

MANUAL FOR A SANCTIFIED LIFE

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

This week we conclude Sefer Vayikra with the laws of the individual who pledges the value of a person or object to the Bais Hamikdash. In such an instance, the value of the object or person must be determined. The Torah presets some values; all other instances must be evaluated by the Kohanim and are determined relative to their true market value. The very last laws in Sefer Vayikra focus on Maaser Shaynie (the Second Tithe) and Maaser Bhaymah (Tithing the Live Stock). Why does Sefer Vayikra end with these select Mitzvos?

Sefer Vayikra presents the ideal lifestyle of the Jew. It describes this ideal in terms of the priestly obligations, services, and restrictions both in and out of the Bais Hamikdash.

Following the exodus from Egypt, the Jews went through three historic stages. The first stage preceded the Golden Calf. The second was from the Golden Calf until the incident with the Spies. The third stage was from the Spies until the death of Moshe Rabbeinu.

In the first stage, the Jews would have entered Eretz Yisroel after having received the Torah. The institution of the Mishkan and Bais Hamikdash would have been unnecessary because of the innate ability of each Jew to relate to G-d. Every Jew would have been his own living sanctuary capable of manifesting G-d's intent for humanity through clarity of intellect and purity of behavior.

Following the sin of the Golden Calf, the second stage, the Jews could no longer be their own sanctuaries. They lost the ability to manifest G-d's actuality through their intellect and behavior. Moshe was the only one who remained in a state of spiritual closeness and purity as indicated by the rays of light emanating from his person. The rest of the nation needed a tangible and external focus for their devotion and spirituality. (The same way that Adam and Chava needed clothing after their sin in order to manifest their divine designation as G-d's focus for creation.) Therefore, G-d commanded Moshe to build the Mishkan, and following its construction while still in the shadow of Mt. Sinai, the nation was taught the book of Vayikra. Once they had been taught the laws and ideals of Vayikra, the nation, under the leadership of Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam, should have entered into Eretz Yisroel. However, this was not to be.

The third stage took place after the Jews lost their faith in Hashem at the incident with the Miraglim - Spies. G-d punished the Jews and they had to remain in the desert for another 38 years. During that time, the entire generation, including Moshe, Aharon, and Miriam, all died. The long-term consequences are incomprehensible. Let it suffice to say that had they not sinned with the incident

of the Miraglim, there would have never been an exile. Moshe would have built the Bais Hamikdash and it would have never been destroyed. Their entrance into the land would have heralded the start of the messianic age.

As mentioned earlier, Sefer Vayikra presented the nation with the ideal outcome of a sanctified lifestyle. A life of Taharah -purity, protected from Tummah - impurity, and lived within the confines and structure of the Mishkan.

The lessons in Vayikra were designed to prepare the nation to immediately enter the Promised Land and transform it from a pagan wasteland into a contemporary Garden of Eden. Therefore, our analysis of Vayikra's conclusion must be viewed from that perspective. How do the laws of voluntary contributions, Maaser Sheni, and Maaser Bhaymah sum up the essence of a sanctified life style?

There are two classic sources where the Shalshelos Hakabalah " Chain of Transmission of Torah from Sinai and Onward is recorded.

1. The beginning of Pirkei Avos Ethics of Our Fathers
2. The beginning of this week's Parsha, Parshas B'Har.

Pirkei Avos is the classic presentation of personal and societal behavior and it begins by presenting the major stages of the Torah's transmission.

Rashi identifies Parshas B'Har and the laws of Shemitah (Sabbatical year) as the classic example of the association between the Oral and the Written Torah. "Just as G-d gave the Laws of Shemitah to the Jews with all their nuance and details, so too did G-d give all the laws in the Torah in complete and detailed form." (Free translation).

Why did Chazal choose these two topics, Shemita and Pirkei Avos, to discuss the unbroken transmission of Torah and Halacha? Any area of Torah law would have been equally effective in introducing the Shalshelos Hakabalah - Chain of Transmission!

In brief, personal behavior, societal responsibilities, and the extended and intended affect of the laws of Shemitah are arenas that are most often disassociated from G-d. This isn't to suggest that G-d did not give laws to frame those areas of human interaction. Just the opposite! However, they are forums of endeavor where humans feel that they do not require Divine direction.

Psychology and sociology are considered the products of human wisdom and experience. Divine authority does not enter into the discussion. It is considered unnecessary, and sometimes destructive. We should be able to take care of ourselves when it comes to social interaction and character development! Many will suggest that the wisdom and advice presented in Pirkei Avos are no more divine than the latest self-help guru, book, or time tested commonsense approach. Therefore, the Rabbis specifically introduced Pirkei Avos by associating it with Har Sinai and the

authenticity of Moshe's prophecy. Regardless of the imagery and examples used in presenting the concepts, Pirkei Avos is as much the Law of G-d as the Ten Commandments.

The laws of Shemitah which introduce Parshas B'Har are equally subject to being ignored or challenged as a Divine directive. The laws of Shemitah impose Divine and seemingly illogical restrictions on the nation's economy. For most of the history of the Jews in Eretz Yisroel, the economy was land based. Property was the only true wealth, and every Jew owned a portion of the land. However, the properties could be leased until the Yovel - Jubilee. Land improvements and development were limited to 50 years, after which the properties, improvements and all, reverted back to their original ancestral ownership. (Yes, there were exceptions to the rule.) In most instances, the 50-year mark meant a restructuring and redistribution of economic wealth.

Business, money, and the national economy are arenas where most humans would prefer to ignore Divine direction. 'You can tell me how much Tzedaka - charity I must give. You can command me to share the fruits of my hard labor with the Kohain and the Layvie. However, You (G-d) cannot tell me how to run my business. That I can do all by myself!' Therefore, Chazal introduced the foundation of Jewish national economy, the laws of property ownership and management by associating it with the Divine transmission of Torah from Har Sinai to the present.

The focus of Sefer Vayikra has been the 'How to' manual on integrating sanctity 'Kedusha' purpose (association with G-d) into daily Jewish life. Eretz Yisroel was supposed to be the setting where in which a Jewish nation and economy could model for the rest of the world how to weave G-dliness into normal living. Therefore, the book of Vayikra concludes with the laws of the individual who pledges the value of a person or object to the Bais Hamikdash, and Maaser Shaynie (the Second Tithe) and Maaser Bhaymah (Tithing the livestock).

In the case of the individual who pledges the value of a person or object to the Bais Hamikdash, it does not make a difference what the owner thinks the person or object is worth. The Torah sets the price for (27:1-8) people and empowered the Kohanim and the Bait Din to assess the value of all other possessions. The message was clear. True value has nothing to do with individual initiative or accomplishment. Rocket scientist, Nobel prizewinner, shoemaker or village idiot are only as important as their subjugation to the law of G-d. G-d determines true value, and association with G-d is the primary criteria for determining value.

The laws of Maaser Sheni and Maaser Bhaymah are equally eloquent in establishing the true criteria for ownership and wealth. Maaser Shaynie required the farmer to transport his tithes to Yerushalayim. There, he and his family would invite the poor to share in G-d's bounty. If he did not wish to transport the actual produce (think in contemporary terms involving shipping costs and storage of tons of raw produce) he could redeem its value at the market value plus 1/5.

The message was clear. The tithed produce was not yours. For that matter, the entire successful yield was really a gift from G-d. G-d's instructions were to bring the tithes to Yerushalayim and share

it with the poor. It was the obligation of the farmer to do so. If he decided to go the more convenient route and redeem it rather than transport it, the convenience would cost the farmer 1/5 more than the market value. Given such a scenario, who was the real boss and who was the employee?

The Maaser Bhaymah. Tithing of the livestock, was even more direct. The selection of which animal would go to the Bais Hamikdash and which stayed in the barn was a matter of chance. As the new flock was moved from one corral to the next, every tenth animal would be marked as "Maaser." If the very best happened to be among the Maaser, too bad. It was forbidden to exchange it for "another" animal. (27:33) Why? Because it wasn't yours. Its value was only in relation to serving Hashem and the doing of Mitzvos.

Vayikra's final message is clear.

Under these laws the enjoyment of life's pleasures, kept within the bounds of morality, becomes in itself a G-dly act, with every home becoming an abode of G-d and every table an altar. Every Jewish man and woman is then consecrated as a priest or priestess without the need for any priestly rite, and they themselves may partake of the things hallowed to G-d. (Rav Hirsch 27:33)

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