

BELIEF AND CIRCUMSTANCE

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

There are four main topics in this week's Parsha.

1. The Avodah (service in the Temple) on Yom Kippur.
2. The restrictions on where a Korban can be offered.
3. Laws regarding the consumption of animal blood.
4. The 15 prohibited, intimate, relationships.

The Avodah is introduced by referencing the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, sons of Aharon. At first glance the tie-in between their deaths and the Yom Kippur service is obvious. The only individual allowed to enter the Holy of Holies is the Kohain Gadol (High Priest) on Yom Kippur and Nadav and Avihu died because they transgressed G-d's will and entered the Holy of Holies without permission. However, there must be more to the reference than the literary association of the two events. What is that deeper meaning?

The prescribed Torah reading for Yom Kippur morning is the Avodah on Yom Kippur and the reading for Mincha is the 15 prohibited relations. Why?

Why are the laws concerning where a Korban may be offered and blood consumption sandwiched between the Yom Kippur Avodah and the 15 prohibited intimate relationships?

In general, why were the four topics of Acharei Mos presented in the same Parsha in association with the deaths of Nadav and Avihu?

Lastly, what does all this have to do with the day after Pesach (yes, the day after, not the day before) and Dennis Prager?

Two years ago, while checking the Valley Eruv (In LA, CA) I was listening to Dennis Prager regularly broadcast talk show. The segment that I tuned in to was his "Happiness Hour." Mr. Prager sets aside an hour every week to discuss the importance of happiness and being happy. For those of you familiar with the segment you know that it is an attempt to understand happiness and the many challenges we must overcome to be happy.

This morning Mr. Prager made a comment that caught my attention. He said (not an exact quote) that happiness is a moral imperative. He went on to explain that it is incumbent upon everyone to become a happy person but conceded that a lone individual stranded on a deserted island would be exempt. In all honesty, I do not know whether Mr. Prager's second statement was intended to be

conclusive. He may very well have intended it as an off-the-cuff comment rather than a philosophically conclusive truth; nevertheless, it grabbed my attention and got me thinking.

Torah Hashkafa (philosophy) fully agrees that happiness is a moral imperative. Chapter 100 in Tehilim (Psalms) states unequivocally, "You must serve Hashem (G-d) with Simcha (joy)." However, if it is a moral imperative, if it is a prerequisite for all Mitzvos (commandments) or a Mitzvah in its own right, than the lone individual stranded on a deserted island is also obligated to be happy. What does it take for a person to always be happy even under the most dire and lonely circumstances?

We are commanded to proclaim G-d's sovereignty over the universe and our acceptance of His sovereignty three times a day. "Shema Yisroel... Hashem Echad." The "Kabalas Ol Malchus Shamayim" - the acceptance of the Mitzvos - is predicated on the absolute belief in the Achdus of Hashem - the singularity of G-d.

The meaning of "Echad - One (the second of the 13 Principles of Faith)," is "One" in a manner that transcends any notion or understanding that we may have of "one." It is a word that attempts to describe the being of G-d Whose reality has no basis for comparison with anything in the physical or spiritual universe. As the one and only Creator, all things physical and spiritual are dependent on His existence; whereas, His existence remains completely removed from theirs. As Maimonides writes, "If G-d should cease to exist all things would cease to exist. If however all things would cease to exist G-d would remain unaffected in any possible manner. His existence is not determined by their existence whereas their existence is entirely determined by His." The concept of G-d's oneness is the foundation for our Emunah (belief). To believe in G-d means to accept that He and He alone determines the reality of our existence and the circumstances of our lives. Regardless of the illusion of our "Hishtadlus (individual and collective effort above and beyond the question of divine determination or self determination) it is G-d who established and maintains the actuality of the universe in a relentlessly, never-ending, process called past, present and future. However, belief in G-d goes beyond the basic acceptance that He is the Creator and Maintainer. Belief in Hashem obligates us to ascertain His wishes and to do whatever He asks of us regardless of emotional conflict, cognitive dissonance, or lack of immediate or eventual comprehension. Simply put, it is what the nation answered when they said, "Naaseh V'Nishmah - We will do and then we will attempt to understand why. However, even if we do not understand or agree we will still do what G-d commands."

Once G-d's oneness is the foundation of our belief we must accept that His will is ultimately to our individual and collective benefit regardless of the immediate circumstances of our lives. The "Simcha - happiness" that King David sang about in chapter 100 of Tehilim was a contentment and joy reflecting absolute dependency on Hashem and His goodness. As such, even the lone individual stranded on a deserted island must be "happy."

The basis for everything in our relationship with G-d is therefore Emunah (faith). The famous

question, "What does G-d ask of you?" is answered, "To Fear G-d..." Yiras Hashem (being in awe of G-d) is the same as having Emunah because the foundation of Yirah - awesome fear is awareness that everything is dependent upon G-d's oneness. (Rambam Hilchos Yesodai HaTorah 2:1) The difference is that Yiras Hashem assumes a greater level of sophistication than simple Emunah; however, the outcome is the same. Whether sophisticated or simple, advanced or basic, Moshe Rabbeinu or Yankela the woodchopper, a Mitzvah is a Mitzvah and all are obligated to do the same.

To be continued next week. At that time, the above questions and a few more from Kedoshim will be answered.

1st, 2nd & 3rd Aliyot: The service of Yom Kippur that was performed by the Kohain Gadol in the Bais Hamikdash is described. The Kohain Gadol may only enter into the Holy of Holies wearing his plain linen garments requiring that he change his garments five times and immerse in the Mikvah five times. The selection of the he-goats for the primary Teshuva process is described. This portion of the Torah makes up the "Avodah" that is the lengthy Musaf service on Yom Kippur.

4th & 5th Aliyot: Following the description of the remaining services for Yom Kippur, the Torah discusses the prohibition of offering a Korban outside of the Mishkan or the Bais Hamikdash. The only offerings allowed were those that were brought to the Temple. The "Bamah", as an outside altar is called, was among the most prevalent sins for which the Jews were guilty. The prohibition against eating blood is repeated.

6th & 7th Aliyot: The end of Acharei Mos is devoted to a presentation of the fifteen prohibited sexual relationships. There is no doubt that G-d considers physical intimacy between a male and female as singularly important. Therefore, it is essential that there be a framework of controls for satisfying the physical. Homosexuality and bestiality are prohibited. Verses 18: 24-29 clearly state the unique relationship that the inhabitants of Eretz Yisroel have to the land and the consequences for defiling her sanctity.

Haftorah Review-Shabbos Hagadol

This weeks Haftorah is from Malachi chapter 3. The Navi proclaims to the nation that the ultimate redemption is waiting. The time will come when the evil and the arrogant will be destroyed and the righteous will prevail.

The relationship of the Haftorah to this week is because it is the Shabbos before Pesach. Just as the nation was redeemed from Mitzrayim 3312 years ago, so too will Eliyahu Hanavi herald the coming of Mashiach. Verse 22 under-scores the basis for all prophets and prophesies. The only true Navi is the one who "remembers the Torah of Moshe, G-d's servant". Any Navi that contradicts Moshe's Torah is by definition a "false prophet". Many false messiahs have arisen throughout history. The only true Mashiach will be the one heralded by Eliyahu himself (a Kohain, by the way) as he proclaims the "coming of the great and awesome day of G-d".

This week is also known as Shabbos Hagadol - the great Shabbos. Traditionally the Rabbi of the Shul delivers an afternoon discourse intended to review the laws of Pesach as well as inspire the community to ready themselves for the Yom Tov - holiday. The custom is to read the first part of the Hagadah in preparation for fulfilling the Mitzvah of relating the story of the Exodus.

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