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PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

A Special Calling

“And He called...” (1:1)

It’s been a while since I was in New York City. But whenever I go there, I always think of the verse in *Tehillim*, Psalms, that says, “*And the land, He has given to the sons of man.*” The avenues that stretch to the limit of vision, the feeling of the human dynamo that is New York. I was walking along Central Park East, just by 62nd Street, and I saw some road works and realized how they can build skyscrapers of more than a hundred stories. In London and in Jerusalem, dig into the ground and you will find soil with some rocks. In Manhattan, try and dig into the ground and your spade will bounce back with a hefty ring as it hits solid black granite. And it was that solid granite that has been hewn to form the two memorials to the nearly three thousand people who were murdered by the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11th 2001.

As you approach the memorial you see all the names of all those who fell victim. Each name is engraved on a metal wall surrounding two vast chasms in the ground where the buildings stood; into those chasms pours an enormous and continual four-sided waterfall, and at that bottom of those chasms are smaller abysses into which the water pours, and of those you cannot see the bottom. It seems like a flood of tears constantly pouring into the depths of the world. What makes the monument so impressive is its sheer scale. I tried to take a video of it, but when I played it back it conveyed nothing of the feeling that I experienced. There are some things you just can’t film, you can’t video. Scale is not just size. It is the yardstick of my relationship to the creation. When you film something, you lose that point of reference, even if you include a human being to indicate scale.

In our world, the ultimate measurement is the measure of a man. So many of the measurements of the Torah and our Sages relate to the human being – the *tefach* – a hand’s-breadth; the *amah* – the distance from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger, the *zeret* – the length of the small finger. There is a way that Hashem speaks to us that is beyond language; there is a language of the emotions, the ‘still small voice’ that speaks to us as a language of connection, of *chiba*. As Rashi mentions when commenting on the first word in this week’s Parsha, *Vayikra*, “And He called...” – ‘an expression of affection.’ Rashi says that the angels call to each other using this phrase. But maybe the only creation to whom Hashem ‘calls’ – the only creation that is attuned to that special broadcast of the emotions – is Man.

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TALMUD TIPS

by Rabbi Moshe Newman

Vayikra : Shabbat 16:22

Why Eight Days?

“What is Chanuka?”

The *gemara* asks this question after a halachic discussion of the Rabbinical mitzvah to light the Chanuka lamps for eight days. Rashi explains the *gemara*'s question to mean: “For *which miracle* was Chanuka established as a holiday (i.e. the miraculous military victory or the miraculous eight days that the Menorah remained lit in the Beit Hamikdash using one day's amount of oil)?”

The *gemara*'s answer emphasizes the military miracle, which may perhaps indicate the principal basis for enacting the mitzvah. However, regardless of the reason, the mitzvah to light lamps for Chanuka for eight days seems puzzling. If the reason is to commemorate the miraculous military success, then one day should be appropriate (like Purim). And if the reason is to recall the miracle of the Menorah, lighting for seven nights would seem logical. There was enough pure oil for it to naturally burn for the first day, so that the miracle was only for seven days! (Last week, regarding the Rabbinical ban on reading by the light of a lamp on Shabbat, we addressed the topic of “revealed reasons for a mitzvah.”)

Here are eight possible answers, among more than a hundred that the commentaries offer:

1. They divided one night's oil into eight portions. Miraculously, each portion lasted an entire night.
2. The Greeks ransacked the Temple many days in search of oil to defile. Despite their strength and numbers they overlooked one flask. A few weak, battle-weary Jews found it immediately.
3. Seven days commemorate the miracle of the oil, and one day commemorates the miracle that a few weak Jewish soldiers defeated the mighty Greek legions.
4. Wanting the oil to last, they made the wicks one-eighth of the normal thickness. Nevertheless, the flames burned just as brightly as if the wicks had been the normal thickness.
5. The golden Menorah in the Temple was ritually impure. So were all the Jewish soldiers, having come in contact with death on the battlefield. Therefore, they were forced to make a temporary earthenware Menorah, because earthenware is more resistant to impurity. But earthenware is porous, and when it's new it absorbs a small but significant part of any oil put in it. Therefore, one night's oil for a gold Menorah was not sufficient for an earthenware Menorah because some of the oil is lost to absorption.
6. In one account, the text reads “and there wasn't enough (oil) it to burn *even* one day...”
7. Chanuka occurred in the year 3622 (139 BCE). Calendar calculations and other historical sources indicate that the 25th of Kislev, the first day of Chanuka, fell on Shabbat that year. Therefore, they needed to light the Menorah before sunset of Friday night, and consequently needed a little more than a night's-worth of oil.
8. The commandment to light the Menorah with pure oil is written in the Torah (Leviticus, chapters 23 and 24) immediately after the commandment to observe the Succot festival for 8 days (7 days of Succot followed by Shemini Atzeret). Our Sages saw this as a Divine hint that Chanuka should be for 8 days.

• *Shabbat 21b*

Q & A

Questions

1. Who does the word "*eilav*" in verse 1:1 exclude?
2. Name all the types of animals and birds mentioned in this week's Parsha.
3. What two types of sin does an *olah* atone for?
4. Where was the *olah* slaughtered?
5. What procedure of an animal-offering can a non-*kohen* perform?
6. Besides the fire the *kohanim* bring on the altar, where else did the fire come from?
7. At what stage of development are *torim* (turtledoves) and *bnei yona* (young pigeons) unfit as offerings?
8. What is *melika*?
9. Why are animal innards offered on the altar, while bird innards are not?
10. Why does the Torah describe both the animal and bird offerings as a "satisfying aroma"?
11. Why is the term "*nefesh*" used regarding the flour offering?
12. Which part of the free-will *mincha* offering is burned on the altar?
13. The Torah forbids bringing honey with the *mincha*. What is meant by "honey"?
14. When does the Torah permit bringing a leavened bread offering?
15. Concerning *shelamim*, why does the Torah teach about sheep and goats separately?
16. For most offerings the *kohen* may use a service vessel to apply the blood on the *mizbe'ach*. For which *korban* may he apply the blood using only his finger?
17. Who is obligated to bring a *chatat*?
18. Where were the remains of the bull burned while in the wilderness? Where were they burned during the time of the *Beit Hamikdash*?
19. What two things does a voluntary *mincha* have that a *minchat chatat* lacks?
20. What is the minimum value of a *korban asham*?

All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.

Answers

1. 1:1 - Aharon.
2. 1:2, 14; 3:12 - Cattle, sheep, goats, turtledoves (*torim*), and doves (*bnei yona*).
3. 1:4 - Neglecting a positive command, and violating a negative command which is rectified by a positive command.
4. 1:5 - In the *Mishkan* Courtyard (*azarah*).
5. 1:5 - Ritual slaughter.
6. 1:7 - It descended from Heaven.
7. 1:14 - When their plumage turns golden. At that stage, *bnei yona* are too old and *torim* are too young.
8. 1:15 - Slaughtering a bird from the back of the neck using one's fingernail.
9. 1:16 - An animal's food is provided by its owner, so its innards are "kosher." Birds, however, eat food that they scavenge, so their innards are tainted with "theft."
10. 1:17 - To indicate that the size of the offering is irrelevant, provided your heart is directed toward G-d.
11. 2:1 - Usually, it is a poor person who brings a flour offering. Therefore, G-d regards it as if he had offered his *nefesh* (soul).
12. 2:1 - The *kometz* (fistful).
13. 2:11 - Any sweet fruit derivative.
14. 2:12 - On Shavuot.
15. 3:7 - Because they differ regarding the *alya* (fat tail). The lamb's *alya* is burned on the altar but the goat's is not.
16. 3:8 - The *chatat*.
17. 4:2 - One who accidentally transgresses a negative commandment whose willing violation carries the *karet* (excision) penalty.
18. 4:12 - a. Outside the three camps
b. Outside Jerusalem
19. 5:11 - *Levona* and oil.
20. 5:15 - Two *shekalim*.

SPECIAL FEATURE

The Frog Virus?

– *Thoughts on the current coronavirus pandemic*

by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

If anyone would have told you a half-a-year ago that in a few months, China – the first, second or third (depends on who you ask!) most powerful nation in the world – would be closed up, that their economy would be in freefall and that their citizens would be dying by the thousands – not only that, but that the *whole world* was being sucked into the problem involuntarily – the only plausible scenario that would have made any sense to explain it would have been some kind of a war. Six months ago the only conceivable reason for being able to imagine such a thing happening would have been, at worst, a nuclear war, or, at "best," a chemical war between the mightiest nations in the world. And yet all of the above – plus more – has been achieved without any warfare – no nuclear, chemical or biological attacks – it has all happened because of the "flu." It sounds absolutely nonsensical. But it is our present reality. It sounds absolutely improbable – completely beyond imagination. And yet it is true.

No one can possibly say for sure why this is happening and why it is happening right now. But I keep coming back to a thought from Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in his commentary on the Torah. He asks one of those questions that are so simple and, yet, I never seem to think of them! He asks: Why, during the second of the Ten Plagues, did G-d send frogs, of all things? After all, frogs are not very threatening. Rabbi Hirsch answers that that is exactly the reason – frogs are ridiculous! They don't hurt anyone, they are not dangerous, and yet they brought the mightiest empire in the world at the time to its knees. Frogs! Why? To show the Egyptians the absurdity of believing that they are masters over their own strength and power. The Torah calls such a philosophy, "*kochi v'otzem yadi*" – "my strength and the might of my hand," see Deuteronomy 8:17. And yet, comical frogs managed to dismantle the might of the Egyptian empire – and all without having to go to war.

It seems to me that what is happening now is eerily similar. The whole world is grinding to a halt – economies all over the world are being enormously damaged, people are dying all over the world, millions of people are being put into isolation and quarantine – and all because of this "flu." It is as if this has become the Plague of Frogs of our time. Maybe, just maybe, G-d is letting us know that He's in charge. Not us. Yes, human beings can destroy the world many times over with their awesome nuclear power and their even larger egos. But right now it is not nuclear fallout that everyone is concerned about. It is finding the right vaccination and treatment for a virus that should not seem to be affecting us – at least not in this horrific manner. And yet it is.

And all this is happening in the month of Adar – a month that symbolizes our complete and absolute reliance on G-d. And it is the month that comes right before the Festival of Passover – the festival that is referred to as the Festival of Freedom.

Who knows? If we listen carefully enough, could that be the footsteps of the Mashiach that we can hear?

PARSHA OVERVIEW

The Book of *Vayikra* (Leviticus), also known as *Torat Kohanim* – the Laws of the Priests – deals largely with the *korbanot* (offerings) brought in the Mishkan (Tent of Meeting). The first group of offerings is called *korban olah*, a burnt offering. The animal is brought to the Mishkan's entrance. For cattle, the one bringing the offering sets his hands on the animal. Afterwards it is slaughtered and the *kohen* sprinkles its blood on the altar. The animal is skinned and cut into pieces. The pieces are arranged, washed and burned on the altar. A similar process is described involving burnt offerings of other animals and birds. The various meal offerings are described. Part of the meal offering is burned on the altar, and the remaining part eaten by the *kohanim*. Mixing

leaven or honey into the offerings is prohibited. The peace offering, part of which is burnt on the altar and part is eaten, can be either from cattle, sheep or goats.

The Torah prohibits eating blood or *chelev* (certain fats in animals). The offerings that atone for inadvertent sins committed by the *Kohen Gadol*, by the entire community, by the prince and by the average citizen are detailed. Laws of the guilt-offering, which atones for certain verbal transgressions and for transgressing laws of ritual purity, are listed. The meal offering for those who cannot afford the normal guilt offering, the offering to atone for misusing sanctified property, laws of the "questionable guilt" offering, and offerings for dishonesty are detailed.

LETTER AND SPIRIT

Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Hershtman

Unblemished Service

One of the first laws we learn about offerings is that the animal must be *tamim* – “whole.” An animal which has a defect – a “*ba'al mum*” – may not be brought to the altar. This includes an external defect that will not heal with time. Even though the animal may be healthy and hearty, a tiny defect such as a pierced eyelid or defective cartilage in the ear is sufficient to render the animal unfit.

Later we will learn of similar defects that disqualify a *Kohen* from serving in the Beit Hamidkash. What is the message conveyed by these criteria?

The prophet Malachi's fiery condemnation of the offering of blind, lame and sick animals gives us a straightforward answer. (Malachi 1:8-12) Malachi censures the priests as representing the table of G-d as detestable and something of which one would not wish to partake. In their eyes, the Sanctuary did not deserve to receive the best and the freshest – the vitality that man has to offer. Instead, they degraded the Sanctuary to the level of a hospital, a home for the crippled, founded solely for those whose lives have been shipwrecked. To them, religion became a shelter for life's castoffs, who can find no other place.

A similar rebuke is given by the prophet Hoshea, where the priests would await misfortune and grief of their “believers.” (Hoshea 10:5). It was not the joyous and happy ones, but the blind, the lame, and the weak who would go on pilgrimages to the house of G-d. To them, religion was a consolation for the suffering and the disadvantaged, and had little to contribute to a vibrant and active life.

Not so! Religion is *not* the opiate of the masses!

Our offerings must be whole, without blemish. We bring our complete (*tamim*) selves to the service of G-d. We turn to Him not only in distress, but also in joy; not only in illness, but also in health; not only in fear, but also in tranquility. Indeed, the active joyous and healthy state is the primary condition for our relationship with G-d!

In these trying days, where fear and illness has swept the entire globe, it is all too obvious Whose hands our lives are in. We turn to G-d, weakened by insecurity, panic, and illness. And we should. But when this pandemic subsides, please G-d, may it be speedily, may we remember that our primary service of G-d is with our full health and communal vibrancy.

Sources: Commentary, Vayikra 1:2

ASK!

Debra from NJ asked:

Dear Rabbi,

I'm at an early stage of considering becoming observant in Jewish lifestyle and practices, but something is on my mind that I think holds me back. If I go ahead and follow Jewish Orthodoxy, will I be looked down upon as a "second class citizen" by others who were born observant? Maybe this shouldn't bother me, but it does. Thanks.

Dear Debra,

I can't promise you what exact reaction you'll get from every single Orthodox Jew, but I can tell you, from my experience, that the correct Jewish attitude towards one who decides to become Torah observant is the accepted attitude of the observant community everywhere.

Rabbi Abahu said in the Talmud, "In a place where *ba'alei teshuva* (returnees to Torah observance) stand, not even one who was always completely righteous can stand." Rabbi Abahu bases this well-known teaching on a verse in the writings of the Prophet Isaiah (57:19). A different Talmudic Sage disagreed with Rabbi Abahu and said that one who never transgressed is first (as one might very well think should be the case based on logic).

Nevertheless, the Rambam rules according to the view of Rabbi Abahu that the newly observant is more lofty (Laws of Repentance 7:4): "Our Sages stated, 'In the place where *ba'alei teshuva* stand, even the completely righteous are not able to stand.' The level of *ba'alei teshuva* transcends the level of those who never sinned at all, since they overcome their inclination to transgress more so than a righteous person who never sinned."

Rashi explains that the power of the returning Jew is so great that no one is worthy of standing (in a spiritual sense) "in front of him" or along with him in his unique spiritual place.

Another explanation for the higher level of the *ba'al teshuva* is given by Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler. He enlightens us on the apparent paradox of why one who returns after transgressing occupies a greater place of honor than one who was righteous his entire

life. The purpose of the Creation – and especially Mankind – is to express the glory of the Creator. The righteous do this by always fulfilling the will of the Creator by themselves, so to speak. On the other hand, one who sins and then repents and returns to the way of God reveals another dimension of Divine glory. He shows that with the acceptance of merciful assistance from God to help begin his return, he is able to make a great effort to successfully conquer his previously unbeatable inclination to transgress.

Another way to help understand this teaching of Rabbi Abahu is the following: One who eats on the day preceding Yom Kippur is attributed as if he fasted for two days. Why? After a person eats on one day, it is often even harder for him to refrain from this activity of eating on the next day. He is accustomed to eating. In a similar fashion, since a *ba'al teshuva* has eaten from "forbidden fruits" by transgressing, it makes refraining from sin that much harder. Therefore, when he repents, does *teshuva* and returns to the way of God, he stands in a place where a person who never transgressed cannot reach. (Torah Temimah)

A personal observation, if you don't mind. As one who has taught and interacted with *ba'alei teshuva* over the years, there are numerous times when I have heard the same reaction from students who have returned after going to eat Shabbat meals with host families who have been life-long observant:

"What a surprise! I am a *ba'al teshuva* (or in the process of becoming one) and look up to someone who is an FFB (*frum*-from-birth) as my spiritual superior. However, my hosts told me that they love to invite *ba'alei teshuva* into their homes since it greatly inspires them to improve their spiritual growth when they see how a Jew has changed to become observant, often with some degree of self-sacrifice. *They* look up to *me* for inspiration!"

I have no doubt, however, that in truth they all look up to *each other*. They all help one another in every way possible in their ongoing efforts to follow the ways of the Torah and share in much happiness and success.