Acharei Mos

Habits

Much of this week's parashah is devoted to describing the sacrificial service that the Kohen Gadol was required to perform whenever he entered the Holy of Holies. The Torah says (Vayikra 16:2), "He shall not come at all times into the Sanctuary . . ." Why not?

Rashi explains: "Because My Shechinah is revealed there, Aharon should be careful not to enter regularly." R' Chaim Shmuelevitz z"l (1902-1979; Mirrer Rosh Yeshiva in Shanghai and Yerushalayim) elaborates: "Habit is the greatest enemy of one who wishes to feel holy and uplifted. When one stands opposite that which is sublime and exalted, and in his soul burn sparks of a holy fire, habit sneaks in and douses the embers one by one until the entire fire is extinguished."

R' Shmuelevitz continues: The prophet Yechezkel writes (46:9), "When the populace comes before Hashem on the appointed days, whoever comes in by way of the northern gate [of the Temple] to prostrate himself shall go out by way of the southern gate, and whoever comes in by way of the southern gate shall go out by way of the northern gate. He shall not return by way of the gate through which he came in; rather, he shall go out opposite it." R' Yosef Yaavetz z"l (died 1507) explains that Hashem doesn't want a person to see one of the gates twice lest he equate it in his mind with the gate of his own house. Likewise, he shouldn't see the same wall of the Bet Hamikdash twice lest he equate it with the walls of his own house. In fact, writes R' Yaavetz, this is what caused the sin of the Golden Calf, for they took the Ohel Mo'ed for granted and began to despise it. Therefore, after the sin, we read (Shemot 33:7) that Moshe dismantled the Tent and rebuilt it outside of the camp. (Sichot Mussar 5731, No. 16)

"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 mitzvah, 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 tikkun / spiritual rectification that that mitzvah was designed to accomplish. (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)

From the Haftarah . . .

"Behold! I send you Elyah the prophet, before the great and awesome day of Hashem."
(Malachi 3:23)

R' Yitzchak Weiss z"l (rabbi of Verbau, Slovakia; killed in the Holocaust) notes that the initial Hebrew letters in the phrase, "Behold! I send you Elyah the prophet," have a gematria of 343. This alludes to the 343 out of the 613 mitzvot which cannot be practiced today. After Eliyahu Hanavi heralds the redemption and mashiach arrives, we will again practice these commandments. (Siach Yitzchak

p.151)

Shabbat Hagadol

Why is the Shabbat preceding Pesach called "Shabbat Hagadol / "the Great Sabbath"?" R' Zelig Reuven Bengis z"l (1864-1953; rabbi of Bodki and Kalvarija, Lithuania; later rabbi of the Eidah Ha'chareidis of Yerushalayim) suggests the following reason:

Midrash Rabbah relates that Moshe Rabbeinu persuaded Pharaoh to give his slaves, Bnei Yisrael, one day of rest every week, and Moshe chose Shabbat as their day off. At that point, however, Shabbat was nothing more than a day of physical rest; it did not yet have a spiritual component. Indeed, our Sages teach that Bnei Yisrael were mired in idolatry like their Egyptian neighbors.

Before the Exodus, Hashem commanded Bnei Yisrael to set aside lambs to offer as the korban Pesach. Lambs were holy to the Egyptians; thus, fulfilling this commandment meant breaking from the idolatry of the Egyptians and expressing emunah / faith in Hashem. The day on which Bnei Yisrael set aside lambs to slaughter as offerings was the tenth of Nissan, which that year fell on Shabbat. That Shabbat was the first one on which Bnei Yisrael did more than rest physically; they experienced a day of spirituality. Thus, it was a "greater" Shabbat than any previous one. (L'flagot Reuven - Haggadah Shel Pesach p.17)

Pesach

R' Yishmael Hakohen z"l (Modena, Italy; died 1811) writes: There are two conflicting midrashim regarding the reason for the Ten Plagues. According to the Midrash Rabbah, each of the plagues was a punishment for some aspect of the slavery that the Egyptians imposed on Bnei Yisrael. For example, because the Egyptians did not let the women of Bnei Yisrael immerse in a mikvah, their water turned to blood; because they forced Bnei Yisrael to gather small animals for them, they were swarmed by frogs; because they forced Bnei Yisrael to sweep their marketplaces, the dust of those marketplaces turned to lice; etc. According to the Midrash Tanchuma, on the other hand, each of the plagues represents a weapon that a king would use against a rebellious province: First, he cuts off their water supply, next he disturbs their peace with loud noises, then he shoots arrows at them, etc. Likewise, Hashem first attacked the Egyptian's water supply (blood), next he disturbed their peace with loud noises (frogs), then he shot arrows at them (lice), etc.

What is the point of departure for this disagreement? R' Yishmael explains: The disagreement is whether the primary purpose of the plagues was to punish the Egyptians for enslaving Bnei Yisrael or it was to force the Egyptians to let Bnei Yisrael go. According to the Midrash Rabbah it was the

former; according to the Midrash Tanchuma, the latter.

What is the practical implication for us? R' Yishmael answers: There is a well-known midrash which teaches that the angels wished to sing praises of Hashem after the Egyptians drowned in the Yam Suf, but Hashem told them, "My creations are drowning in the sea, and you want to sing?"

Commentaries ask: Why then were Bnei Yisrael allowed to sing? Because they benefitted directly from the drowning of the Egyptians.

Similarly, concludes R' Yishmael, if the primary purpose of the plagues was for our benefit, as the Midrash Tanchuma holds, then we should give praise and thanks to G-d for the plagues. On the other hand, if the primary purpose was to punish the Egyptians, we should not rejoice at the plagues, as it is written (Mishlei 24:7), "When your enemy falls, do not rejoice." (Haggadah Shel Pesach Shevach Pesach)

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 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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