

IT'S ALL ABOUT TRUST

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

It was a moment of singular profundity. The Mishkan was fully assembled. Aharon and his sons were engaged in the last stages of their initiation into the service, and the Mishkan was about to be consecrated with heavenly fire. However, what should have been a picture perfect day was marred by the tragic deaths of Nadav and Avihu. What had begun as the happiest of all days (Medresh) ended in humble silence.

We know that the Mishkan and the service that it framed was a direct response to the sin of the Golden Calf. We are also told that the Jews at the time of the Exodus and the giving of the Torah related to G-d on the level of Yirah - awesome fear.

The Jews at the time of the Exodus had been exposed to G-d's awesome power and majesty in manners never before experienced by humanity. The plagues in Egypt, the miracle at Kriyas Yam Suf (Parting Of The Sea), their manner of travel and survival in the desert, and finally the indescribable experience of Mattan Torah (Revelation). Yet, they still sinned with the Golden Calf.

The Rambam's (Maimonidies) formulation of Yirah (awesome fear) vs. Ahava (love) orders Ahava as the preliminary step to Yirah. This suggests that the Jews at the time of the Exodus were on the most exalted level possible in their relationship with G-d.

There was a second Kabalas HaTorah (acceptance of the Torah). We are told that the story and miracle of Purim resulted in the Jews renewing their covenant with G-d - a "second acceptance of the Torah." By contrast, we are told that the relationship of the Jews with G-d at the time of Purim was founded upon the principle of Ahava - love. The first "acceptance of G-d's law" resulted in the Golden Calf and eventually being replaced by the second acceptance at the time of Purim. How can we understand that the acceptance predicated on Yirah did not last while the acceptance of Ahava has lasted since the time of Purim? What does the sin of the Golden Calf occurring so soon after the first acceptance of the Torah teach us about Yirah vs. Ahava?

Before I go on, allow me to explain why I am discussing the sin of the Golden Calf in contrast to Purim.

1. The Mishkan was a direct response to the sin of the Golden Calf, and the Golden Calf occurred when the Jews were on the more exalted level of Yirah. Although they were on the more exalted level they sinned with the Golden Calf.

2. Purim occurred when the Jews were on the lesser level of Ahava. Yet, that relationship has remained, regardless of all our subsequent sins and their consequences.
3. The key difference between the two periods in history is Yirah vs. Ahava (awe vs. love); Yirah did not result in a lasting relationship whereas Ahava did.
4. It makes sense to conclude that the Mishkan, which was supposed to be the Tikun - correction for the sin of the Golden Calf should represent Ahava (love of G-d) - the missing component when contrasted with Purim.

(The supposition is as follows. The acceptance of the Torah at the time of Purim lasted whereas the acceptance of the Torah at Mattan Torah did not. The basic difference between the two events was Yirah vs. Ahava. Therefore, the problem with the first acceptance of the Torah was that the Jews were not prepared to have a relationship with G-d on the highest level because they were unable to sustain it. However, the lesser level of Ahava they were able to sustain as proven by Purim. Therefore, if the Mishkan was intended to "fix the problem" of the first acceptance than the Mishkan must represent a relationship of Ahava rather than Yirah. Or, the Mishkan represents Yirah with the added component of knowing that the Yirah is built on Ahava.)

5. This week's Parsha describes the final moments of the Mishkan's consecration. Figuratively speaking, it was the laying of the corner stone for the corrected, and hopefully ever-lasting, relationship between the Jews and G-d. Therefore, it must have been the quintessential expression of G-d's Ahava for the Jews, and their love for Him.
6. Therefore, the deaths of Nadav and Avihu (Aharon's sons) at that very moment must also represent G-d's greatest expression of love.

How can we understand that G-d's exacting and seemingly unforgiving judgment could be the greatest expression of love no different than the consecration of the Mishkan and the Mizbeach (alter)?

The Rambam's formulation of Ahava vs. Yirah in the beginning of the second chapter of Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah (Fundamental Laws of the Torah) presents the ideal relationship with G-d as developing through two basic stages. The first stage is Ahava. Ahava occurs when the human recognizes that he, his family, and his nation are the beneficiaries of G-d's personal and loving benevolence.

Yirah, the second stage, is an extension of Ahava. It builds upon the recognition of G-d's loving benevolence and extends that recognition to realizing that every creature as well as the whole of creation are equally the beneficiaries of G-d's personal attention and love. Therefore, the stage of Yirah does not contradict the starting stage of Ahava; it enhances the Ahava.

At the time of the Exodus the Jewish people had jumped the stage of Ahava. Beset by 210 years of slavery and persecution, the Jews did not see themselves as the personal beneficiaries of G-d's love

and compassion. In fact, at the Burning Bush Moshe successfully argued with G-d not to reveal to the enslaved Jews that there would be future times of persecution and difficulties (Tractate Berachos 9a). It takes the perspective of time to understand and accept life's ups and downs. It requires the perspective of history to make loving sense of the scope and sequence of events, whether personal or global. The Jews at the time of the exodus did not have the perspective of time and history wherein which to assimilate the awesome revelation of G-d's sudden personal attention and caring. Confronted with His awesome power, majesty, and mastery they were catapulted to the level of overwhelming awe (Yirah) without first having the benefits of learning to trust G-d's love.

It is not easy to relate to anything from fear and awe. If it is founded upon years of trusting love, the moments of Yirah enhance and strengthen the relationship making it more profound and encompassing; however, awe alone is very difficult to sustain. The Jews at the time of the Exodus were functioning on pure Yirah - pure awe. What allowed them to survive the awesome revelation of G-d's power and dominance without the benefit of trust was Moshe Rabbeinu. His presence was what they trusted. His leadership is what they counted on to buffer their relationship with G-d's fearful awesomeness.

As soon as Moshe had not returned when the nation thought he would, the basis of their survival was challenged and their relationship with G-d changed. Whereas before Mattan Torah Moshe directed G-d's caring for every need, after Mattan Torah they were minus the important factor of Moshe's leadership. As such, they perceived a change in their circumstances and they had no buffer for their fear, confusion, and panic. Their level of Yirah could not be sustained without the trusting foundation of Moshe's Ahava. The Yirah could not be sustained without the confidence they had in Moshe's presence caring and protecting them. Their awareness of G-d's awesome strength and power had not been softened by years of G-d's loving protection and benevolence. Every change became a challenge and every challenge became a crisis of faith.

(Think about how the dynamic of trust works in relation to a spouse, children, and parents. Think about how you felt during the first years of marriage before there was a record of proven trust in contrast to later in the marriage when a record of spousal support, trust, and familial survival existed.)

Not so with Purim. Purim came after the first Bais Hamikdash had been destroyed. Purim came on the threshold of redemption at the end of the 70-prophesized years of Babylonian exile. Purim came about after the Jews realized that G-d had not turned His back on them despite their shortcomings and sins. The exile in Babylon proved to the Jews that G-d truly loved them and that they could trust His love.

The purpose of the Mishkan was to provide the Jews with proof of G-d's ever present loving benevolence. It was a building that should have reflected G-d's desire to "dwell within their midst." It was a building that was intended to be an ever-present testimony to G-d's Ahava. However, with humans, time is always the key factor. It is the critical ingredient in trust and it is the critical

ingredient in comfort. We are time-bound in contrast to G-d's timelessness; therefore, it is a component, like freewill, that must always be considered. After all was said and done, after all the awesome miracles and obvious displays of G-d's loving concern for His chosen people, the Jews needed time. They needed to experience the ups and downs of life, the successes and the failures, before they could truly trust G-d's love and compassion.

Imagine a parent - child situation where the child never did anything deserving of real concern. Imagine if the first time it the child did something "real bad" the parents flipped out and threw the child out of the home. What will that say to the child? In spite of the years of care and love what will the child feel and think? More importantly, what will the child question? So too with G-d and the Jews, the Jews had to experience a goodly slice of history and time along with all their challenges to His love before G-d's love for them was proven and ingrained in the collective conscience of the nation.

Purim came after sufficient time and experiences had passed to prove G-d's love. It became exceedingly clear to them how much G-d truly loved them after they had been exiled from their home and yet continued to grow and flourish in Babylon. Therefore, when they reaccepted the Torah in the aftermath of the miracle of Purim, their acceptance was predicated upon their trust in G-d and their certainty of His Ahava.

Rabbi Shimon Jacobson (A Spiritual Guide To The Counting Of The Omer) points out that love should not be taken for granted. We must view the ability to give and receive love as a present from G-d. Love is not natural to all creations. There are many species of animals that do not have the lasting natural instincts of parental love for a child, or a child's love for a parent. Our ability to love each other is uniquely human.

Secondly, Rabbi Jacobson points out that love without discipline is not love at all. Discipline and judiciousness, or the parental obligation to criticize and direct children, is what love is all about. Sure, there is a quality of unconditional love, however, that is for the person, not his or her behavior. We can judge a person's behavior to be terribly lacking and yet love that person more than life itself. The obligation of the parent is to always make sure that the criticism we express and the direction we offer is a product of our love for that person and not an expression of our frustration and disappointment. To criticize or punish must be solely motivated by the desire to see the child grow to become the very best he or she can be. Often that demands tremendous strength, courage and discipline on the part of the parent to accomplish.

The Mishkan was a physical manifestation and expression of G-d's love for His children. Despite their terrible betrayal and defection at the time of the Golden Calf, G-d did not turn His back on us. Instead, He reprimanded us, punished us, and blessed us with His ever-present love and benevolence. G-d showed the absolute in the integration of love and discipline, Chesed and Gevurah.

At the greatest moment of G-d's loving kindness, at the moment that He sent down heavenly fire to consume the first offerings on His Mizbeach (alter), at the moment that He showed the Bnai Jews how much He desired them as His chosen people, G-d also took the lives of Nadav and Avihu.

The moment was the single greatest expression of G-d's absolute love. Love without discipline is not love. In fact, parents who love their children so much that they cannot bear to punish them consign their children and themselves to a life of pain, anger, and often death. Not so with G-d. The greatest among us are subject to G-d's most exacting expectations. The greatest among us are expected to attain their highest-level of accomplishment. For G-d to want anything less from them would be a lack of His love. To punish when necessary and help them realize their greatest potential is the truest sign of G-d's pure love. As Moshe comforted his brother Aharon, "With those who are closest to Me am I sanctified..."

Maftir HaChodesh

This week, in addition to the regular Parsha, we read the section known as HaChodesh. The additional sections of Shekalim, Zachor, Parah, and Chodesh are read prior to Pesach for both commemorative and practical reasons.

This additional section from Shemos [Exodus], Parshas Bo, Chapter 12, is read on the Shabbos before the month of Nissan, or on the Shabbos of Rosh Chodesh Nissan. This section is an account of the very first Mitzvah given to the Jewish people as a nation. It includes the concept of Rosh Chodesh - the New Moon, as well as the basic laws of Pesach and the Pascal Lamb.

Being that Pesach starts on the 15th of Nissan, this section is read about two weeks before Pesach begins. As with Parshas Parah, Chazal [sages] wanted the reading of this Parsha to be a reminder that Pesach is almost upon us! Only two more weeks to make the necessary arrangements to get to Yerushalayim and bring the Pascal Lamb! Only two more weeks and your house had better be in order! (are you panicked yet?)

It is interesting that Hashem selected the Mitzvah of the New Moon as the first national Mitzvah. Basically, the Mitzvah required two eye witnesses to testify before Beis Din that they had seen the tiny sliver of the new moon's crescent that is the very first exposure of the moon's new monthly cycle. The Bais Din would then declare the start of the new month. The most obvious consequence of this procedure was the 29 or 30 day month, otherwise identified by a one or two day Rosh Chodesh.

A two-day Rosh Chodesh is comprised of the 30th day of the previous month and the 1st day of the new month. A one day Rosh Chodesh means that the preceding month was only 29 days long making Rosh Chodesh the 1st day of the new month. This would have an immediate effect on the scheduling of Yomim Tovim and other calendar ordained activities. It underscores from the very inception of the nation that the Beis Din, representing the Rabbinic leadership of the nation, were the single most important factor in guaranteeing the practice of Torah throughout time. It was as if G-d

would wait for Beis Din to notify Him when His Yomim Tovim were to be.

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