

THANKSGIVING

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BS"D

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Sponsored by Aaron and Rona Lerner
in memory of their fathers
Avraham ben Yaakov Hakohen a"h
and Yaakov Yonah ben Yisrael a"h

Martin and Michelle Swartz
on the yahrzeit of
Martin's grandmother
Eva (née Kalikow) Lichman a"h (17 Nissan)

This week's Parashah continues presenting the laws of the Korbanot / sacrificial offerings, one of which is the Korban Todah / Thanksgiving offering. Rabbeinu Bachya ben Asher z"l (Spain; 1255-1340) writes (in his commentary to Vayikra 6:2): A Korban Todah is brought for a miracle, and the word Todah means "thanksgiving." If one was sick and was healed, he brings a Todah offering. Likewise, on any other joyous occasion – for example, for the joy of a groom and bride – one brings a Todah, as it is written (Yirmiyah 33:11), "Kol sasson ve'kol simcha / The sound of joy and the sound of gladness, kol chatan ve'kol kallah / the sound of a groom and the sound of a bride, the sound of people saying, 'Praise Hashem . . . ,' bringing thanksgiving offerings to the Temple."

R' Raphael Moshe Luria z"l (1937-2009; Rosh Yeshiva in several chassidic yeshivot in Israel) notes that R' Bachya is alone among the major commentaries in suggesting that one brings a Todah on a joyous occasion. Other commentaries -- for example, Rashi z"l and Rambam z"l – understand that this offering is reserved for one who experienced a miracle. [See further below.] Nevertheless, R' Luria notes, R' Bachya's view finds support in the Midrash which states that, in the future, there will be no offerings except a Todah, for once the Yetzer Ha'ra is eradicated, there will be no sin and no need for atonement. In contrast, there will always be joyous occasions. (Bet Genazi: Nisuin p.3)

On the subject of thanksgiving, this issue of Hamaayan marks the completion of 30 cycles of the Torah reading since the first issue, on Shabbat Parashat Shemini 5747 / 1987. On this occasion, we

express our thanksgiving to Hashem for bringing us to this day and to you, our readers, for your continued interest and support. May we all merit soon to have the ability to bring Korbanot Todah for the joyous occasions in our lives.

"If he shall offer it for a Todah / thanksgiving-offering . . ." (7:12)

Rashi z"l explains: If he brings his offering on account of something that requires thanksgiving, on account of a miracle that was done for him – for instance, he made a sea-voyage, traveled in the wilderness, was imprisoned, or had been sick and was now healed, all of which obligate a person to give thanks, since it is written with reference to them (Tehilim 107:8, 15, 21, 31), "Let them offer thanksgiving to the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!" – if it is on account of one of these things that he vowed a Shelamim offering, it is regarded as a Todah offering and requires the offering of bread that is mentioned in this section, and it may not be eaten beyond a period of one day and one night, whereas other Shelamim offerings may be eaten at any time during two days and the intervening night. [Until here from Rashi]

R' Raphael Moshe Luria z"l (see above) writes: It seems from Rashi's words that a person who was in danger and is saved has an obligation to give thanks and also to bring a Todah offering. Rambam z"l does not view the Todah as an obligatory one for any person, rather as a voluntary offering, but he too writes that four categories of people must give thanks. [Today, we "give thanks" after being in danger by reciting Birkat Ha'gomeL.] What is the relationship of these two separate services: (1) giving thanks and (2) bringing a Todah offering?

R' Luria answers: The Talmud Yerushalmi (Shabbat 74b) records a dispute, as follows: Rabbi Yaakov says that if a person sees a snake or scorpion within his personal four Amot / cubits space, he should know that death was decreed upon him but Hashem showed him mercy. Rabbi Shimon says: That is true if he did not kill the snake or scorpion. But, if he did, G-d sent them to him so he could kill them. The Sages say: In every case, they appeared to him in his merit, i.e., to frighten him and awaken him to repentance. R' Luria explains that, because of a Jew's intrinsic holiness, snakes and scorpions should fear him. If they approached so close to him, it can only be because Hashem is sending him a message.

So, too, when a person is placed in any type of danger, R' Luria writes, Hashem is sending him a message. Because he was saved, he must give thanks. Separately, because he doesn't know whether the danger truly has passed or whether he merely was given a temporary reprieve, he must bring a Todah offering as an atonement. [This is apparently how Rashi and Rambam understand the nature of this offering, unlike R' Bachya cited on the front page.] Along these lines, R' Luria notes, kabbalists state that Bnei Yisrael at the Yam Suf faced a decree of destruction. Hashem gave them a reprieve and split the sea, but the decree was not erased, and it resurfaced in the days of the Purim story. Only with some act of atonement can an evil decree be erased for good. (Bet Genazi: Vayikra

p.193)

Shabbat Ha'gadol

"Shabbat Ha'gadol" / "the Great Shabbat" commemorates the day when our ancestors in Egypt first set aside a lamb for the Korban Pesach. Many ask: Why do we commemorate the day of the week when this occurred (Shabbat) rather than the calendar date of the event (10 Nissan)? R' Yaakov Moshe Charlap z"l (1882-1951; rabbi of Yerushalayim's Sha'arei Chessed neighborhood and Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Merkaz Harav) explains:

Our Sages teach that Hashem did not redeem Bnei Yisrael until they were on the brink of falling into the lowest level of impurity. Why did He wait? Because He wished to highlight the fact that there is permanent holiness within a Jew. No matter how low he falls, there is an "inner point" which cannot be eliminated. That "inner point" is hidden within all Jews, including many who seem be lost, but all that is necessary for it to be revealed is for some of the layers that conceal it to be stripped away. This is what our Sages mean when they say: "Anyone who rejects idolatry is called a 'Yehudi'." When our ancestors separated a lamb – an Egyptian deity – as an offering, that is what they did: they stripped away that which concealed the "inner point" of holiness that cannot be eliminated.

The day that represents this characteristic of a Jew is Shabbat. Calendar dates and the dates of the festivals are determined by mankind, through the power of the Bet Din to say what day is Rosh Chodesh. In contrast, Shabbat is fixed, built in to creation.

This explains, as well, why Pesach is a holiday that revolves around the family. The Egyptians set out to destroy Jewish families and, as punishment, their families were destroyed. On Pesach, we celebrate the family, recognizing that "inner point" that is passed by heredity from generation to generation. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Mei Marom)

Pesach

"Echad mi yodai'a" / "Who knows one?"

R' Avraham Aharon Prag z"l (1870-1921; Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Shomrei Ha'chomot in Yerushalayim) writes: It is likely that this song and the one after it ("Chad Gadya") contain much wisdom as well as mussar / ethical guidance, but they were written in the form of riddles and metaphors in order to keep the children awake. A precedent for this is the Midrash which relates that Rabbi Akiva saw that his students were dozing off, so he said: "Why was Esther queen of 127 provinces? Because Sarah lived 127 years." [Many commentaries offer lessons that can be learned from that cryptic statement.]

R' Prag continues: This song can serve as a educational tool for a father to use throughout the Seder.

He can say to his children, "We are now making this Seder in honor of the Unique One. Who knows who that One is? We have two cooked items on the Seder plate. Do you know something else that the number two represents? We have three Matzot. Do you know something else that the number three represents? Also, there are:

1. Four cups of wine.
2. Five items on the Seder plate according to the custom of the Vilna Gaon z"l: Maror, Charoset, Matzah and two cooked items.
3. Six berachot over the wine: Ha'gaffen four times, plus Kiddush and She'he'chiyanu.
4. Seven blessings before we reach the Matzah [apparently referring to the three blessings of Kiddush, plus Ha'adamah, Ga'al Yisrael, the second Ha'gaffen and Al Netilat Yadayim]
5. Eight sections of Hallel recited at the Seder: six in "Hallel Ha'mitzri" [the same chapters we recite as Hallel on every festival], one in Hallel Ha'gadol [the poem beginning "Hodu . . . ki l'olam chasdo"], and the praise beginning "Nishmat."
6. Nine expressions of praise in the paragraph beginning "Le'fichach" with which we conclude Maggid and introduce the first section of Hallel.
7. Ten Makkot.
8. Eleven blessings recited over food: Ha'gaffen four times, Ha'adamah, Ha'motzi, four blessings in Birkat Ha'mazon, and the blessing after the last cup of wine. [This does not include the blessings of Al Achilat Matzah and Al Achilat Maror, which are not blessings over food but rather blessings over Mitzvot.]
9. Twelve Mitzvot performed at the Seder: four cups of wine, Charoset, Karpas, two hand-washings, the blessings of Ha'motzi, Al Achilat Matzah and Al Achilat Maror, and Koraich.
10. Thirteen Mitzvot performed at the Seder if the Mitzvah of telling the story of the Exodus is added to the twelve "tangible" Mitzvot listed above.

Upon reaching each of these items during the Seder, a father can say: "Now we will do/say something involving the number 'x.' Do you know something else that involves that number?" (Haggadah Shel Pesach Tavlin L'mitzvah)