

**LIGHT
FROM
THE
FUTURE
PARSHAS TZAV**

**BY
HESCHEL GREENBERG**

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TZAV

**LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE
ESSAYS ON PARSHAS TZAV**

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Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who, more than any Jewish leader, has prepared us for Moshiach and the imminent Redemption

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INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *parshas Tzav* was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

“The time of your Redemption has arrived.”

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to

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help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *galus/exile* mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

* * *

In most years, parshas Tzav is read the Shabbos preceding Passover and is therefore referred to as Shabbos Hagadol-the Great Shabbos. One explanation for this title is to remind us that the upcoming Holiday of Liberation is not just about the past; it is also and primarily about the future liberation from exile which will be great, even in comparison with the Exodus from Egypt!

ESSAY ONE

EMPTYING OUR HEART'S POCKET

When we ask for Moshiach we are actually asking from the two layers of our heart external and internal.

The desire for the satisfaction of our individual needs that Moshiach will bring derives from the external part of our emotions.

The desire to be as one with G-d and connect to the entirety of the Jewish people, foregoing all personal interests, arises from the depths of the heart of every Jew.

ESSAY ONE

EMPTYING OUR HEART'S POCKET

Lack of a Wallet

This week's parsha begins with G-d telling Moses to "command Aaron and his sons, saying: This is the Torah-law of the burnt offering..."

Rashi comments on the Torah's use of the strong term "command" rather than the more ubiquitous expression "speak." Rashi, in his second explanation, cites Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai:

"Scripture needs especially to urge (a person to observe a commandment) when the Mitzvah causes him a financial loss [literally: "lack of a wallet"]".

The conventional wisdom expressed by Rabbi Shimon's answer is that when we are forced to dig deep into our pockets we might find all sorts of rationalizations as to why we should not incur the cost. G-d therefore chose to underscore the importance of the burnt offering by using the more austere expression "command" rather than

“speak” or “say.” No matter what the cost, you should not hesitate to offer this sacrifice.

Every expression employed by our Sages is careful and precise. They did not allow poetic license to dictate the expressions they used. When Rabbi Shimon spoke about incurring a loss he did not use the term “loss of money” but instead a “lack of a *kis*-wallet.” We must understand why Rabbi Shimon chose that particular expression.

The Rebbe (cited in the Gutnick edition of the Chumash) provides a simple explanation: It was to indicate a more serious financial loss; one is not merely lacking funds, but they are totally depleted to the extent that one’s wallet has been is totally exhausted.

However, although the simple meaning is its most basic meaning, there are other layers of depth embedded in the text. Upon deeper reflection one can find a spiritual explanation for the use of the term “lack of a *kis*-wallet.”

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 97a) relates that Moshiach’s coming will be prefaced by a dire economic downturn. The way the Talmud articulates this point is:

“The son of David [i.e., Moshiach] will not come until the *perutah* (a small copper coin) will cease from the wallet.”

How's Your Pericardium?

The Chassidic work *Divrei Yechezkal* cites an earlier Chassidic work, *Yismach Moshe*, who not only gives a novel interpretation to this statement but cites Elijah the Prophet as his source!

The Hebrew word for wallet is *kis*, which can also mean a pouch or a sac and is also used in Talmudic texts on anatomy as a reference to the "sac of the heart"—the **pericardium** (from the Greek "around" and "heart"; a double-walled sac containing the heart and the roots of the great vessels).

The Hebrew word *perutah* is cognate to the word *perat*, which means detail or individual. The *Yismach Moshe* then proceeds to retranslate the above quote as follows:

The son of David will not come until our hearts (*kis*) cease to focus on our individual needs (*perutah*) and instead are directed to the will of G-d and the needs of the entire Jewish nation. Only this can extricate them from exile and its attendant suffering. Not only do we humans suffer in exile, the Shechinah-the Divine presence also suffers with us because its presence is obstructed.

With this novel interpretation of the word *kis*, that it refers to the heart, we can retranslate Rabbi Shimon's words thus:

“Scripture needs to urge (a person to observe a commandment) especially when the Mitzvah causes him to lack the proper heartfelt feelings for the Redemption.”

What’s the Connection?

At this point, we may wish to understand the connection between the *olah*-burnt offering and the lack of heartfelt feelings for the Redemption.

Another question: If, as the *Yismach Moshe* suggests, the word *kis* refers to the heart, why didn’t our Sages allude to this by using the word for the heart itself—which is *lev*. Instead they chose a word that refers to the sac that surrounds the heart, but not the heart itself. Moreover, *kis* also connotes one’s wallet. How do we connect the empty wallet with the heart’s emptiness?

To answer all these questions, we must examine the spiritual nature of the burnt offering. The burnt offering was entirely consumed by fire on the Altar. No part of it was consumed by any person. This offering therefore expresses an uncompromising devotion to and passion for G-d. With this offering, one must put aside his or her own personal interests, even if they are spiritual. For the individual’s spiritual and physical needs, we have the *shelamim*-Peace Offering discussed in last week’s parsha.

In truth, Moshiach will serve our individual needs as well as our spiritual needs, since exile is an imposition on both. Moshiach's coming will be enabled by our proceeding along parallel pathways: the *shelamim*-Peace Offering model, which underscores the needs and wants of each individual and the *olah*-Burnt Offering paradigm, which speaks to the complete subordination of our own interests and passions to those of the entire Jewish people and G-d.

Two Models: Moshiach Son of David and Son of Solomon

We can see both models in the two royal progenitors of Moshiach: Kings David and Solomon.

When Maimonides wishes to identify Moshiach's principal traits he writes that Moshiach must "meditate on the Torah and engage in the observance of the Mitzvos **as his ancestor David.**" David is seen as the model for single minded devotion to G-d. Anyone who reads the Psalms, particularly, Psalms 27 and 119, is struck by King David's unbridled passion to serve G-d in the most ardent and exclusive manner. In Psalm 27 he declares: "**One thing** I ask of G-d, it is this I seek: to sit in the house of G-d all of my days to behold the pleasantness of G-d, and to visit His sanctuary."

Moshiach will usher in the *Olah*-Burnt Offering world: one filled with G-dly passion.

King Solomon, whose very name means “peace,” represents the second model for Moshiach and the Messianic Age—the *Shelamim*-the Peace Offering. Moshiach will bring a period of peace, harmony and an abundance of all physical delights. All of our needs and desires will be satisfied. In this model the need of each individual is paramount.

This may explain why, in the Talmudic statement that Moshiach will come when the individual needs will cease from the heart, as explained above, the Talmud actually uses the phrase “ben Dovid-the son of David,” and not Moshiach. Here the emphasis is on Moshiach’s role in emulating his ancestor David in his focus on living an *olah* model of life.

We can now understand why the Talmud used the word *kis* to signify the heart rather than the word *lev*-which means the heart itself.

When we ask for Moshiach we are actually asking from the two layers of our heart: the heart itself and the sac that surrounds the heart. The desire for the satisfaction of our individual needs that Moshiach will bring derives from the external part of our emotions. This external source is metaphorically likened to the *kis*, the external sac that encases the heart. The desire to be as one with G-d and connect to the entirety of the Jewish people, foregoing all

personal interests, arises from the depths of the heart of every Jew.

Thus, our Sages are careful to stress that “the son of David” does not come unless we distract ourselves from our own *perutah*-individual needs and wants.

This does not mean that Moshiach cannot come otherwise, G-d forbid. It merely suggests the need to cultivate within ourselves the desire for the higher dimension of Moshiach to manifest itself. Towards this end we have to empty the *kis*, the cover of our hearts, and allow our inner heart to manifest its true desire.

We can now understand the interplay between the simple meaning of “the lack of a wallet” and the allegorical meaning that refers to the sac encasing the heart. The desire for money and material possession is indeed a manifestation of the *kis*, the pericardium. In order for us to focus on the *olah* model we must divest ourselves of our hearts’ preoccupation with material goods.

A Puzzling Midrash

We can turn now to a puzzling and elusive Midrashic comment:

The students of Rabbi Yosi ben Kisma asked him:
“When will the son of David come?”

He replied, "This is the Torah of the burnt offering..."

On the surface, his answer has no relationship to their question.

In light of the above analysis, however, we can see the connection. Their question was not about the practical steps required to bring Moshiach. They knew that our Torah study, Mitzvos and prayers have the capacity to do just that. They also knew that Moshiach will come when they bring a symbolic *shelamim* offering, whereby they dedicate themselves to living a wholesome life, one in which everyone benefits. They, however, had their hearts set on possessing the key to the much higher model of Redemption that is associated with "the son of David."

In the words of Maimonides:

"The prophets and the Sages longed for the Messianic days not in order to dominate the nations of the world, not to rule over them, nor to be exalted by them, nor to eat and drink and rejoice, but to be free to study Torah, with no one to oppress or disturb them, so as to deserve life in the world to come."

Maimonides then refers the reader to an earlier discussion of this matter in which he attributes this single-minded yearning to King David.

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Rabbi Yossi's response to his students was for them to study Torah—and, by extension, observe the Mitzvos—permeated with the *olah* model; by this study they will merit to experience the higher dimension associated with Moshiach, the Son of David.

ESSAY TWO

USE BOTH HANDS!

In Judaism, the preparation for a Mitzvah—while less dramatic, romantic and exciting than the actual Mitzvah—is no less G-d's will.

The same G-d that asked us to celebrate Passover wants us to prepare for it.

And while the preparations are more tedious and appear to lack the sense of fulfillment and satisfaction of the actual Seder, they are an integral part of the Mitzvah.

ESSAY TWO

USE BOTH HANDS!

“Aaron and His Sons Did Everything”

A the very end of this week’s parsha—after discussing in detail the seven day initiation process Aaron and his sons had to go through before they would serve in the Sanctuary—the Torah declares:

“Aaron and his sons did everything that G-d commanded through Moses (lit. “by the hands of Moses.”).

Rashi comments that the Torah here is “praising Aaron and his sons for not deviating to the right or to the left.”

Three questions have been raised:

First, whenever the Torah mentions the fact that Aaron followed Moses’ instructions it phrases it differently: “that he did not alter G-d’s command **to Moses**” but here it says “by the hands of Moses.”

Second, in other places where the Torah wishes to relate the praise of Aaron Rashi states, “he did not alter the

command.” Whereas here Rashi says “he did not deviate right or left.”

Third, why does the Torah even have to tell us that Aaron—who the Torah describes as being equal (in many respects to Moses)—should have to be praised that he followed G-d’s commandment and that he did not stray from them. Much lesser individuals would not consider it a compliment if they were told that their greatness consisted merely in doing as G-d has expressly commanded them.

What Motivates Us?

The Chassidic work *Igra d’kala* provides one answer to all these three questions:

To better appreciate what was unique about Aaron and his sons in this initiation procedure we must examine what it is that motivates a person to perform a Mitzvah. Obviously, when we are raised from infancy onward to perform certain rituals etc. our compliance with the Torah comes natural; it is the way we were brought up. When, however, we are introduced to a new practice and told to conform to a prescribed course of action, we can discern several distinct patterns.

One individual will be motivated by a sense of duty. If they respect authority—especially if it is a Divine Authority—they will comply unreservedly.

Judaism demands that one's commitment to the Commandments be, first and foremost, based on acceptance of a Higher Authority.

Investing our Emotions of Fear and Love

But G-d also commands us to instill all of our positive actions with affect and emotion.

Within the emotional sphere there are two distinct modes:

Some people might be motivated by a sense of fear. Either fear of retribution if one does not comply. On a higher plane it could be motivated by a feeling of reverence and awe. All of these three feelings—fear, reverence and awe—have one thing in common; they express the person's emotional constriction. One who is in fear of something will recoil and “shrink” in the face of that which is feared. Similarly, when a person is overwhelmed by an awesome person or experience they will be humbled.

Yet there is a different, more emotionally expressive, mode of observance: One that is motivated by love. Love is an expansive emotional experience. It is full of life and passion as compared to fear that is devoid of energy.

In Kabbalah these two modes of expression are represented by the left and right hands respectively. The right hand that is more active and energetic (for a left-handed person, his or her left hand is considered right in Jewish law) is therefore a metaphor for love. Moreover, the act of giving—done mostly through the more powerful hand—is generally motivated by love for the recipient. Hence the right and giving hand is the symbol of love.

The left—and weaker hand that is generally not involved in giving; it remains passive—is the symbol of fear and reverence.

The Power of Synthesis

There is a third model for observance; it is the ability to synthesize both of these emotions and attitudes. Few people can maintain such a harmonious balance between love and awe, but those who can are said to be endowed with the Divine attribute of *Tiferes* that means beauty because beauty is expressed primarily in a mosaic or symphony that blends different colors, hues or sounds.

Of all the Biblical personalities that we read about, Moses stands out as one who possessed this incredible synthesis of love and awe. Moses personified the Divine attribute of *Tiferes* more than any other human being.

When the Torah tells us about Aaron and his sons, and how they did exactly as G-d commanded, the Torah wishes to convey the message that they did not just do what they were told to do out of a sense of obedience and submission to authority; they invested feelings as well. To be sure, obedience to the Divine will is the primary desire of G-d. But, Aaron and his sons went further. Moreover, Aaron and his sons did not just instill one “hand,” or one emotion, in their new mission as Priests—either love or awe—but they did exactly as Moses would have done it. They did with one hand that combined the properties of both right and left.

Thus, the Torah tells us that Aaron did as G-d had commanded “by the **hand**” of Moses. In this initiation process they were able to achieve the ideal of Moses; the synthesis between the right and the left; love and awe.

Rashi therefore explains that they did not deviate “to the right or to the left.” This was not meant to suggest that they did not violate G-d’s command. That would be too obvious. Rather it means that they did not allow their observance to be mono-colored by either intense passion or by profound awe and reverence. They were able to transcend the right and the left by combining the two.

This explanation—based on the brief comments of the work *Igra d'kalah*, call for further clarification for the inevitable question:

If Aaron always complied with G-d's command to him, what was different about this particular situation—the initiation of Aaron and his sons—that the Torah emphasizes that they did not go to the right or the left. Why specifically in this regard did they achieve this synthesis and not in all the other places where Aaron was commanded to do something? And if he achieved that goal in the other places as well, why is it only intimated in the narrative of their initiation into the service of the Sanctuary?

Synthesis at All Times

One may suggest that Aaron certainly achieved the highest level of spiritual emotion whenever he performed a divinely commanded act. However, with regard to this case in particular one might have thought that Aaron could not possibly have invested all this energy and experienced this ultimate synthesis that was unique to Moses. This is so because this initiation process in which he was engaged a full week was precisely that: an initiation. It was not the real thing; only a preparation for the real thing. As we will read in the next parsha, the Divine presence did not manifest itself in the Sanctuary until the “eighth” day; the day after the initiation process was completed.

One, therefore, might have thought that it would have been impossible for them to experience the love and awe that they would feel in the future. One's love and awe is usually a response to a profound spiritual experience. When one feels the love and closeness of G-d they will reciprocate with love. When one is exposed to the majesty and awesomeness of G-d it inspires the feeling of awe and reverence on the part of the person to whom G-d has revealed His majesty. But when one is merely "practicing" and "training" for the real thing, one would have concluded that it is impossible to generate either of these feelings; certainly not the synthesis of the two.

The Torah therefore tells us: not so!

Aaron and his sons, in anticipation of what was to come, were able to generate not just one "hand" the feeling of awe and reverence but also the emotion of love and integrate the two.

The rationale for this is that in Judaism, the preparation for a Mitzvah—while less dramatic, romantic and exciting than the actual Mitzvah—is no less G-d's will. The same G-d that asked us to celebrate Passover wants us to prepare for it. And while the preparations are more tedious and appear to lack the sense of fulfillment and satisfaction of the actual Seder, they are an integral part of the Mitzvah.

It may also be suggested that they received the inspiration to achieve this from Moses under his tutelage they were being trained. Moses imparted some of his ardor and awe to his disciples.

Pre-Passover Mode

We are all presently in the pre-Passover mode in two senses of the word. First, this is the week before the Festival of Passover. Second, we are in the last moments of exile, on the heels of the final Redemption.

And there are two ways we can view the period we are in:

We can feel that what we do now has no real meaning since it is only the preparation for the “real” thing in the future. This feeling is magnified when we reflect on the length and depth of the exile we have gone through. With this attitude, everything we do is devoid of emotion. We do what we have to do, but no more.

Alternatively, we can look at it the way Aaron and his sons viewed their preparation and initiation period. In great anticipation of what was to come, as well as realizing how important preparing for a Mitzvah is, they were able to generate all the requisite emotions; indeed, even to approach the sublime level of Moses himself. And just as Moses instilled his own “two hands” into their preparations,

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so too Moshiach—who is the Moses of the generation of the final Redemption—inspires and instills within us the ability to approach our tasks with emotion.

In these final days of preparation for the annual Passover and the future ultimate and final Holiday of Liberation, may we all experience our physical and spiritual liberation and greet Moshiach with both hands; with love and awe.

ESSAY THREE

THE ULTIMATE SYMPHONY

Moshiach is the embodiment of Moses and more.

Moshiach, as Moses, embodies the balance between right and left, and he too has the “single” hand that can guide the exquisite symphonic music that will accompany the “new song” we will sing imminently, in the days of Redemption.

ESSAY THREE

THE ULTIMATE SYMPHONY

Aaron did not Change

There is something intriguing about the way the Torah refers to Aaron's compliance with the directives he was given by Moses. In several verses the Torah declares that "Aaron did as G-d had commanded him." In each of these instances, Rashi's comment is: "This is to tell his praise: that he did not change," meaning that he had complied fully with the instructions he was given.

In the end of this week's parsha, which deals with Aaron's initiation into the High Priesthood, the Torah makes a similar declaration, but with a slight variation:

"Aaron and his sons did everything that G-d commanded through [literally: "in the hands of"] Moses."

When we examine this verse and contrast it with similar verses, many questions arise:

First, in other similar verses the Torah states that he complied with the commandments that G-d "commanded

Moses.” Why does the Torah stress here that these commandments were given “through” Moses?

Second, the literal translation of this verse, as noted above, is that these commandments were given by G-d, “in the hands of Moses.” The Torah does not employ idiomatic expressions just as a literary device. There must be a deeper meaning—and many layers of meaning—in the term “in the hands.”

Third, Rashi, in anticipating the question we might have - why does the Torah have to tell us that they (Aaron and his sons) did as they were commanded? – replies: “This is to tell their praise: that they did not stray to the right or to the left.” What does Rashi mean by “right” and “left?”

Fourth, if Aaron could have strayed, and done so, what would he have done differently?

Fifth, why would we ever entertain the notion that Aaron—the man chosen by G-d to be the Kohain Gadol/the High Priest - would have been tempted to stray?

Sixth, as stated above, in Rashi’s discussion of other places in the Torah where it is stated that Aaron complied with G-d’s commandment, his wording is slightly different: “This is to tell their praise: that he did not change.” Why does Rashi have to add here that Aaron and his sons deviated neither to the right or the left?

Aaron and His Sons

The obvious difference between this verse and the others is that it refers here to Aaron and his sons. Aaron's own compliance is not as noteworthy as the fact that he and his sons complied together. It was truly remarkable that there was complete cooperation and harmony in their joint practice of the initiation rites.

Aaron and his sons—at least the two elder sons, Nadav and Avihu—were temperamentally very different. Aaron was calm, patient, tolerant, loving and a peaceful servant of G-d. Aaron was the ultimate expression of *chesed* - kindness. Nadav and Avihu, on the other hand, were powerful, strong willed, individuals, who did not always consult with Moses or Aaron before making an offering, which – as we will discover in the next parsha - resulted in their untimely passing.

Moreover, Or Hachaim suggests that their deaths were not a punishment but rather the fulfillment of their passionate need to come closer to G-d. Their longing was so intense that they could not keep their souls anchored in the physical world; that is what impelled them to bring the unauthorized offering in the first place.

The Oral Tradition fills in the gap by stating that they were also celibate and that they were intoxicated with passion, which caused them to stray from their G-d given role as

people who would help bring the Jewish nation closer to G-d. Instead they allowed their own passions to take them away from the very people they were chosen to serve.

No Right or Left Turns

It is now easier to see how Aaron and his sons could have strayed to the “right” or to the “left” in the execution of their duties.

Right and left are metaphors for the opposite emotions of chesed and gevurah. Chesed is generally translated as kindness but in a broader sense it refers to the traits of openness, expansiveness, love, and sociability. Gevurah, on the other hand, is the very opposite of Chesed, and is characterized by strength, rigidity, separation, harshness, judgment and intensity. A Gevurah-oriented person’s love, for example, can be so powerful and intense that it smothers and overwhelms the one he or she loves.

Aaron was the embodiment of Chesed, which is why he acquiesced to the demands of the people to make the golden calf in Moses’ absence. His love for them and fear for their well-being prompted him to shoulder the blame for their sin. Thus, he illustrates the principal flaw of a kind, tolerant and peace loving individual: he cannot successfully execute orders that require the trait of Gevurah.

For Aaron, it would have been extremely difficult for him to limit his open and loving personality. By his very nature, Aaron would have been drawn to the “right” – toward Chesed - at the expense of the intense demands of Gevurah required in the initiation rites for the Mishkan. Conversely, Aaron’s sons, by virtue of the very opposite trait of Gevurah, would have been hard-pressed to limit their spiritual energy in any way.

The emotional challenges that Aaron and his sons had to face were exacerbated by the command in the preceding verse:

“You should stay at the entrance of the tent of Meeting day and night for seven days, and must guard your appointed duty to G-d so that you will not die, for this is what I was commanded.”

Right after this stern admonition, the Torah describes Aaron and his sons’ compliance as unerring. What is the connection between these two verses?

A Major Sacrifice

Staying inside the Mishkan for seven full days posed an enormous spiritual challenge for Aaron and his sons, albeit for opposite reasons.

For Aaron, staying away from the people was a major sacrifice. Aaron devoted his life to the people, whom he loved above all others. In mystical sources we are told that his level of *chesed* even surpassed that of Abraham, who was the very personification of kindness.

Conversely, Aaron's two oldest sons were forced to accommodate themselves to the rules that would inhibit and contain their souls' passions. That was extremely difficult for them.

The Torah makes a point of describing the degree of restraint shown on the part of both Aaron and his sons. They did not drift to either the extreme right or the extreme left, emotionally and spiritually speaking.

Moses and Moshiach: The Ultimate Conductors

The question remains, how did they have the power to exhibit such restraint and discipline, at least until the events described in our next parsha?

The answer can be found in the unusual wording of the verse: G-d's command to them came through "the hands of Moses." Moses' "hands" imply his unparalleled ability to balance *Chesed* and *Gevurah*. Moses, the transmitter of Torah, personified the trait of *Tiferes*, which allows for the perfectly balanced synthesis of these two traits. The word

“hand” in the singular alludes to this unified approach to life.

During the seven days of initiation, Moses conducted the G-dly symphony with the skillful movement of his hand. Moses’ elevated presence ensured that there was harmony between father and sons, right and left. Once Moses left the scene, however, Aaron’s older sons rebalanced to favor their one-sided personalities, which resulted in their untimely passing.

Generation Gap

The lesson for our day is obvious. Parents and children are products of different times. There is a natural tendency for children to think that they can do some or even all things better than their parents (which might very well be the case in some instances). The “generation gap” that has so characterized modern times has encouraged the children to stray from the traditions of the parents.

When a parent has several children, he or she discovers that despite shared parents, schools, and virtually identical upbringings, each child will be different and unique. No matter how hard we endeavor to shape our children in the same mold, the outcome is seldom uniform. Children are rarely exactly like their parents and two or more children are unlikely to be like each other.

Is this good or bad?

The answer, like the answer to so many similar questions is, “it depends.”

When we deal with emotions, we should encourage the cultivation of each person’s unique personality traits. If a child is happy and gregarious, that should be celebrated and encouraged. Of course, no one wants a child who is happy-go-lucky, without a serious bone in his or her body or one, for that matter, who is reclusive and bereft of social skills. As long as there is an overall balance, we are not concerned by a child whose personality leans in a certain direction. A parent must possess the skill of a conductor who has the ability to raise and educate a well-balanced child. A parent can only achieve this by incorporating Moses’ Torah approach.

The New Song

There is also a lesson for our times as we prepare for Redemption. Moshiach is the embodiment of Moses and more. Moshiach, as Moses, embodies the balance between right and left, and he too has the “single” hand that can guide the exquisite symphonic music that will accompany the “new song” we will sing imminently, in the days of Redemption.

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As we prepare for these days, particularly in the Passover season of Liberation, we must remember that we cannot stray to the right or the left. As members of a symphonic orchestra we must keep our eyes on the conductor. The teachings of the Torah, transmitted to us by Moses and the Moshiach of our generation, will guide us and lead us to the Era of Redemption. May we merit being part of that symphony!

ESSAY FOUR

KORBAN SUBSTITUTES

Chassidus explains that the unwitting commission of a sin is a sign that one's animal nature is still untamed, causing one to gravitate towards transgression without even realizing it.

If our Animal Souls were refined and receptive to our G-dly souls, with whom they share "occupancy" of our bodies, we would never be prone to an unintentional sin.

ESSAY FOUR

KORBAN SUBSTITUTES

The Five Offerings

The Biblical book of Leviticus (*Vayikra*) is devoted to the laws of the various offerings in the Bais Hamikdash. This week's parsha, *Tzav*, speaks of the *Olah Mincha*, *Chatas*, *Asham* and *Shlamim* offerings, among others

When the Torah introduces these five offerings it introduces each of them with the identical words: **"This is the law (*Toras*) of the.."** followed by either: "*Olah*-Burnt Offering; "*Mincha*-Meal Offering"; "*Chatas*-Sin Offering"; "*Asham*-Guilt Offering"; or "*Shlamim*-Peace Offering."

The Talmud and Midrash derive from these introductory phrases that when one studies the laws concerning these offerings, the Torah regards it as if one had actually brought them to the Bais Hamikdash.

The question has been asked, why the Torah needed to make this introductory lesson separately for each of the

five offerings in this week's parsha. Why the need for five separate but identical lessons?

Torah and Intimacy

Upon deeper analysis we can see that each one of these offerings pose a different challenge for us to be able to replace them with Torah study.

The *Olah* offering was unique because it was burnt on the Altar in its entirety. This offering alludes metaphorically to people whose passion for G-d is total. No part of their personality is held back from their devotion to G-d.

How does Torah study, a cerebral exercise, take the place of unbridled passion for G-d?

A simple yet profound explanation can be offered:

Torah is G-d's expression of love for us. It is through the Torah that we have become "betrothed" to G-d, as it were. A well-known Biblical phrase concerning the Torah alludes to this: "The Torah Moses commanded us as an inheritance to the assembly of Jacob." The word for inheritance in Hebrew is *morasha*, which the Talmud says can also be rendered *me'urasa*-betrothed. No other nation, the Talmud rules, may study Torah the way we do because to do so would violate the law against adultery!

To be sure, the nations of the world are encouraged to study the teachings of the Torah that relate to the observance of their Seven Noahide Commandments. But, G-d vouchsafed Torah as a life-partner to the Jewish people exclusively.

The passion that one expressed through the all-encompassing *Olah* offering can be replaced now by the all-embracing manifestation of love and intimacy one experiences with G-d's Torah.

Torah: Elicits the Soul

The *Mincha* offering possessed its own uniqueness. It is by far the least extravagant of the offerings and one might think it was, therefore, also the least significant.

In truth, the opposite is true. When the Torah introduced the *Mincha* offering in last week's Parsha it said, "When a *Nefesh*-person-soul offers a *Mincha*-meal-offering..." Rashi cites the Talmud's discussion as to why the Torah introduces the *Mincha* with the word *nefesh*, which also means soul. His answer is: "Whose custom is it to bring a *Mincha*? A poor person. Says the Holy One, Blessed is He, 'I regard it as if he has brought his own soul'"

When a person who might be poor, in the sense of a lack of sophistication, intellectual or spiritual prowess, makes a seemingly nominal gesture to get closer to G-d, He regards it as if they had given everything. Precisely because this individual is so bereft of high qualities, his or her insignificant gesture is indeed more profound than that of the spiritual sophisticate who brings the *Olah* totally consumed with a passion for G-d in every fiber of his being.

While the sophisticated person brings the totality of his or her knowledge, emotions and actions to the worship of G-d, the simple Jew brings his or her soul!

By introducing the *Mincha* offering with the words "This is the Torah of..." the Torah instructs us that the value of Torah study is measured not by the quantity but by the effort put into it. As the Talmud puts it: "Whether one does a lot or a little; as long as his heart is directed towards Heaven."

The power of Torah study to achieve that which a *Mincha* offering would arise when it is studied as a poor man's offering, with humility. Consider what we say at the end of the Amidah prayer: "Let my soul be as dust for all," which is then followed by "open my heart to Your Torah." When we study Torah with a poor person's sincerity and humility

we offer our very soul to G-d, not just our external faculties.

Torah: “Spices” the Animal Soul

The *Chatas*-Sin-Offering is likewise unique. While the offering was not entirely consumed on the Altar like the *Olah*, it possessed another salient feature:

The Sin-Offering atoned for certain serious breaches of the Torah. However, it was only offered for the **unintentional** violation of these prohibitions.

Why would a person who transgresses unwittingly be in need of atonement?

Chassidus explains that the unwitting commission of a sin is a sign that one’s animal nature is still untamed, causing one to gravitate towards transgression without even realizing it. If our Animal Souls were refined and receptive to our G-dly souls, with whom they share “occupancy” of our bodies, we would never be prone to an unintentional sin. It is said of a Tzadik that he or she is protected from doing even an unintentional sin. In one respect, the inadvertent transgression is even more serious than an occasional lapse into committing an intentional sin.

For example, one might lose his temper for which one must certainly atone by seeking forgiveness. Contrast that with a person who loses sensitivity to another's needs and behaves in a way that causes pain and anguish without even realizing it. The latter situation is more egregious for two reasons.

First, it is a sign that one's Animal Soul is simply out of touch with decency and civility.

Second, when a person commits a crime with malice and forethought, he or she is aware that it is a crime. As a result there is a strong chance that he or she will seek ways to make amends. Not so those who don't even realize that they have done something wrong.

The objective of offering an animal as a form of atonement was symbolically to bring sensitivity to the Animal Soul.

By introducing the section concerning the Sin Offering with the words, "This is the Torah of..." the Torah suggests that study of its teachings regarding this sacrifice is a suitable substitute for refining the Animal Soul.

This is consonant with the Talmud's statement that Torah can "spice" one's *Yetzer Hara*-Evil Impulse. The spicing metaphor implies that our Animal Soul, which houses the *Yetzer Hara*, does not have to be eliminated; instead, it has to be refined and edified.

Torah: Shedding Light on Our Inner Selves

The *Asham*-Guilt Offering takes the lesson of the Torah's refinement of the Animal Soul a step further. The *Asham* was brought by a person who wasn't sure if he had actually transgressed. The Rebbe explains (*Likkutei Sichos* Volume 3 p. 946) that, in a certain sense, this person's Animal Soul is so desensitized that he or she isn't even aware of sinning. This phenomenon points to a much more deeply rooted spiritual and moral problem. It takes a most powerful spiritual "drill" to reach into the deepest recesses of the Animal Soul and get to the root of the problem.

The *Asham* gave the person bringing the offering the resources to extricate his Animal Soul from its trapped state and lead it to a state of closeness to G-d, alongside his G-dly soul.

Proper Torah study, specifically the study of the laws of the *Asham*, serves as a substitute because it too can reach deep into the inner layers of the Animal Soul and cause its refinement. Torah is called the light which can expose things that were previously concealed. Torah shines a light on our inner personality, exposes our Animal Soul's insensitivity and then serves as the medicine or "spice" to refine and transform it.

Torah: The Source of Peace

The *Shelamim*-Peace Offering is so called because it was “shared.” A part of it was “given” to G-d and consumed on the Altar, a second part was given to the Kohain, and a third part of it was enjoyed by its owner. It represents a threefold peace: Peace between us and G-d, peace between one Jew and another and peace between body and soul.

We can easily understand how Torah study can serve as a substitute for bringing the *Shelamim*:

Proverbs describes Torah as the source of peace: “Its ways are pleasant ways, and all its paths are peace.” Moreover, our Sages declared: “Torah was given to make peace in the world.” Kabbalah teaches that Torah corresponds to the attribute of *tiferes*, beauty and harmony. It is a synthesis of *chesed*-kindness and *gevurah*-judgment; fire and water.

Galus: All of the Above

In short: Torah study is the ultimate experience of intimacy with G-d (*Olah*); reveals the inner soul of the Jew (*Mincha*); has the capacity to heal and spice the Animal Soul (*Chatas*); can expose and shed light on the most deeply rooted flaws of the Animal Soul (*Asham*) and bring peace on all levels (*Shelamim*).

Torah is thus the most fitting medium by which we may rectify the symptoms of Galus, which is marked by a lack of the passion and intimacy generated through the *Olah*. Galus makes it difficult to express our inner soul (*Mincha*), and our Animal Souls are desensitized to their utmost (*Chatas*). We are often not even aware of the darkness in which we live (*Asham*). We certainly need the power of the *Shlamim* to rectify the lack of peace in all three areas.

The straightforward way to get ourselves out of Galus, as the Rebbe exhorted us on so many occasions, is to study Torah, specifically the parts that deal with Moshiach and Redemption. This is the easiest way for us to bring Moshiach, whose Torah teachings will obviate the need for any of the above-mentioned sacrifices. As our Sages state: "In the Messianic Age all sacrifices will cease except for the Thanksgiving offering" (also discussed in this week's parsha), to express our gratitude for the imminent Redemption.

ESSAY FIVE

ILLUMINATING GARMENTS

One of the goals of our spiritual journey is to humble ourselves before G-d.

However, breaking our egos and the resultant feelings of lowliness can degenerate into depression, which, ironically, can also be a product of our egos.

ESSAY FIVE

ILLUMINATING GARMENTS

Two Stages of Ash Removal

Among the services in the Sanctuary entrusted to the Kohanim-Priests was the removal of the ashes from the Altar. First the Kohain would remove some ashes and place them near the Altar where they would be absorbed by the earth. The remainder of the ashes would be taken out of the camp.

What is the deeper significance of this rather strange Mitzvah of removing the ashes in two stages and how does it relate to our own lives today, particularly now as we stand on the cusp of the Final Redemption?

The purpose of an animal sacrifice is to refine and elevate our own internal animal. And the goal is for it to be consumed by and subsumed within the fiery passion of the G-dly soul.

However, as we shall see there are base aspects of our personalities that are comparable to ashes that cannot be

elevated. These aspects of our personalities (the “ashes”) must therefore be removed from the Altar and taken outside of the camp. There is no room for them in our lives.

This premise can be questioned. If ashes are such a negative symbol why would some of them remain near the Altar? Furthermore, the Talmud states that during Festivals the Kohanim would allow the ashes to pile up into a huge mound on the Altar and described this mound as “the beauty of the Altar!” How could ashes, the unredeemable aspects of our animal nature, be considered an enhancement to the Altar?

G-d Driven Humility

To answer this question we should start with the analysis of the removal of the ashes from the classic Chassidic work *Derech Chaim* (authored by the second Rebbe of Chabad, Rabbi Dovber, known as the Mitteler Rebbe):

In his analysis the Mitteler Rebbe reveals that the ashes are not exclusively suggestive of the negative forces of our animal souls. The ashes of the sacrifice are also symbolic of our humble feelings of inadequacy. These feelings arise in times of prayer, precisely when we are at the height of our spiritual journey. When our souls are on fire as we recite the Shema and are consumed with a heightened G-dly

awareness, we then are overcome with a sense of how small we are. This initial feeling of inadequacy is actually a positive development, because it rids us of any and all traces of destructive ego.

Some of the ashes are therefore redeemable. These are the ashes that can be placed next to the Altar and be absorbed there because they represent the aspect of humility that can be elevated no less so than the offering of the sacrifice itself.

A Spiritual Skiing Experience Mishap

But there is also an attendant danger to the humbling nature that accompanies our spiritual journey. The breaking of our egos and the resultant feelings of lowliness can degenerate into depression. Initially, our sense of lowliness is healthy because it derives from a heightened awareness of G-d and our desire to get closer to Him. It's not about us; it's about G-d.

However, since our egos have not been completely neutralized, this initial G-d oriented sense of humility can morph into an ego-driven deep depression. This depression, the Mittlerer Rebbe writes, is not precipitated by G-dly awareness (as were the initial feelings of humility brought on by one's meditation on G-d's greatness). Rather, ironically, it is a product of the ego itself! We might be

disappointed by our inadequacies because we have an inflated expectancy of ourselves. This, in turn, can lead inexorably to a destructive downhill path to getting angry at ourselves, and ultimately giving up trying to grow.

The situation might even degenerate further. Once we feel that we are spiritual failures, it could start us down the slippery slope into indifference. We lose our desire to please G-d and instead look to please ourselves by indulging in whatever will take away our depression. So what began as a spiritual journey might actually end with a gradual fall into the abyss. The entire sacrifice-prayer experience turns into a spiritual skiing exercise which ends when we smash into a tree on our way down. Ouch!

That is why there are two stages in the process of removing the ashes. First we must not allow our spiritual growth to make us arrogant. The more we climb the proverbial ladder of prayer and get closer to G-d the more humble we become. This humility is healthy and must be placed in close proximity to the Altar to be absorbed there as an indication that it is a positive experience and is an auxiliary to the actual sacrifice.

However, we must be extremely vigilant not to allow this "ashes" consciousness to break our spirit and awaken the ego's sense of worthlessness and depression. Whatever feelings of lowliness engendered by our heightened

awareness of G-d must not give way to depression. The bulk of the ashes therefore had to be removed from the Altar and taken outside of the camp. There is no room for it in the realm of holiness.

We can now understand why the Talmud states that the pile of ashes during the Holidays were the beauty of the Altar, because that pile was reserved for the joyous festivals. In times of true G-dly joy, the danger of the ashes-humility degenerating into depression did not exist. Hence, it was an adornment to the Altar because it demonstrated that the feelings of self-abnegation engendered by their proximity to the Holy Temple and the revelation of G-d therein were all positive.

Isaac's Ashes

With this analysis we can answer a question posed by the Rebbe on the statement in the Midrash concerning the ashes left on the Altar that Abraham built for the sacrifice of his son Isaac. This, of course, was only a test and in the end Abraham substituted a ram for Isaac as the sacrifice. The Midrash states that its ashes were never removed from the Altar and stand to this day as a testament of Isaac's self-sacrifice and serve as an eternal merit for the Jewish people.

Why didn't Abraham (whom our Sages state observed the entire Torah even before it was formally given) fulfill the Mitzvah of removing the ashes? (See *Likkutei Sichos* volume 25, p. 131, for two answers.)

The Altar of Abraham and Isaac was different. Their self-abnegation was so complete, as evidenced by their readiness for total self-sacrifice, that there was no danger of their humility turning into an unhealthy and egotistical form of depression. Indeed, Abraham said of himself that he was but "dust and ashes." Their "ashes" were untainted and could therefore serve as perpetual reminders of their devotion to G-d.

The Ash-Heap of History

It can be said that all of our history follows the pattern of the sacrifices. Thus, the final step of removing the ashes parallels the last days of our stay in exile. In this very sensitive period which can be compared to a bridge that takes us into the Messianic Age of Redemption, we must integrate the two functions of ash removal.

Although it may not seem that way to some, we are at the highest point of our spiritual journey because of all the cumulative effects of all the Mitzvos ever performed. Moreover, all of the self-sacrifice of so many millions of Jews over the millennia has elevated us to the pinnacle of

closeness to G-d even if we are now not consciously aware of it. Thus, when we reflect on our collective achievements and how close we are to the climax of history when G-d's glory will be fully revealed, we are humbled.

Thus, the Midrash states, Moshiach's address to the Jewish people begins with the words, "**humble ones**, the time of your Redemption has arrived." We are humbled by the sacrifices our forebears have made and by the imminent prospect of seeing the revelation of G-dliness in the world.

This initial state of humility can be compared to the ashes that were removed from the Altar but placed alongside it. Perhaps it might even be compared to the tall mound of ashes that graced the Altar in times of joyous Festivals.

However, since we are still not out of Galus, we must still forestall the potential for humility to mutate into ego-driven depression. To allay this concern, we are commanded to take the ashes outside of our camp. There is no room here for sadness. On the contrary, the greatest display of self-abnegation is when we are able to revel in the knowledge that we are soon to experience the full revelation of Moshiach and the Messianic Age.

Illuminating Garments

There is a hint in the Torah that the removal of the ashes concerns the Messianic Age. The Torah commands the *Kohain* to wear “**other-acheirim** garments” for the removal of the ashes. “*Acheirim*” was also used as a nickname for the great Talmudic Sage, Rabbi Meir. The commentator, *Or LaMeir* (cited in the anthology, *Yalkut Geulah Umoshiach*), writes that the wearing of “*acheirim*” garments is an allusion to the Talmudic tradition that Rabbi Meir’s Torah scroll spelled the word *ohr-leather* (which describes the garment made by G-d to clothe Adam and Eve) with an *aleph* (instead of the prevalent spelling with the letter *ayin*), which translates as “garments of light.” While leather covers and conceals, light uncovers and reveals. In the Messianic Age, those aspects of life which obscure their G-dly nature will be transformed into illuminating light that will fully reveal the Divine.

What is the connection between the garments of light and the removal of the ashes?

It is clear that the final obstacle to entry into the state of Redemption is the need to get rid of the last vestiges of our negativity, which are the debilitating effects of an ego induced depression. This we do by promoting joy and light in all the Mitzvos (which are likened to garments) that we do.

Indeed, the word *acheirim*, according to the abovementioned work *Or Lameir*, has the same numerical value as the words, "David, King of Israel is living and enduring." And the word for "the ashes-*hadeshen*" is numerically equal to the word *satan*-obstacle. By wearing these radiant garments we can get rid of the negative, obstructive and depressing forces of *galus* and bask in the unfiltered light of the Divine presence.

ESSAY SIX

PERISH THE THOUGHT

The Tanya explains that we cannot be held responsible for the thoughts that “ascend” from the heart to the conscious mind.

We do, however, have control over how long those thoughts stay in our minds.

We have control as to whether we should dismiss these thoughts or allow them to ruminate in our minds.

ESSAY SIX

PERISH THE THOUGHT

Atonement for Improper Thoughts

This week's parsha begins with:

"This is the law of the ascent-offering: It is the ascent offering on the flame, on the Altar, all night ..."

This "ascent-offering" (also referred to as a "burnt offering") was to burn on the altar during the night until it turns into ashes.

The Midrash, citing the explanation of the Talmudic Sage and author of the mystical work, the Zohar, tells us that the objective of this offering was to help a person atone for improper thoughts.

One of the features of the "ascent offering" was that it was totally consumed on the altar. Most other sacrifices were given to the priests. In many offerings, even the non-priest was entitled to partake of the meat of the sacrifice.

Two questions come to mind:

First, what connection is there between an offering of a sacrifice on the altar and improper thoughts?

Second, why was this offering specifically totally consumed on the altar? It seems that the very nature of this offering (that it was completely consumed) will provide us with a clue as to how it atones for improper thoughts.

The Anatomy of a Burnt Offering

A better understanding of this sacrifice requires an analysis of the very word that the Torah uses to describe it. The word is *olah*, which means to arise, ascend, elevate.

Again, a question arises (no pun intended): Why was this sacrifice designated as an olah-ascending one, more so than all the others? After all, parts of all sacrifices were burnt on the altar. The difference between this offering (where all of it was consumed on the altar) and the others is only a quantitative one. Why, therefore, was the name olah-ascent employed for this offering exclusively?

One answer based on the Tanya by Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liady (the primary text of Chabad Chassidic literature) lies in a better understanding of the role of thought in our lives:

Controlling our Thoughts

We express ourselves in three general ways: Either through thought, speech or action. And we are responsible for the

manner in which we express ourselves. Our actions must be legal and ethical; our words must be refined and sensitive, and even our thoughts must be pure. But here is where one is entitled to raise a very simple question:

How can we control what enters our mind? Surely, we can exercise self-control on what we do and even what we say. But thought is an entirely different story. Thoughts enter our minds without us consciously asking for them to enter. How can we be faulted for these thoughts and how do we control them.

The Tanya explains that, in fact, we cannot be held responsible for the thoughts that “ascend” from the heart to the conscious mind. We do, however, have control over how long those thoughts stay in our minds. We have control as to whether we should dismiss these thoughts or allow them to ruminate in our minds.

Thus, the very word for the ascent-offering (olah) is the same word used for the process of the thought that ascends from its sub-conscious point of origin to the conscious mind.

When a Jew would bring this ascent offering, or when we pray, which takes the place of all of the offerings that were brought in the Holy Temple, his focus was on the process of how thoughts ascend from the subconscious part of our

being to the conscious mind. And that our struggle is to be vigilant when this process begins.

Moreover, since we do not have the power to control what enters (“ascends”) into our minds, we must always be on guard. In dealing with improper behavior and speech, we have a much better chance of avoiding doing or saying the wrong thing. But when it comes to thought, we are most often kept off guard. Hence, the “ascent-offering” was totally consumed on the altar as a way of underscoring that there was a much more dramatic effort needed to deal with controlling one’s thoughts.

Revealing the Purity of our Souls

On a deeper level, the “ascent-offering” was a means of revealing the pure, self-sacrificing devotion to G-d that is embedded in the recesses of one’s heart and soul; a devotion that was all consuming. When this occurs, the source of the improper thoughts that ascend to the conscious mind can be affected.

And while we cannot single-handedly change the way we think—only the way we allow those thoughts to stay in our conscious minds—G-d provided us with a physical exercise (the offering of the ascent-offering) that had the capacity to refine even that subconscious part of our

personality, that would ultimately affect and alter even the way thoughts would ascend into the conscious mind.

As long as we are in exile, the emphasis of our efforts is on the refinement of our actions and speech. Even as we try to cope with the avalanche of thoughts that enter our minds, the focus is on controlling what stays in our mind. But in the Messianic Age, we will be able to deal with our thoughts at their root and bring refinement to them, so that only proper and holy thoughts will “ascend” and enter our minds.

ESSAY SEVEN

WHEN THE TORAH RISES

It does not suffice for us to study Torah.

**We must instill it with fire so that the Torah itself rises
and you rise with it.**

**This will surely help Moshiach lead us to a higher world—
a world of freedom, peace and goodness.**

ESSAY SEVEN

WHEN THE TORAH RISES

A Cryptic Midrash

This week's parsha continues the Torah's discussion of the various sacrifices that were offered in the Mishkan, the portable Sanctuary in the desert and later in the two Temples that were built in Jerusalem.

The parsha opens with the following commandment:

“This is the law of the burnt-offering: It is the burnt offering which burns on the Altar all night until morning.” The Altar's fire shall burn with it.”

There is a cryptic Midrashic statement on this verse that reads as follows:

“The student of Rabbi Yosi ben Kisma asked him, ‘When is the Son of David coming?’ His response to them was, ‘This is the law of the burnt-offering.’”

The obvious question here is what is the connection between the coming of Moshiach and the law of the burnt-offering?

An Exercise in Numerology

One approach to this question focuses on the numerical value of the introductory word “*Zos*-this,” in the verse: “**This** is the law of the burnt offering.” The numerical value of the word “*zos*” is 408, which is the same as the cumulative value of the three words that highlight the service of Yom Kippur-the Day of Atonement: *tzom*-fasting, *kol*-voice of prayer, *mammon*-money for charity.

In many prayer books these three words appear above and parallel the words of: Teshuvah-repentance or return, Tefilah-prayer and Tzedakah-charity. Fasting is intended to facilitate our repentance. We use our voices to express our most heartfelt prayers, and we give our money to tzedakah.

These three items provide us with the power to break through the barriers in Heaven and procure atonement for us on Yom Kippur. Similarly, it is these three things that will enable us to break through the barriers of exile and bring about the final redemption through the “son of David.”

Teshuvah is explicitly mentioned in Maimonides’ code of law as a force that will bring about the final Redemption: “Israel will do Teshuvah and they will be redeemed immediately.”

Tefillah-prayer is also mentioned by our Sages as the means to bring about the Redemption. Indeed, according to

the Midrash, our daily prayers were designed precisely for that purpose. G-d wants us to show our concern for the plight of the Jewish people, materially and spiritually by praying to him to bring the Redemption. Our prophets and sages thus composed the Amidah-Shemonah Esrei (the “standing-eighteen benediction” prayer recited three times every week day) to express our most heartfelt pleas for G-d to bring an end to suffering and pain, return us to our Land and restore our Temple.

Tzedakah, likewise, has been mentioned specifically by our Sages as the means to hasten the Redemption. In the words of the Talmud: “Great is tzedakah for it hastens the Redemption.”

The Substitute for Bringing Burnt Offerings

A simpler way of explaining the connection between the words “This is the law of the burnt-offering” and the coming of Moshiach can be suggested based on the Talmudic comment on this same verse:

“Whoever studies the laws of the burnt offering is as if he had actually brought the burnt offering.”

In other words, when we study the section of the Torah that deals with the offerings in the Temple that we cannot

bring in the current day and age, it is as if we have actually made that offering.

Inherent in that statement are two lessons:

First, the study of Torah takes the place of those rituals and commandments that we cannot physically perform because of the constraints that we have been placed under due to exile conditions since the destruction of the Temple.

Second, the study of the laws concerning the offerings—that we will only be able to make in the future when the third temple is built by Moshiach—is the very catalyst that will make it happen. When we study the laws concerning these offerings, and, more generally, when we study any part of Torah that deals with Moshiach and the Redemption, it generates the energy that will bring Moshiach and the Redemption.

This perhaps is what Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma had in mind when he gave his students the cryptic reply as to when “the son of David will come.” By responding with the words “This is the law of the burnt-offering” he implied that when we study the laws concerning the burnt-offering and the like, we actually make it happen. Studying Torah, and particularly, when we study these laws of Torah, hastens the arrival of Moshiach and the final Redemption at which time we will see the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem amidst world peace, universal harmony and G-dly light.

Taking the World to Higher Places

On yet a deeper level it may be suggested that Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma was emphasizing the specific sacrifice known as an “Olah—a burnt offering.” Literally, the word Olah means “going up.” When the Olah offering was brought in the Temple it represented taking all elements of creation and elevating them. A burnt offering involved salt, flour, oil and wine that accompanied the animal and a Kohain-Priest, human being who made the offering. Hence all four levels of existence—inanimate, vegetation, animal and human—were involved in this ritual, the underlying theme of which was to elevate the entire world to a higher G-dly level.

Thus, Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma was trying to teach his students that the process of Moshiach requires our efforts to elevate ourselves. Reaching higher; never staying in one place—on the spiritual plane, of course. But even that does not suffice. One must also attempt to take the world around us to higher places, by utilizing all of the world’s resources that are at our disposal for higher and nobler purposes. This, Rabbi Yossi, perhaps, meant is the force that will prepare us for and hasten the coming of Moshiach—“the son of David.”

And finally, it may be suggested, Rabbi Yossi was intimating that the way to bring Moshiach involves the manner in which we study Torah. The words “This is the

law of the burnt-offering” can also be rendered: “This is the elevation of the Torah.” And the Torah continues to describe the fire that must be left to burn on all Altar upon which the burnt offering was placed.

Permeated with Fire!

The message we can derive from this on a spiritual level is thus:

If one wants their Torah learning to rise and thereby elevate us as well it must be permeated with a constant fire. Torah learning—unlike the study of other subjects—must be instilled with fiery passion, enthusiasm and holiness, for it to rise above the level of a mere intellectual exercise and to have the maximum of power to change the person who studies it and to also affect the rest of the world.

Rabbi Yossi ben Kisma’s message to his students was:

It does not suffice for you to study Torah. You must instill it with fire so that the Torah itself rises and you rise with it. This will surely help Moshiach lead us to a higher world—a world of freedom, peace and goodness.

Our Sages tell us that just as we were redeemed for the first time in the month of Nissan, so too will we be redeemed in the month of Nissan. This has been

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interpreted to mean that in this month the energies of Redemption are especially powerful. Our “little” contribution to this effort is to internalize the lessons of the “laws of the burnt offering.”

ESSAY EIGHT

JUDAISM & OUR POCKETBOOKS

No one would suspect people of high spiritual attainments of consciously making crucial decisions based on financial considerations.

There is, however, the possibility of a subconscious effect.

ESSAY EIGHT

JUDAISM & OUR POCKETBOOKS

Why the Need for an Order?

This week's Torah portion - Tzav opens with G-d telling Moses to command Aaron and his sons to be responsible for the offering of the daily sacrifices in the Temple. Rashi notes the unusual usage of the term "Tzav-command!" Why was it necessary for Moses to order Aaron to comply? Why couldn't G-d simply have told Moses to "speak" to Aaron and his sons? Why did it have to be articulated in such a harsh manner?

Rashi's answer, citing the Talmudic sage Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, is that wherever one must incur a financial loss, "*chasaron kis*", in the fulfillment of a mitzvah, there is a need for an extra "push," to encourage them to comply.

"B'ka'aso, b'koso and b'kiso"

On the surface this sounds reasonable. The temptation to make and save money is one of the greatest pressures. Our sages alluded to the allure of money and its effects on our

character when they said that one can tell a person's character *b'ka'aso* (his anger), *b'koso* (his cup, i.e. alcohol) and *b'kiso* (his pocketbook)."

Just as rage and intoxication distort all of our perceptions and allow us to degenerate into anti-social behavior, similarly, the allure of money or the fear of losing it, can alter a person's perceptions of reality and decency.

Still, it is hard to imagine that people of the caliber of Aaron and his sons would need this encouragement. Did money mean so much to them that they would cut corners and not do precisely what they had been commanded to do.

A Telling Story

The following story provides us with a psychological insight that can shed some light on this matter.

Rabbi Sholom Dovber, the fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, instructed his son, Rabbi Joseph Isaac (who succeeded his father as the leader of Lubavitch) to embark on a journey to the capital of Russia. This was one of many missions he was to undertake and successfully execute on behalf of the Jewish community.

Upon giving his father a detailed report of the completed mission, Rabbi Sholom Dovber wanted to reimburse his

son for the full cost of the trip. The faithful son, known for his absolute self-sacrifice for Jewry and Judaism, was taken aback.

“Father,” he said, I don’t need to be reimbursed by you. I am more than happy to have shared in the cost of the mission on behalf of our people.”

Rabbi Sholom Dovber was adamant. “I must reimburse you for every cent. What you do with the money is your choice. You can keep it or contribute it to tzedakah.

Rabbi Sholom Dovber explained that had he not been reimbursed, it could have impacted the success of future missions. When confronted with two courses of action, one might be subconsciously influenced by the fact that one course of action would be more costly than the other. Without realizing the subtleties of the influence of the subconscious, one might choose the less preferred option.

The lesson is obvious. While no one would suspect people of high spiritual attainments of **consciously** making crucial decisions based on financial considerations, there is always the possibility of a subconscious effect.

Thus, the Torah exhorted Moses to **command** Aaron, his sons and all of us, to watch out for the subconscious influences that would somehow compromise the integrity of their/our mission. Even the most spiritual person could

have a subconscious desire to save money in a way that could undermine the integrity of the mitzvah.

No More Subliminal Financial Influences

Standing on the threshold of the Messianic age, about which the prophet Daniel predicted that “everything will become manifest,” including the heretofore subconscious energies, good and bad, there is an added challenge.

In the past, the subliminal and subconscious aspects of our personality, inasmuch as they were beneath the surface, exerted limited influence on our behavior. Now that they are coming closer to the surface greater care is needed to not allow them to affect our commitments to Judaism.

This awareness is the catalyst for us to make the final step into the Age of Redemption about which it is said that “the delights will be as abundant as the dust of the earth.” Then we will no longer have to worry about the effects of financial influences on our Jewishness

ESSAY NINE

EATING OUT

Eating more than any other physical experience brings about, very literally, the unity between body and soul.

Sacrifices – “G-d’s food” – had the effect of unifying G-d, the soul of the world, with the body of the world; the entire universe.

Eating is also an internalizing process, to the extent that one cannot separate between the food that one has eaten and the body which has ingested the food.

ESSAY NINE

EATING OUT

Eating it Within the Temple Precincts

Of the different types of sacrifices a Jew would offer to G-d in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, there were two distinct categories. The first included sacrifices one would bring as an atonement for one's transgressions such as a *chatas* (sin offering) or *asham* (guilt offering). The generic name for this entire category is *kodshei kadoshim*, the most holy of the holy sacrifices. The second category included the *shelamim* (peace offering) or Thanksgiving offering (*todah*) that one brought as a way of getting closer to G-d. The generic name for this category is *Kodashim Kalim*, lighter or lower levels of holiness.

One of the salient distinctions between these two categories mentioned in this week's parsha, *Tzav*, is that the sacrifices of the first category *kodshei kadoshim*, must be eaten within the precincts of the Holy Temple itself. The sacrifices of the second category (*kodashim kalim*),

however, could be eaten anywhere within the city limits of Jerusalem.

There are two questions that arise. First, why is there a restriction as to where one can eat the sacrifice? Once the sacrifice had been offered in the Holy temple, why did it matter where the person who offered the sacrifice ate it?

Second, why is there a distinction between sin offerings that may be eaten only in the Temple itself, while all other sacrifices may be eaten throughout the city of Jerusalem?

Korban: Not Sacrifice; Agent of Closeness

To answer these questions one must understand the purpose of eating the sacrifice. Why does the Torah make such a fuss about the actual eating of the sacrifice, to the point that, as stated in the Talmud, only when the Kohain (priest) ate the sin offering does the one who sinned procure atonement.

The Hebrew word for sacrifice is *korban*, which really means “drawing near.” All sacrifices are about removing the gaps that exist between a Jew and G-d, and a fellow Jew. While one can get closer to G-d and others by way of the performance of any mitzvah, the *korban* experience was considered to be the most dramatic form of achieving closeness and unity, and also the most enduring.

The Kabbalah of Eating

To exemplify the *korban's* objective of unity and endurance, the Torah required of us to actually eat the sacrifice, because of two salient features inherent in the process of eating:

First, eating more than any other physical experience brings about, very literally, the unity between body and soul. Indeed, the entire sacrificial rite is referred to as *Achilas Mizbeach*, the eating of the altar. This is to suggest that the *korban* had the effect of unifying the soul of the world — G-d — with the body of the world, the entire universe.

Second, eating is also an internalizing process, to the extent that one cannot separate between the food that one has eaten and the body which has ingested the food. The exercise of eating best exemplifies the concept of internalization.

While the offering of a *korban* effects a bond between the person and G-d, there is a need to exemplify that bond and internalize that newly acquired relationship, so that it does not dissipate with the passage of time. By eating the sacrifice, thus, the person was made aware of the sacrifice's goal of generating unity and of the need to make the ideal of unity an integral and inseparable part of his/her personality.

The Right Environment

But, eating alone does not suffice for the completion of the process. The environment in which the eating of the *korban* took place was also crucial.

Though of a peripheral nature — unlike eating which internalizes the food — environment sets the tone and direction for the other experiences of life. To guarantee that the eating of the *korban* was in the right environment, it was crucial that it be eaten in a holy place, so that the holy aspects of the *korban* should be internalized.

When one would bring a sin offering, a much greater amount of effort was required to internalize the feeling of closeness to G-d that was generated by the *korban*. Because the distance that had to be bridged was far greater for the sin-offering than for the others, there was also a greater demand that the eating of the *korban* occur in the holiest of environments, in the Temple precincts themselves.

No More Sin Offerings!

Our sages tell us that in the Messianic age there will be no need for the sin offerings. The sole offering that one will have to bring to the Temple will be the Thanksgiving offering. Despite the fact that we will no longer have to bridge the gap caused by sin, we will always need to

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express our gratitude to G-d as a way of getting closer and closer to Him; a process that will never end.

ESSAY TEN

THANKSGIVING!

Exile is like a prison, because G-d's light is concealed.

Exile is like sickness because our spiritual quest cannot be realized.

Exile is compared to a sea because of the chaotic pursuit of a livelihood similar to the turbulent waters of the sea which threaten to engulf us and drown us.

Exile is like a desert because of its spiritual desolation

ESSAY TEN

THANKSGIVING!

The Four Categories of Thanksgiving

Yes! We are in the season of thanksgiving, not only because we are on the threshold of Passover when we give thanks to G-d for liberating us from Egypt, but, this week's Torah portion *tzav* describes in detail the laws concerning the Thanksgiving offering. This sacrifice called a *Korban Todah* sacrifice was intended as a way of expressing gratitude to G-d for having delivered us from any one of four categories of danger.

The four categories are:

- a) One who was released from imprisonment.
- b) One who recovered from a serious illness.
- c) One who traveled overseas.
- d) One who traversed the desert.

R. Yosef Karo – the author of the *Shulchan Aruch*, one of Judaism's most authoritative works of Jewish Law, whose *Yahrtzeit* we will be observing on the thirteenth of Nissan

– provides us with a mnemonic to remember these four categories.

In our daily prayers we make the statement:

“And all the living things (*Chaim*) shall forever thank you.”

The word *Chaim*, R. Yosef Karo writes is an acronym for the four categories. The letter *Ches* of *Chaim* stands for *Chavush* (a prisoner), the *yud* is the initial of the word *Yesurim* (suffering from illness), the second *yud* represents the word *Yam* (sea) and the letter *Mem* is the first letter of the word *Midbar* (desert).

When we reflect on the Exodus from Egypt, we come to the realization that the Jews went through all four forms of danger. They were prisoners in Egypt; they had been subjected to all forms of suffering at the hands of the Egyptians, and were spared the illness and suffering G-d visited upon the Egyptians in the ten plagues. They crossed the sea and they traversed the desert.

Some authorities maintain that the four cups we drink at the Seder correspond to the four forms of danger the Jews were liberated from at the time of the Exodus.

Exile: Four Forms of Danger

Our sages also inform us that in the future Redemption all (personal) sacrifices will be unnecessary, except for the thanksgiving offering. At the time of the Redemption we will offer thanks to G-d because He had taken us out of four levels of hardship: prison, sickness, sea travel and desert travel.

Exile is like a prison, because G-d's light is concealed and obstructed.

Exile is like sickness. Besides the obvious sufferings that Jews endured, there is also a spiritual dimension of illness with which exile can be identified. The Hebrew word for sick "*Choleh*" has the numerical value of 49. Mystical sources tell us that there are 50 gates of understanding. One who attains 49 levels of understanding and for whom the 50th level is elusive is in a state of illness, because his/her spiritual quest cannot be realized.

Exile is also compared to a sea. The chaotic pursuit of a livelihood has often been compared to the turbulent waters of the sea which threaten to engulf us and drown us.

Exile has also been likened to a desert because of its spiritual desolation and the lack of Torah which has been compared to water. The poisonous snakes and scorpions with which a desert is identified in the Torah, represents the harmful influences present in our society.

All of these four impediments of exile: the concealment of G-d's light; the inability to realize our souls desire for more knowledge; the distractions inherent in earning a living and the danger posed by negative influences undermine the quality of *Chaim* (life).

Only after the Redemption will we all bring a thanksgiving offering because we will – for the first time in our history – experience unobstructed life in all of its facets

During Passover, however, we get a taste of this experience of life so that our appetites are whetted for the complete Redemption. We thus declare at the end of the seder:

L'shanah Haba'ah Biyerushalayim (Next Year in Jerusalem)!

ESSAY ELEVEN

TAKE AARON, PLEASE...

The word for life in the Holy Tongue is "Chaim."

The word is written in the plural form the Rebbe explained, because life is only worthy of its name if it is a life that acknowledges, appreciates, and is shared with others.

True life is defined by the nature and quality of our relationships. And since relationships are created, preserved, managed, and enhanced through speech, it follows then that speech is the primary defining factor of our humanity.

ESSAY ELEVEN

TAKE AARON, PLEASE...

Aaron the Bridegroom

In this week's parsha, the Torah introduces the inauguration of Aaron and his sons as priests in the Sanctuary with the following three Hebrew words "*Kach et Aharon*, translated as "Take Aaron..."

Chida (an acronym for R. Chaim David Azulai, one of the greatest Halachic authorities and Kabbalists of the late eighteenth century) states (in his work *Chomas Anach*) that if we take the concluding letters of these three words it spells the word *chasan*, a bridegroom. *Chida* applies this to Aaron's appointment as High Priest. He was to be honored and feted as a bridegroom is at his wedding.

Every detail of Torah is precise. Therefore the association made by the Torah between the taking of Aaron and a bridegroom can go both ways. On the one hand it suggests that Aaron should be treated as a bridegroom because he was about to enter into a new relationship with G-d upon serving as a Kohain Gadol, the High Priest. And, on the

other hand, it can also be said to imply the inverse: a bridegroom should emulate Aaron.

We can now interpret the words "Take Aaron" with its allusion to a bridegroom as a directive to the bridegroom to take his cue from Aaron. The Torah is here instructing the bridegroom: "When you enter into your marriage, Aaron should serve as your role model."

What is the connection between Aaron and a bridegroom? And in what way is the *chatan* to follow Aaron's example? And how does that relate to each and every one of us, particularly in our day and age?

L'Chaim: Speech, Relationships and Life

The greatest gift given to humans is arguably the power to communicate with speech. It is for this reason that when delineating the four levels of existence (inanimate, vegetative, animal, and human) the term used to describe the human condition is "*medaber*" which means "speaker," rather than the title "intellect."

Why is speech so central to our identity as human beings?

The answer lies in the very word for life in the Holy Tongue, the word "Chaim". The Rebbe once asked why this word is written in the plural form? The Rebbe's answer was that life is only worthy of its name if it is a life that

acknowledges, appreciates, and is shared with others. Put another way, true life is defined by the nature and quality of our relationships. And since relationships are created, preserved, managed, and enhanced through speech, it follows then that speech is the primary defining factor defining our humanity.

Marriage is the paradigm of all relationships. For a marriage to succeed it must be one in which the art of communication is well honed and refined. When our ability to communicate with our spouse suffers so, too, our relationship in general suffers. And with our diminished relationship the entire quality of life is profoundly affected since the quality of life itself hinges on the quality of our relationships.

Marriage and the Art of Communication for the Chasan

At which point in one's life is the art of communication most crucial? And for which individual is the need to communicate properly most imperative?

It stands to reason that it is the time of marriage, the ultimate relationship, wherein proper communication can either make it or break it, G-d forbid. At the point where two half-souls are to be united (or, more accurately reunited, since, according to the Zohar, our mate is actually

the other half of our soul that was separated at birth), that is the time when communication is integral to the success of the marriage. In the initial stages of marriage—particularly the first year, when Jewish law and tradition refers to the bridegroom and bride as *chasan* and *kallah*—the need for proper communication is indispensable. This period of transition from single life to married life is a most precarious time for the young couple. And frequently the future success of the relationship hinges on the way it is established at that time.

As important as this “art-form” is for both *chasan* and *kallah* the message and challenge of communication is even more imperative for the *chasan*-bridegroom. Before his marriage the man is used to a certain form of communication that might outwardly seem harsh.

Even Torah learning—which the groom is expected to engage in prior to marriage—often involves the use of critical language. To be sure, even when Torah scholars argue vociferously it is only a façade. Deep down, the two Talmudic students who argue incessantly about their studies love each other.

According to the Talmud this love becomes evident at the end of their discussion and debate. The Talmud applies the verse “*Vahev b’sufa*-Love in the end” to this phenomenon of Torah scholars showing their true love for each other

despite the strident debates in which they engaged that previously may have masked that love.

However, even this **façade** of harshness one must remove when talking to one's spouse. And while verbal abuse directed against anyone is wrong, the Talmud exhorts us to be extra vigilant when speaking to one's wife. In the marriage relationship the external form of communication is almost as important, if not as important, as its inner dimension. While a teacher may occasionally use stern language to rebuke a recalcitrant student this ought not carry over to the way one must communicate with one's spouse.

The Ultimate Role Model for Proper Speech

Who is the ultimate role model for proper communication?

The answer is Aaron. What was so unique about Aaron? Aaron, Rashi tells us, was beloved by everyone as compared to Moses who was not as "popular." Moses, in his position as the ultimate leader of the Jewish people, had to occasionally employ the tactic of harsh language of rebuke. Aaron, by contrast, would always use gentle language; he would "wear his love for everyone on his sleeve." He was able to change hearts by speaking with words that everyone could see emanated from his loving heart. Thus

they recognized because his outward manner of speaking was a genuine expression of his true inner feelings.

Even when Aaron was in a most difficult position which would have caused many a person to lose control of the content of their words, let alone their tone of voice, he still maintained his soft-spoken mannerism. One glaring example of this is when he was confronted by Moses for his role in the incident of the golden calf. His response is prefaced by the word "*Vayomer*-And he said" which in Hebrew has the connotation that he replied softly.

The Pro-Active Aaron

One might think that Aaron was a softy, that he was not an assertive or pro-active individual. And one might even conclude that his soft-spoken demeanor was a sign of weakness not of moral strength. To counter this misapprehension of Aaron's unique model of communication, the Mishnah in Ethics of the Fathers cites the immortal words of Hillel: "Be of the students of Aaron; love peace, **pursue** peace, love all creatures and bring them close to the Torah." Not only did he love peace, he pursued it. Not only did he love all creatures, he actively sought to bring them close to the Torah. This he achieved to a great extent by his unique method of communication.

Aaron's goal was no less pro-active than Moses'. But unlike Moses, his method was obsessively positive, warm, loving and peaceful.

The chasan is therefore well advised to follow Aaron's example of communication — "Take Aaron"— and incorporate Aaron's mode of communication as your own.

"With Kindness and Mercy"

We are living presently in the transitional period—on the bridge—between Galus/exile and Geulah/Redemption. We are about to enter into a new relationship with the world. We are like the chasan in his transitional period. We too must learn the lesson of communicating with love. And while in earlier generations we could have afforded the luxury of being more stern in the way we tried to affect others, today, the method we must use is the method of Aaron.

"With Kindness and Mercy"

This lesson of the chasan and Aaron can be taken a step further and applied to G-d as well.

Our Sages tell us that all of the commandments that we were given are also observed by G-d. If G-d commands us to communicate to our kallah—and, by extension, to all

others—with sensitivity and warmth, then we ask of G-d to do the same with the Jewish people, His bride. Indeed, our Sages have compared G-d to the bridegroom and the Jewish people as His bride. More specifically, they have compared the Messianic Age as the time when our marriage will be complete.

However, the initial stages of the Messianic Age can be fraught with difficult challenges. Our Sages referred to the travail that can potentially accompany this transitional period. So we therefore say to G-d:

“Follow Aaron’s example. Just as You have commanded us to communicate with love, so too lead us out of exile with warmth and love. Take us your bride under Your Chupah (wedding canopy) and into Your embrace with loving and endearing words. We have had our fill of the showers of hidden love that were expressed through the pain and suffering of Galus.

We respectfully implore G-d to communicate with us with loving sentiments that are expressed openly in a loving fashion. Not only should the outcome be pleasant but also the road to that outcome be filled with overt goodness. This is consistent with the Rebbe’s frequent blessings and prayers concerning the future Redemption: “May it be *b’chesed u’brachamim*-with kindness and mercy.”

ESSAY TWELVE

THE LIBERATION OF THOUGHT

Thought is the most intimate of “instruments” of our soul.

Improper thoughts can therefore cause more damage to the soul than improper speech or action.

Improper thoughts may also be a symptom of a diseased soul that is in dire need of refinement.

Thought is like a soul in the search of a body.

Positive thoughts will lead to positive speech and action, while negative thoughts will find expression through negative speech and action.

ESSAY TWELVE

THE LIBERATION OF THOUGHT

Imperative!

This week's parsha begins with G-d telling Moses to command Aaron and his sons concerning the manner in which an *olah*, a "burnt offering," was to be offered in the Temple.

"Command Aaron and his sons, saying, 'This is law of the burnt offering. It is the burnt offering that may burn on the Altar all night until morning. The Altar's fire shall burn with it.'"

A question has been raised as to why the Torah uses the more imperative word "command" instead of the more common and more passive expression of "speak" or "say." Why did Aaron have to be commanded? Wasn't G-d's request of him to do something enough for him to have fulfilled G-d's will? Indeed, even a slight hint would have sufficed for Aaron! (See Essay Eight for another approach.)

Rashi, noting this question, provides three explanations:

"The expression *tzav*-command always denotes urging on for the present and also for future generations." In other words, when the term "command" is used it suggests

immediacy. This is a command that a) may not be delayed and b) should be imparted to future generations as well.

If the Torah would have used a less assertive expression it could have been construed that it was not quite so urgent and its implementation might be delayed.

Furthermore, though Aaron did not have to be told in such strong terms to fulfill this obligation, his descendants might have treated it less seriously. By commanding Aaron, G-d was thinking about the future generations who might need more prodding.

Rashi then provides a third interpretation in the name of Rabbi Shimon:

“Scripture needs especially to urge a person to do a Mitzvah when it involves a severe financial loss (literally: “A lacking wallet or pouch.”)

Commentators explain that the regular offerings in the Temple were very costly. The prohibitive cost of these offerings might have caused Aaron and his sons to be lax in bringing them. The Torah thus employs the word “command” to ensure that the integrity of this offering would not be compromised.

The simple understanding of this concern is that, subconsciously, even a person of high spiritual stature who is not interested in accumulating money might,

nevertheless, cut corners in the execution of his duties in order to save some money.

The Threefold Power of Thought

A question still remains. Why does the Torah choose to impart these lessons specifically in the context of the *olah*-the burnt offering? After all, there are many other offerings and observances that can be quite costly. The fact that the Torah chose to make this admonition with respect to the burnt offering is instructive.

There is another deeper explanation of the three reasons as to why Aaron had to be commanded that relates to the spiritual nature of the burnt offering.

A burnt offering, our Sages tell us (Midrash Tanchuma), was to atone for improper thoughts.

The reason improper thoughts need atonement can be understood on three levels:

First, the thought itself, though appearing harmless, is deleterious to the soul. Of the three “garments” of our soul, thought, speech and action, thought is the closest to our soul. And, in some respects, improper thoughts can cause more damage to the soul than improper speech and/or action.

Second, an improper thought may be a symptom of a diseased soul that is in dire need of refinement. And even if the thought itself appears harmless, it can be an indicator of a decadent inner personality. It may be a telltale sign of some deep rooted decay that must be cleansed and perhaps uprooted before it can spread and corrupt the person entirely.

Third, a negative thought is like a soul without a body. And the nature of a soul is to find a body within which it can express itself. A writer has to express his or her thoughts in writing. An artist needs to draw, and an inventor has to invent. Creative people—people who are into thinking—need to express themselves. When a person harbors positive thoughts he/she seeks ways of expressing those thoughts in positive speech and action, giving the soul of their thoughts a body. Conversely, a negative thought seeks and usually finds a way of expressing itself in ways which lead to negative speech and action.

We can now understand the three approaches as to why there was a need to command Aaron concerning this offering specifically.

Perish the Thought

When a person harbors a negative thought he/she thinks they have all the time in the world to deal with it. After all,

the thought will not harm anyone. Why rush into bringing this offering that deals specifically with eradicating negative thoughts?

The answer to this challenge is that there is a need to rush because the negative thought is not innocuous. It's "rubbing" against the soul and causing damage to it. And since the damage can be severe, immediate attention is needed and a sense of urgency must therefore be communicated to the people.

However, one could argue that this is true for someone whose soul is extremely sensitive and pure. Like expensive silk any contact with something coarse can damage the delicate nature of the fabric. Not so, one will argue, if one's soul is far from such holiness. A little scratch or dirt on a crude animal skin will do it no harm. Aaron was an example of a silken soul. Perhaps he needed to be exhorted about the offering that removes the blemish caused by an improper thought, but his children wouldn't necessarily need it as urgently.

The answer to this challenge is that, while it might be true that the stain caused by the negative thought is not as serious for someone with a less radiant soul, one must still feel the urgency to remove that blemish. And this urgency is for precisely the reason they think they don't need to deal with it. The reason why the thought is considered not

to be a major problem is because their souls are unrefined. That is why they harbor these negative thoughts. Therefore it is crucial to remedy the situation by getting to the root of the problem and bringing refinement to one's soul. Without treatment of the core problem, the person's inner decay can totally destroy the person.

Less refined people are even in greater need of atoning for their thoughts. It is like the person who develops external lesions that can be a sign that there is a malignancy beneath the surface. While the lesion itself will not harm them, the underlying cause of it left untreated can.

And then there is a third reason, Rabbi Shimon's, as to why urgent language must be used to inspire conscientiousness in dealing with the negative thoughts.

Rabbi Shimon's thesis translated literally yields the following:

"Scripture needs especially to urge a person when there is a lack of a *kis* (pouch or wallet, implying financial loss)." This has been understood, as noted above, to refer to a person who will have to incur great expense to perform a Mitzvah and he needs an extra boost not to skimp or delay its performance. A deeper explanation is that, as mentioned above, a detached thought is like a soul that seeks a body, a receptacle, a pouch, a way to express itself in a tangible way.

If we think we cannot be affected by negative thoughts because they are only thoughts, and as long as their actions are pure and holy we are safe, Rabbi Shimon came to disabuse us of that: if you don't bring this offering that changes the way you think and which elevates your thought process (the word for burnt offering is *olah* which means elevation), it will cause your thoughts to materialize in the world of action as well. Thus, whenever there is a lack of a body—when a bodiless thought hovers in our mind—we must bring this offering that cleanses and refines our thought processes.

The Soul of Torah

Rabbi Shimon, the author of the classic Kabbalah work called the Zohar, epitomized the idea of not neglecting our soul. True, Judaism places the greatest emphasis on action, but it does so without neglecting to deal with our inner thoughts and mindset.

Rabbi Shimon's teaching here—that has been applied to negative thoughts—is also operative with regard to positive ones. We must not be content with the body of Judaism; we must infuse it also with soul, with holy thoughts. And this means to achieve this refinement of our thoughts is through Rabbi Shimon's teachings of Kabbalah, especially as they have been articulated and made accessible to

everyone through the teachings of Chassidus, the soul of Torah.

Exile = Negative Thoughts

Exile conditions generate negative and pessimistic thoughts. We cannot allow such thoughts as these to remain unchecked; otherwise they can harm us three ways:

First, an exile thought and mindset causes damage to our soul. Second, it is a sign that our soul is ailing and needs immediate attention. Third, it leads to exile-tainted speech and action as well.

Conversely, when we fill our minds with positive and holy thoughts, if we try to think in spiritually sophisticated ways, we cleanse our soul and, most importantly, our soul then seeks expression in the physical world as well. The good thoughts bring good results. Thinking in a Moshiach and Redemption oriented fashion is the instrument that makes it a reality.

Shabbos Hagadol: Liberating Thought before Speech and Action

The above analysis of the power of thought can explain the significance of Shabbos Hagadol, the Great Shabbos, the Shabbos that precedes Passover. Many explanations have been given for the designation of this Shabbos as the Great Shabbos. One way of explaining it is that Passover is a Holiday of the liberation of speech and action. The Arizal states that the word Pesach actually means “a mouth that speaks.” On Passover we experience the liberation of our speech and we are physically liberated from bondage as well.

That is the “body” of Passover.

But before we acquire the body of Passover—the physical aspect of it—we preface it with its soul. Shabbos Hagadol is the soul of Redemption. It is the day which introduces us to a mature way of thinking (which is the definition of the word *gadol*), that takes us out of our immature galus mentality. And this becomes the catalyst to liberate our speech and our actions with the ultimate Redemption. May we celebrate this Passover—the freedom of all of our faculties—with Moshiach in the Third Beis Hamikdash!

ESSAY THIRTEEN

MESSIANIC MATURITY AND CHILDLIKE INNOCENCE

An educator must recognize that he or she is dealing with a child, he or she must also view the child as a potential adult.

Indeed, a child possesses far more adult characteristics than we usually give him or her credit for.

Just as an adult retains a latent spark of childhood innocence and purity, so too, a child possesses a spark of maturity and adulthood.

It is the educator's role to ignite that spark.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

MESSIANIC MATURITY AND CHILDLIKE INNOCENCE

Two Versions of the Seven Days of Initiation

At the end of this week's parsha, after discussing the seven day period of initiation of Aaron and his sons into the priesthood, the Torah concludes.

“You should not leave the entrance of the Tent of Meeting for seven days until the concluding day of your days of inauguration... You should stay at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting day and night for seven days, and must guard your appointed duty to G-d...”

Commentators ask why the Torah repeated the command not to leave the Tent of Meeting for seven days.

Another question: Why does it mention day and night the second time this command is given, but not the first time?

A third question is posed, if the Tent of Meeting was disassembled every night and there was no entrance, where were they to stay?

The Rebbe answers that the two verses actually discuss two different obligations. The first verse was directed to those inside the Tent of Meeting performing the required services during the first seven days. Their obligation did not extend into the nights because the Tent of Meeting was taken down and no services were performed until the next morning.

However, the second verse was addressed to those who remained **outside** the Tent of Meeting; they had an independent obligation to stand guard at the site of the Tent of Meeting even when the Tent was disassembled for the night.

We must try to understand the spiritual dimension of these two obligations.

The Connection with Passover and Shabbos Hagadol

Since this Torah reading occurs on the Shabbos before the Holiday of Passover in most years, we must also look for the connection between these obligations and Passover.

In addition, the Shabbos before Passover is called Shabbos Hagadol, the Great Shabbos. There are literally dozens if not hundreds of explanations why it is so called. Whatever the reason for the name, the question presented here asks about the connection between the Torah reading concerning the seven days of initiation and the theme of the Great Shabbos.

At first glance, the connection to Passover is the seven day initiation period Aaron and his sons had to serve in the Tent of Meeting and its parallel in the seven days of the Passover Holiday.

But that is where the analogy appears to end. The seven days in the parsha were for the inauguration and initiation of the Priests, whereas Passover celebrates the Exodus from Egypt. What is the connection between these two events?

Passover as Initiation

Upon deeper reflection it is apparent that Passover too is a time of initiation and inauguration. The Passover Seder's dominant theme is education of our youth. It is the child who asks the four questions. We do things differently during the Seder so that the children will ask additional questions. We are required to start the Seder promptly at

nightfall so that the children do not tire out and fall asleep too soon. And, indeed, a good portion of the Seder is devoted to answering the questions of the Four Sons.

In truth, Passover is not just for children. It is also meant to inspire us adults, who are children relative to the spiritual level we are capable of reaching but have not yet achieved. When we respond to the questions of the child we are also responding to the child in us.

Cultivating the Adult in the Child

According to many opinions, when we train a child to do a Mitzvah we must train him or her to do it in the precise manner it is done by an adult. It does not suffice to get the child to perform a Mitzvah in some symbolic, half-baked, compromised fashion, absent its details and intricate requirements. If the contrary were the case, it would be misleading the child. He or she would be ill-prepared to perform the mitzvah properly.

We are led by this thought to an arguably novel way of viewing the role of an educator. While the educator must recognize that he or she is dealing with a child, he or she must also view the child as a potential adult. Indeed, a child possesses far more adult characteristics than we usually

give him or her credit for. Just as an adult retains a latent spark of childhood innocence and purity, so too, a child possesses a spark of maturity and adulthood. It is the educator's role to ignite that spark.

We can now understand the connection between the seven day period of inauguration and the Holiday of Passover: they are both designed to prepare the uninitiated for their ultimate roles.

Although the Priests—Aaron and his sons—were grown men, they were regarded as children relative to their future position in the Tent of Meeting. As a consequence, they were charged with activating their more advanced adult level.

The lesson at this point is obvious. Every day of our life is a day of preparation for the future. Each and every day we are both an adult as compared to the preceding day and a child as compared to the next day.

Shabbos Hagadol: Sets the Tone for Passover

This also the connection with the Shabbos Hagadol, which can be translated as the Shabbos of maturity. The focus of Passover is the introduction of the Gadol-great-mature-adult dimension of spirituality to the child.

To be sure, Passover is a children's Holiday in which we cultivate the childlike purity and innocence within our children and within ourselves. However, it is also a time for us to cultivate the adult dimension of our lives. To set the tone for the second objective, the Shabbos before Passover is designated as the Shabbos of adulthood and maturity.

Preparing for the Age of Maturity

The above discussion also sheds a light on our own status as we prepare to enter the Messianic Age. In exile we are like children preparing for the Messianic age of maturity. As we stand close, so very close to the Final Redemption we must conduct ourselves as adults, not as immature children.

And here is the ultimate paradox. On the one hand, the Messianic Age is the age of ultimate maturity. "The entire world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d." As Maimonides puts it, we will know G-d "To the extent of human potential," which means that we will reach the apex of intellectual and spiritual development and act accordingly. In these last moments of exile, we must cultivate that maturity by learning the teachings of Chassidus which introduce us to a more sophisticated level of understanding of G-d.

On the other hand, Moshiach is also associated with childlike innocence. The Talmud comments on the verse “Do not touch My anointed [*Meshichoy*] ones,” and states that it refers to the children who study Torah with purity and innocence. The Moshiach spark in us is the inner child that we all possess. Our individual responsibility is to cultivate that spark of innocence and bring it to the fore.

So, which is the real Messianic dynamic: childlike innocence or mature knowledge?

The Nexus

The answer is a synthesis of the two. We have to strive for the highest level of knowledge and maturity even as we preserve the purity and innocence that flows from the essence of our soul. A child is born that way and does not have to do anything to be a child. To acquire our Messianic childhood, by contrast, we must invest great effort so that it is not overshadowed by a Messianic sophistication. The ultimate goal is the fusing of the “inner child” and adulthood.

This synthesis is highlighted by observing Passover (the Holiday that cultivates childlike innocence) after Shabbos Hagadol-the Shabbos of Maturity.

The connection between Shabbos Hagadol and Passover suggests that our educational goal must be to inspire the child to strive to become an adult. Moreover, the true goal is to create a fusion of spiritual adulthood with childlike innocence and purity.

So, when we educate our children and ourselves we must focus on the two intertwined goals: achieving maturity and preserving innocence. Both goals are liberating. Achieving maturity allows us to break out of our immature, unsophisticated, infantile and foolish ways of approaching everything in life, as well as breaking through the crust of intellectualism and sophistication to reveal the pure and holy essence of our soul.

Parallel with Twin Seven Day Initiation Process

But we still have to understand the connection between the two seven day initiation processes; the first for seven days **in** the Tent of Meeting and the second seven days and nights **outside** the Tent of Meeting.

The Tent of Meeting represents our Messianic aspiration to meet with G-d. In our preparation for this meeting, there are two dynamics.

First, we have to anticipate all that we will be doing in the future. This seven day period corresponds to our seven emotional attributes. The objective is that all of our faculties should be harnessed to the highest level of our meeting with G-d. In this mode we are engaged in cultivating our adult version of Judaism. Indeed, on the next day, Nadav and Avihu, Aaron's eldest sons, reached the climax of their spiritual advancement to the extent that their souls left their bodies.

This "seven day adult program" is limited to the daytime, when the Tent of Meeting is fully assembled in operational mode, just like true education of a child requires that the child perform the Mitzvah in an adult fashion. The command not to leave the Tent of Meeting indicated that this was part of a permanent, mature program.

However, these seven days of initiation served another function. They were intended to preserve the inner purity and holiness that can become obscured by a person's sophistication.

That is why the people had to stand outside the disassembled Tent of Meeting and guard it, i.e. preserve the integrity of the holiness of this place; the holiness of a disassembled (read: unsophisticated, childlike) Tent of Meeting. That too must be preserved.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TZAV

As we wait and anticipate Moshiach's revelation we must work to attain a level of maturity in our knowledge of Torah; particularly, the part of Torah that introduces us to the highest spiritual levels. We then have to fuse that with the simple faith in the Rebbe's words to us that "The time of your Redemption has come."

ESSAY FOURTEEN

TOUCHED

ESSAY FOURTEEN

TOUCHED

We have been guaranteed by our sages that when engaged in the process of helping our fellow Jew — materially or spiritually — that we will be impervious to the dangers that are normally associated with this relationship.

Moreover, our sages tell us that the one who expresses this measure of love and concern will be refined to the extent that “his mind and heart will become one thousand times more sensitive.”

ESSAY FOURTEEN

TOUCHED

“It Won’t Rub Off...”

A certain young man, steeped in Torah knowledge, began to associate himself with a group of rebellious youths, whose views were quite antithetical to the views of Judaism. When his rabbi apprised him of the danger in his associating with such individuals, the young student replied tongue in cheek: “Don’t worry. Just as all of my years that I have associated with your disciples didn’t rub off on me, the heretical views of these youths will also not affect me.”

The rabbis replied by referring to a law mentioned in this week’s Torah portion. When the meat of a sacrifice touches something that is ritually impure it renders the meat likewise ritually impure ((Leviticus 7:19). Mere touch has the deleterious effect on the meat and renders it contaminated and unfit. On the other hand, when something holy touches something neutral, it does not confer the holiness on it with mere touch. In order for the neutral substance to become holy, the holy substance must permeate it.

If one wants to be influenced in a positive way, one must

make an attempt to imbibe, absorb and internalize the positive influence. By contrast, when one makes “casual” contact with impure influences, it can have a negative effect.

“Distance yourself from a bad neighbor.”

This response is, in essence, what our sages intended when they said “Distance yourself from a bad neighbor.” Even if one’s contact with a bad person is of a purely superficial nature — he is only my neighbor — nevertheless, one must make an attempt to distance oneself from him.

Having made the case for keeping one’s distance from undesirable influences, a question can be raised from the Haggadah text that we recite on the two first nights of Passover. The Haggadah lists the four sons and their questions. The author of the Haggadah lists the four sons in the following manner: The wise son, the wicked son, the simple son and the one who does not have the knowledge to ask.

Commentators raise the question, why was the wicked son placed next to the wise and presumably righteous son?

The previous Lubavitcher Rebbe answered that it is the duty of the wise son to associate himself with the wicked son and influence him to return to Judaism.

How does this reconcile with the preceding teaching that impurity can contaminate something with even the most casual forms of contact. Wouldn't it pose a serious threat to the spiritual health of the wise son to associate himself with the wicked one?

Intention Counts

The answer lies in a basic distinction between the two scenarios. In the latter case, where the Chocham-the wise son associates himself with the wicked son, his intention is to influence him. In doing so, he fulfills the most basic mitzvah of "Ahavas Yisrael-Love for one's fellow." By demonstrating his love and concern for his fellow Jew, he is protected from being harmed by his closeness to the wicked son. On the contrary, the love and concern is so powerful that it will ultimately move and inspire even the most wicked of sons.

We have been guaranteed by our sages that when engaged in the process of helping our fellow Jew — materially or spiritually — that we will be impervious to the dangers that are normally associated with this relationship. Moreover, our sages tell us that the one who expresses this measure of love and concern will be refined to the extent that "his mind and heart will become one thousand times more sensitive."

Moreover, the Haggadah states that the wicked son is told that had he lived in the days of the Exodus he would not have been liberated from Egypt. Now, however, that the Wise son has been sitting next to him and inspiring him, even he is guaranteed to be liberated from exile.

No More Wicked Sons

This was true in times gone by, when there were Jews who were actually characterized as “evil” and “heretics” and the like. Even they are Jews, whose soul yearns for G-d. It takes the effort of the Wise son to reveal the inner core of Jewishness in the Wicked Son.

How much more so is this true nowadays, when there is virtually no such thing as a “wicked son.” Our task is to mainly bring the warmth and light of Judaism to the many people who — through no fault of their own — have not received a good Jewish education, or who may not know of the beauty of Mitzvot.

This is why, the Prophets allude to the fact that no Jew will be left behind, when the Moshiach will liberate all Jews from exile. Never before in history have we experienced such an outpouring of “Wise sons” and their desire to reach “in” to the hearts and souls of even the most assimilated Jew. All of these positive and loving efforts to reveal the inner spirit of every Jew, will pay off very soon.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TZAV

May we all experience the Festival of Liberation in Jerusalem with Moshiach.

In the traditional Passover greeting:

A Kosher and Happy Passover!

ESSAY FIFTEEN

THE COMMAND OF PASSOVER

When one views Passover as only a cultural or even spiritual experience, they are able to capture much of the overt significance of the observance.

However, as with the proverbial iceberg, most of the Mitzvah's power is beneath the surface.

We cannot just revel in the beautiful wrapping paper. We must open up the package to find and enjoy its real content.

ESSAY FIFTEEN

THE COMMAND OF PASSOVER

A Common Theme

This week's parsha, *Tzav*, usually occurs on the Shabbos before Passover.

According to the seventeenth century Halachic and mystical authority, the *Shelah*, there is always a connection that can be found between a Torah reading and the holiday that is nearby. What is the connection between our *parsha*, *Tzav* and the upcoming Festival of Liberation, Passover?

One can find a connection in the very name of the Parsha—*Tzav*, which means command. In the Haggadah that we recite at the Seder, several references are made about the need for us to be commanded. For example: The wise son asks, "What are these testimonies, statutes and judgments that G-d our G-d has **commanded** you?"

What precisely is the wise son's question? And how does it differ from a similar question that is raised by the wicked son—"What is this service that you are doing?" Both question the need for observing the rituals of the Seder.

Yet one's question is characterized as a question of a "Wise son," while the other is described as a wicked son's question!

Second, the Haggadah states that the wicked son uses the exclusionary term "you," implying that he is not a part of the Seder. Yet, amazingly, the wise son also uses a similar term when he asks "What are these testimonies, statutes and judgments that G-d our G-d has commanded **you**?" He doesn't say "us", but "you." Why then is he called a wise son and the other one a wicked son?

Why the Need for a Commandment if You are in Love?

The explanation lies in the word "*Tzav*." The Wise Son is addressing his parents, teachers and elders. He is in awe of their devotion to G-d and the joy and enthusiasm for celebrating the exodus from Egypt. "Why then," he asks, "do **you** have to be **commanded** to do all this. If you are in love with G-d why do you need to be commanded to fulfill all these rituals? Perhaps, I, who is not so inspired and spiritually attuned, need to be prodded into action by way of a command, but **you**, the spiritual elite, do you also have to be commanded?!"

The Haggadah's answer is cryptic. It reads, "And you too tell him the laws of Passover; one should not eat a desert after the Paschal offering." How do these words respond to

the wise son's question as to why they need a command?

Judaism is More than Emotional Expression

The answer is that **everybody** needs the command because a Judaism that comes **exclusively** from one's emotions, as beautiful and meaningful as that may be, will be missing some key elements of the observance.

Every Mitzvah contains within it revealed and obvious meaning. But, a Mitzvah is also replete with hidden and unfathomable levels of meaning. When one views Passover as only a cultural or even spiritual experience, they are able to capture much of the overt significance of the observance. But, as with the proverbial iceberg, most of the Mitzvah's power is **beneath** the surface. It can almost be compared to one who receives a package that is wrapped with beautiful wrapping paper and revels in the wrapping, neglecting to open up the package to find and enjoy its real content.

This explains an earlier quote of the Haggadah: "Even if we are all wise, understanding...we have a Mitzvah-commandment to recount the story of the exodus." No matter how brilliant and spiritually sophisticated we are about the exodus and Passover, there is infinitely more there that can only be accessed when we view the Holiday rituals as an expression of a Divine command.

Thus the Haggadah states, “And you too say to him the laws of Passover,” implying that you too need the **laws** of Passover, the commandments. Because each law is also a pathway (Halacha can be translated both as law and pathway) to plumbing the depths and embracing the totality of Passover.

When one, in addition to the emotional and spiritual excitement, recognizes that there is a hidden and elusive dimension to the Seder it enhances one’s taste for it as well. Thus the Haggadah continues: “One must not eat desert after the Paschal lamb.” The reason is to keep the taste of the Paschal lamb in one’s mouth.

The message is clear. When our approach to Judaism is based only on savoring the good taste “the desert,” we can lose the most essential ingredient the “Pass-over-transcendent-mystique” of the Holiday. However, when we appreciate the nature of the commandment—the transcendent aspect of Passover—that itself becomes the desert, whose taste will linger on—as well.

Transmitting to the Next Generation

Moreover, only the approach that appreciates the “command” aspect of the Mitzvah—that recognizes the infinite and transcendent nature of the Mitzvah—will carry on to the next generation.

When one's Judaism is emotional and intellectual based, the next generation might have a different set of emotional needs and develop a different mindset, which doesn't make room for Passover. Only when there is the element of *Tzav*-command does it proceed seamlessly to the next generation. The command serves as the bridge over the generation gap.

The command is also what enables us to experience the full sense of freedom that Passover is all about and will be the ultimate bridge between the end of the period of exile that we are in and the beginning of the period of Redemption that we are about to enter into, imminently.

A Kosher and Happy Passover!

ESSAY SIXTEEN

THE SHABBOS OF MATURITY

The “immature” view of freedom is to see it as an end.

The more mature view is to view it as an opportunity to
rise to a higher spiritual level.

In its simple formulation, freedom is the removal of
external constraints.

In a more mature and advanced understanding of freedom
it represents the removal of the internal forces that inhibit
us.

ESSAY SIXTEEN

THE SHABBOS OF MATURITY

The Pre-Passover Great Miracle

There are many reasons given for the designation of this Shabbos, the one that precedes Passover, as *Shabbos Hagadol*-the **Great** Sabbath. The primary reason given is that on the Sabbath immediately preceding the Exodus from Egypt the Egyptians were informed of the impending “tenth plague” in which all the Egyptian first born would die. Upon hearing this, many of the first-born demanded of the Egyptian leadership to let the Jews go. When they refused, a civil war ensued. Hence from that time onward, we mark this *Shabbos* as *Shabbos Hagadol*-the Great *Shabbos* because of the **great** miracle that occurred then.

One is entitled to ask, why is this miracle considered so great? It did not involve any supernatural occurrences, nor did it seem to have helped the Jews in any meaningful way.

More specifically, we must understand why the term *gadol*-great is used in connection with this Shabbos? It could have been called, "*Shabbos haness*-the Sabbath of the miracle," or some other similar expression.

Demonstrated Maturity

The Hebrew term *gadol* implies maturity and independence, as the Talmud states: "An adult child who is supported by his father is considered a minor, whereas, a minor who is independent is regarded as a *gadol*." Hence the word '*gadol*' is not intended to convey the idea that it was a great and spectacular miracle, but rather that it was a miracle that demonstrated a level of maturity.

The fact that the Egyptian elite fought against their own leaders on behalf of the Jewish people, was a sign of their independence and maturity.

A Mature way of Observing Judaism

This Sabbath is thus intended, among other things, to cultivate spiritual maturity in each and every one of us. This maturity can be applied to every aspect of life in general and to every aspect of Judaism in particular.

For example: One can look at a Mitzvah simply as a good deed, or a beautiful Jewish tradition. Another more

“mature” and sophisticated view of a mitzvah is to see it as our way of “connecting” with G-d. Moreover, a Mitzvah affects more than just the people involved in its performance; it has cosmic effects, for it is the medium that shapes and molds the entire universe to conform to the very purpose G-d had for its creation.

Similarly, one can view the Torah simply as a beautiful piece of literature that teaches us right from wrong. This is true and valid. Yet a more advanced and mature approach to the Torah is to view it as Divine wisdom that transcends all aspects of creation.

Immature and Mature Redemption

With respect to freedom, which we celebrate on Passover, there can also be two perspectives. The “immature” view of freedom is to see it as an end. The more mature view is to view it as an opportunity to rise to a higher spiritual level. In its simple formulation, freedom is the removal of external constraints; while a more mature and advanced understanding of freedom sees it as removal of the internal forces that inhibit us as well.

In short, the less sophisticated level sees things in their most narrow sense, the view of the *gadol*, the mature view that is represented by this Sabbath, sees everything in its broader and deeper context.

Why Not Before Rosh Hashanah?

One could raise the question, why is *Shabbos hagadol*—that gives us the ability to see things through the mature eyes of a *gadol*—situated right before Pesach? Why don't we have a "Shabbos of Maturity" before Rosh Hashanah, or at some other time of the year?

Moreover, the Holiday of Passover seems to focus on the *katan*, the child: Children ask the "Four Questions;" we read about the "Four Sons," and indeed, many of the customs of the Seder revolve around children. Passover is also seen by the Prophet as the birth and infancy of the Jewish people. How then is it that precisely before this child-oriented holiday, we have a Sabbath that highlights the level and role of the *gadol*—the fully mature individual?

The Passover Synthesis

The answer is that while a person must go from the level of a newborn to the level of maturity, one step at a time, one must know, from the very outset, that there is a higher and more advanced level. Even one who is just beginning his/her development must be made aware of the goal and objective of one's life. The little girl or boy will play house, acting out the adult roles of mother and father. A healthy child fantasizes about adulthood. This

Shabbos then can be viewed as our collective adult role playing.

Conversely, the fact that we follow the “Shabbos of Maturity” with an emphasis on the child conveys yet another profound message that no matter how sophisticated we are, we must always seek to find and reveal the child within all of us. Because it is that childhood innocence and purity that is truly liberating and G-dly.

Hence the Passover season is a synthesis of maturity and childhood. We attempt to see things from a mature vantage point, even while we capture the untainted innocence of the child within.

The foregoing analysis explains why the future Messianic Age is characterized both as a time when we will experience total child-like innocence and purity, while simultaneously attaining complete maturity.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

A JEWEL AND A COW

On the most basic level we honor our parents, because we are grateful to them for what they've given us: life, sustenance, education, love and concern.

It is our way of saying thank you for all that they have done for us.

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

A JEWEL AND A COW

Preparing for Passover with a Red Heifer

In addition to the regular Torah reading this week, we read a special section of the Torah that deals with the Red Heifer (*Parah Adumah*), the purification rite for one who has come in contact with a dead body. This special section, taken from the Book of Numbers, is referred to as *Parshas Parah*, the section of the cow.

Parshas Parah is read now, our Sages tell us, as a preparation for the upcoming Festival of Passover.

In the days of old, when the Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem—and we pray for its restoration every day—every Jew had to partake of a Paschal lamb for the Passover Seder. However, if one had come in contact with a corpse they would be rendered ritually unclean, and would not be eligible to partake of that Festival offering unless they were purified with the ashes of the *Parah Adumah*. The Red Heifer that was used for this purification ritual, had to be

completely red. Even two hairs that were black would render it unfit for use. Indeed, the phenomenon of a completely red heifer is so rare that our Sages record that in all of Israel's history only nine were used; the tenth to be found and used in the Messianic Age.

Learning Filial Respect from A Roman

The Talmud relates how a certain Roman official, *Dama ben Nesinah*, refused to sell the rabbis a jewel that was needed for the High Priests Breastplate. His reason for not selling it to them was that the key to the jewelry box was underneath his father's pillow and he refused to disturb his father's sleep. The rabbis tried to offer more money but it was to no avail.

When his father woke up he pursued the rabbis and sold the jewel to them, but only for the lower price they had originally offered. He refused to be reimbursed for the Mitzvah of honoring his parents. As a reward for this exceptional respect for his father, *Dama* became the proud owner of a Red Heifer that he sold for a sum that was equal to the money he had turned down as a result of his filial responsibilities.

Commentators wonder why of all ways of rewarding someone with wealth G-d chose to give him a red cow. There are so many other ways G-d could have used to

reward him for his Mitzvah of honoring his father. Why did G-d choose this rather unusual fashion?

Mitzvah of Reciprocity

One answer is to highlight the difference between *Dama's* exceptional devotion to his parents and the even greater and **purser** devotion demanded by G-d for the **Jewish** people.

Honoring parents is no less of a Mitzvah, a Divine command, than any other commandment. In fact, the Talmud states that it is one of the most difficult commandments to fulfill properly. To facilitate proper observance of this great and difficult Mitzvah, the Torah thus promises us something in return: long life.

To begin with, we honor our parents, because we are grateful to them for what they've given us: life, sustenance, education, love and concern. At the very least, we owe them our devotion simply because it is our way of saying thank you for all that they have done for us. There is quid-pro-quo. Because we were recipients of their devotion to us, we reciprocate with devotion to them. And once we perform our filial responsibilities properly—as in the foregoing case of *Dama*, the Roman official—we again become recipients to many of G-d's blessings, from longevity to wealth and prosperity.

Based on this analysis of the commandment to honor one's parents, one could have thought that Judaism's conception of performing the Mitzvot is one of reciprocity. G-d gives us so many blessings, so we serve Him by doing His bidding, which, in turn makes us eligible for more of His blessings.. And while this "quid-pro-quo" element can be found in Judaism as one aspect of the performance of the Mitzvot, it is by no means its central or primary focus.

Transcending Reciprocity

To underscore this notion that Judaism transcends the "what's in it for me" approach, G-d rewarded *Dama* for his scrupulous observance of respecting his father with a Red Heifer, which was used for a ritual, concerning which our Sages comment that it has no rational basis. There is no rhyme or reason—other than it is G-d's command to us—for us to perform this ritual.

When we approach the Festival of Passover, the time when we were liberated, we might view its rituals as our way of repaying G-d for His infinite kindness, for which we anticipate more of in the future. To dispel this notion, we read *Parshas Parah*, the section of the Torah that underscores the "purity of Israel," i.e., the idealistic attitude towards Judaism, that we serve G-d because this is what being Jewish is all about, and not simply as a response to

the good we received in the past and the good that it will generate in the future.

Preparation for the Messianic Age

Just as reading the section of Red Heifer was intended as a preparation for Passover, the Festival of Redemption, so too, our preparation for the Messianic Age, must also be informed by the concept underlying the Red Heifer.

To be sure, the Messianic Age will be a reward for all the good we have done for the last three thousand years. And if the prospects of a better life is what makes us want Moshiach and work towards bringing Moshiach, the better off we are. Nevertheless, the focus of Redemption should go beyond the notion of what we will get out of it. We must realize that Moshiach and Redemption are about rising above the narrow perspective on life and responsibility. Moshiach will inspire us to uncover the dimension of our souls that is holy and pure and that can see everything through the prism of holiness and purity.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

EGYPTIAN CIVIL WAR

The former Soviet Union, since its collapse, has provided buildings and financial assistance to the Jewish community for the purpose of Jewish education!

All this began Shabbos Hagadol, when the Egyptian first born fought to liberate the Jews from Egypt.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

EGYPTIAN CIVIL WAR

What was so Special about this Miracle?

Shabbos Hagadol, or the Great Sabbath, is the name of this week's Sabbath. It is so named because of a miracle that occurred even before the Jewish nation was liberated from Egypt. When the first born Egyptians discovered that the next plague that was to be visited upon them was the plague of the first born, they demanded that Pharaoh let the Israelites go.

As a result, a civil war ensued, and Egyptians were literally fighting and giving their lives so that the others should let the Israelites go! This great miracle occurred on the Sabbath before the Jews left Egypt and has since been designated as "The Great Sabbath," to highlight this preliminary miracle.

The question begs to be asked. In conjunction with the exodus from Egypt there were so many spectacular miracles. Among them, of course, were the Ten Plagues and the splitting of the Sea of Reeds. These were miracles that

altered the very natural order of things. Water turned into blood. Hail descended upon them containing fire! An entire nation of millions of Jews cross a sea that had completely dried up! According to our sages, the sea split into 12 tunnels, one for each tribe! And these are only a small fraction of the incredible supernatural events that transpired in Egypt.

How can we compare these overt expressions of G-d's power to alter nature with the rather natural phenomenon of a civil war? Why then is this miracle — of the first born fighting to urge the release of the Jews — characterized as the “great” miracle and not the others?

Two Kinds of Miracles

In truth, this miracle was indeed unique even as compared to the more dramatic miracles associated with the exodus.

There are two general types of miracles. The first is where G-d clearly overrides the natural order. The “advantage” of this category of miracle is that it impresses upon us that there is a G-d and that He is greater than everything — even the laws of nature.

There is a second type of miracle, where G-d orchestrates that nature itself supports the plan that G-d has for the world. The same world that was, heretofore, a hindrance to

the realization of G-d's plan, becomes its facilitator. (Hence the Hebrew word for "world" is "*olam*," etymologically related to the word *helam* that means concealment.)

The pre-eminence of this miracle over the first category is that it creates a situation where the obstacles themselves become supporters to G-d's plan. Rather than transcending nature to accommodate G-d's will, thereby leaving nature to its original role of an obstructive force, G-d transforms the nature of nature itself.

Transforming the Enemy

This is what happened in Egypt before the actual exodus. The first born Egyptians were their elders and leaders; the essence of the natural order of Egypt. Now, these same natural forces that characterized the existence of Egypt were fighting and sacrificing their lives to allow the Jews to leave Egyptian bondage.

While this miracle is less spectacular and earth shattering, it is precisely this kind of a miracle that does more than the other to prepare the world for the true, complete and everlasting Redemption, where even "the darkness shall shine."

Thus, from the Shabbos before Passover the Jewish nation was exposed to a new phenomenon. Even the enemy can be

transformed and thereby demonstrates that there was really never a real adversary.

The prophet compares the future age of Redemption to the exodus from Egypt. “As in the days of your departure from Egypt, I will show him wonders.” Concerning the time of Redemption it is said that the “night shall shine like the day.” Not only will the light dispel the darkness, the darkness itself will become light.

Modern Day Miracles

During the last century, we were witness to the phenomenon of the natural forces that have pitted themselves against the Torah. One had to overcome and resist the pressures from without to remain faithful to the dictates of Judaism. Yet, in most recent years, we’ve seen a reversal of this phenomenon. Many of the world’s institutions — political, social, educational etc. — have been receptive to the needs of the Jew.

To cite one glaring example: The former Soviet Union, since its collapse, has provided buildings and financial assistance to the Jewish community for the purpose of Jewish education! All this began Shabbos Hagadol, when the Egyptian first born fought to liberate the Jews from Egypt.