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Parashat Shemini

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REBOUND

by *Rabbi Scott Friedman*

In the beginning of Parashat Shemini, Moshe instructs Aharon regarding his inaugural Korbanot, through which many lessons are revealed to us. First, Moshe tells Aharon to take for himself a calf for a Korban Chatat (VaYikra 9:2). Rashi explains that this calf was to tell Aharon that he would receive atonement for the sin of the Eigel HaZahav. The Chizkuni adds that this Korban Chatat is the only one in the entire Torah consisting of a calf; that of Bnei Yisrael is a male goat.

In Parashat Parah, the extra portion we read this week, Rashi (BeMidbar 19:22) explains that the Parah Adumah also is a form of atonement for the sin of the golden calf. Although we know that the Parah Adumah is a Chok, a law beyond human comprehension, perhaps we can learn something about it based on Rashi. The Parah Adumah, as the name indicates, must be red, just as sin is symbolized by the color red (Yeshayahu 1:18). Furthermore, the Imrei Shefer adds that a man sins through physicality, which stems from man's life force, blood, which is red as well.

Further into the inaugural process, Moshe tells Aharon "Kerav El HaMizbeiach," "Come close to the Mizbeiach" (VaYikra 9:9). These few words seem extraneous and imply that Aharon hesitated. Rashi comments that Aharon was embarrassed and afraid to approach. Ramban adds that when Aharon saw the calf he was to bring on the Mizbeiach, he was reminded of his sin with the golden calf; perhaps the Satan placed this image in his head. Therefore, Moshe says to him, "Why are you embarrassed? This is what you were selected for." The Degel Machaneih Ephraim says that it is precisely because Aharon was embarrassed that he was chosen for this position.

Very often, feelings of guilt and shame overwhelm us. We feel unworthy and incapable of approaching Hashem. From this week's Parashiyot, we see how to approach such situations. It is specifically in such times that we are told Kerav, come close. It is at the lowest points and the loneliest times that Hashem wants our closeness. Zev Kahane, a former student at TABC, pointed out (in an article available at www.koltorah.org) that the term Korban has the same root as the work Kerav. It is through the Korbanot that we become closer to Hashem. For example, when we bring a Korban, we are coming before Hashem and sacrificing something that is ours and begging for this to atone in our place. We not only sacrifice the animal; we sacrifice ourselves. In coming before Hashem, we are saying that we are not in charge; that we need His love, approval, guidance, and more; that we are coming to Him because we are insufficient without Him. With these thoughts in mind, we naturally come closer to Him. Our relationship is

strengthened, and we are given the opportunity not only to repent and be forgiven, but also to elevate ourselves and come even closer.

In any relationship, both sides have different options as to how to respond after an argument. They could hold a grudge, ignore it, or hopefully use the argument as an opportunity to hear each other more clearly and work on the relationship as a whole. In fact, every argument is an opportunity to grow closer, to learn about each other better, to open up more, and to learn to resolve differences in a productive manner. So too, in every sin that a person does, he has the opportunity to sulk, beat himself up for his imperfection, or, hopefully, realize the problem and use the sin as an opportunity to do greater Teshuvah and move to a higher level. There is a common misperception that in following Torah or, LeHavdil, any other set of guidelines, it is all or nothing. I believe that this is largely due to the idea that many of us, out of embarrassment, drift further away from perfection in response to a setback as opposed to coming closer. We must remember that it is due to this feeling of embarrassment that we were chosen, as the Gemara (Yevamot 79a) tells us that Bnei Yisrael by nature are Bayshanim. Our feelings of shame should come from a place of real regret, not from arrogance related to not having been as perfect as we expect ourselves to be. The Sefat Emet, Rav Chaim Volozhiner, and others point out that the Mishnah, "Eizehu Ashir? HaSameiach BeChelko," "Who is rich? He who is happy with his portion" (Avot 4:1), applies to Ruchniyut as well as Gashmiyut. (For more on this, see an amazing article titled "The Pursuit of Perfection: Vice or Virtue in Judaism at www.DrSorotzkin.com.) Unfortunately, there is not enough of a premium placed on admitting our mistakes and trying to do Teshuvah. Too often, the focus is placed on the wrongdoing, not the great honesty and strength that it takes for one to admit his mistakes. Perhaps if we would place a greater emphasis on the relationship, the honesty, and the communication between ourselves and less on our shortcomings, we would all have an easier time accepting ourselves for what we are as well as others for what they are, consequentially making the growing, changing, and advancing process much more appreciated and possible. The Pasuk tells us "Ki Sheva Yipol Tzaddik VaKam," "A Tzaddik may fall seven times and [yet] get up" (Mishlei 24:16). The famous question goes that if this person is a Tzaddik, why does he fall seven times? Firstly, we know that seven is the number of nature, and we see from here that it is natural for someone to fall repeatedly. However, with the help of Hashem, we can rise to an eighth level, LeMa'alah Min HaTeva (above nature). Only with Hashem's help can we overcome our own shortcomings and our own nature; a Tzaddik is not one who does not fall, but rather is one who repeatedly picks himself up and does Teshuvah.

There was once a Bachur who went to see the previous Gerrer Rebbe. The Bachur said that he was learning in a Yeshiva for Ba'alei Teshuvah but that he was not a Baal Teshuvah himself. The Gerrer Rebbe responded, "And why not?" Really, every day we should all be doing some kind of Teshuvah. This can happen only when we realize that when we have erred and feel distant or unwanted, whether it be from Hashem, a spouse, a child, or a friend, we must take the advice of Moshe: Kerav, come closer.

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KORBANOT AS REMEMBRANCES OF THE PAST

by *Yehuda Koslowe* ('17)

Parashat Shemini begins by expounding on the laws of the Korban Chatat, the Korban that one brings in order to receive atonement for his sins. Interestingly, before Moshe explains the laws regarding any Jew's Korban Chatat, he instructs Aharon to bring an Eigel, a bull, in order to receive atonement for an unmentioned sin (VaYikra 9:2). In the next Pasuk, Moshe goes on to describe the general Korban Chatat, which consists of a Se'ir Izim, a goat. Looking at these two Pesukim, we can pose two questions. One, why is Aharon's Korban Chatat different from all future Korbanei Chatat? Additionally, what is the significance of the specific animals that are sacrificed as part of a Korban Chatat?

Rashi (9:2 s.v. Kach Lecha Eigel) answers our first question and part of our second question by explaining that Aharon had to bring an Eigel to atone for his leading role in the Cheit HaEigel (Shemot 32). This answers our first question, as to why Aharon's Korban was different from all others. However, Rashi's comment does not fully answer our question regarding the significance of the specific animals associated with a Korban Chatat? Whereas Rashi acknowledges the significance of Aharon's Korban, he does not comment on the significance of all future Korbanei Chatat. Although Rashi's confusing stance on our question could lead us to suggest that there is no reason why a Se'ir Izim is brought as a Korban Chatat, doing so would imply that there are instructions in the Torah which are of little to no significance, which is a very dangerous implication. Therefore, it appears that the wiser approach is to suggest that there is significance to the Se'ir Izim's role in Korbanei Chatat. Regarding Rashi's lack of explanation, we could suggest that perhaps the Se'ir Izim is so obviously related to Korbanei Chatat that Rashi did not have to explicitly inform us of that significance.

To help explain the connection between the Izim and the Chatat, Rav Daniel Fridman points out that the Se'ir Izim was involved in three of the most seminal sins in Am Yisrael's history. In Parashat Toledot, Rivkah Imeinu panics and worries that Yitzchak will bless Eisav, not Ya'akov, with the most important Berachah. Therefore, she instructs Ya'akov to bring her two Izim so that she can prepare them as Yitzchak likes (BeReishit 27:9). Then, Ya'akov brings these Izim to his father – which makes Yitzchak believe that it is Eisav in front of him – and receives the Bechorah. In this episode, the Izim play an important part in what is perhaps the most significant deception in Sefer BeReishit.

In addition, the Izim appear in the episode of Yosef's sale. After Yosef is sold into slavery, his brothers slaughter a Se'ir Izim, dip Yosef's Ketonet into its blood, and present it to their father as evidence that Yosef has been killed (37:31:32). This episode not only caused great grief to Ya'akov Avinu, but it also led to Ya'akov's children going into Galut.

The Izim play a significant role also in the episode involving Yehudah's illicit relations with Tamar, who was supposed to marry Yehudah's youngest son Sheilah.

In this episode, Yehudah instructs his friend Chirah to send Izim to Tamar, so that the collateral which Yehudah previously gave to Tamar can be returned to him (38:20). In this episode, the Izim are integral in Yehudah's grave sin.

In Ya'akov's and Rivkah's deception of Yitzchak, the sale of Yosef and deception of Ya'akov, and Yehudah's sin with Tamar, the Izim play an important role. Perhaps, when members of Am Yisrael bring an Izim as a Chatat, they receive atonement both for their individual sin and three sins that forever changed the path of Jewish history. Additionally, it is possible that one who sins brings Izim in order to remind himself that he is not the first, nor the greatest, Jew to sin; on the contrary, Rivkah Imeinu, Ya'akov Avinu, and all of Yosef's brothers sinned. Therefore, one who sins should not be discouraged. Lastly, from the Izim's appearance in the Korban Chatat, we should learn the importance of communal responsibility amongst all members of Am Yisrael; even when one attempts to receive atonement for his own individual sin, he implicitly asks for atonement on behalf of his ancestors.

Wake Up!

by *Avi Roth* ('18)

Every day in Shemoneh Esrei, we recite the Berachah of Mechayeih HaMeitim. Under close examination, we see that the phrase "Mechayeih HaMeitim," or some form of Hashem's reviving the deceased, appears five different times in the beginning of Shemoneh Esreih. Why is Techiyat HaMeitim mentioned five times in the beginning of Shemoneh Esreih? Why must we put such an emphasis on Techiyat MaMeitim?

Perhaps, the five mentions of Techiyat HaMeitim correspond to different revivals of the dead in history. By mentioning Techiyat HaMeitim five times, we recognize that these examples of Techiyat HaMeitim were done by Hashem. The first revival of the dead is the initial one, in Ma'aseh BeReishit, when Hashem turned dust of the earth to life (BeReishit 2:7). The reason we associate our first mentioning of Techiyat HaMeitim – "Mechayeih HaMeitim" – with "Atah Gibor" is that Hashem's great might and power is visible in His action of creating Adam HaRishon. The second time we mention Techiyat HaMeitim – "Mechayeih Meitim" – we refer to two similar events: Eliyahu's (Melachim I 17:22) and Elisha's (Melachim II 4:34-35) bringing back to life a child for a mother. With this phrase, we say "BeRachamim Rabim," for Hashem's mercy is obvious in His allowing of the prophets to bring back the dead to life. The third time we mention Hashem's revival of the dead is when we say "Melech Meimit UMechayeh." This refers to Yechezkeil's experience in the valley of dry bones, when Hashem turns the dry bones into life (Yechezkeil 37:7-10). With this mentioning of Techiyat HaMeitim, we say, "UMatzmi'ach Yeshuah," "And makes salvation sprout," because the whole incident is symbolic for the revival of all of the dead in the future. The fourth time refers to the final revival of the dead, when Mashiach comes. Therefore, we say, "VeNe'eman Atah Lehachayot Meitim," that we believe Hashem will bring back the dead. These reasons account for our mentioning Techiyat HaMeitim. What does the fifth mentioning – "Baruch Atah Hashem, Mechayeih HaMeitim" – symbolize?

One way to understand the last one is that it is not a physical revival of the dead; rather, it refers to Hashem's "bringing back to life" each and every one of us every day. This fifth mentioning of Techiyat HaMeitim is essentially saying that just as Hashem can bring the dead back to life, so too He can bring each and every one

of our souls back to life. Every day, we have many things that distract us from our goals in life. All of these things are fine to do, if done for the right reasons, but we cannot let them distract us from our main purpose in life: to worship Hashem. Therefore, we conclude the Berachah on an individual revival of the dead.

This idea is very important for this time of year. We have just celebrated Purim, a holiday about celebrating life itself. We were supposed to die, but everything flipped around; essentially, we were brought back to life. We must bring this lesson to the next holiday. While Pesach is about our celebrating our physical exodus from Egypt, it also celebrates our spiritual exodus from the land of idol worship.

Also, Pesach has a very special sacrifice: the Korban Pesach. In the times of the Beit HaMikdah, we all had to be Tahor in order to offer and eat it. Nowadays, while we do not bring the Korban Pesach, we remember it and commemorate it during Pesach. We have to wake up from the long winter and remember to prepare for this mitzvah; therefore, we read Parashat Parah (BeMidbar 19:1-22) in order to remind us to be sprinkled by the ashes of the Parah Adumah. Parshat Parah is the wake-up call to our spiritual holiday; Purim celebrates the saving of our bodies, but Pesach celebrates the saving of our souls!

May we keep this lesson in mind, so that Hashem will not only bring us back spiritually, but eventually, He will perform the ultimate Techiyat HaMeitim.

IR HANIDACHAT

by Rabbi Chaim Jachter

Few Mitzvot in the Torah seem as violent as the rules set forth in Devarim Perek 13 regarding the Ir HaNidachat, a city in which a majority of the inhabitants serve Avodah Zarah (idolatry). The Torah demands that we kill all of the city's inhabitants (even the minority who did not serve Avodah Zarah) and burn all of their possessions.

The Challenge

While it is understood that morality requires good people to eliminate evil¹, the administration of the death penalty to an entire city seems brutal and incongruent with Sefer Mishlei's (3:17) characterization of the Torah: "*Deracheha Darchei No'am VeChol Netivotehah Shalom*," "its ways are pleasant and all its path are peaceful." Thus, we are challenged to find an explanation for why Hashem includes this rule in the Torah.

A Question that Might Unlock the Message

A clue to unlocking this mystery lies in the surprising phrase presented in Devarim 13:18 in the context of Ir HaNidachat,

"VeNatan Lecha Rachamim," meaning that Hashem should bestow mercy upon us. This phrase's appearance after the Torah's describing a Mitzvah to kill all of the inhabitants of a city is astonishing. The concept of Rachamim appears to be starkly out of place when discussing the rules of an Ir HaNidachat. How do we explain the promise of mercy in the context of a Mitzvah that requires violent action?

Three Classic Answers

Ramban (Devarim 13:16) explains that the mercy element in the Ir HaNidachat teaches us to spare the children from punishment². In a variation on this theme, Rav Zalman Sorotzkin, in his *Oznayim LaTorah*, explains that mercy is required to adopt the orphaned children of an Ir HaNidachat³.

The Netziv⁴, in his *HaAmeik Davar*, explains that the Torah is concerned that engaging in violent activity, even when it is necessary to do so, will negatively transform people into violent individuals⁵. Thus, those who administered the death penalty to the residents of an Ir HaNidachat are in need of Hashem's gift of mercy so that their justified, yet violent, actions do not transform them into violent people.

A Different Approach, Based on the Lubavitcher Rebbe

The Gemara (Sanhedrin 71b) presents an opinion that an Ir HaNidachat would never occur. The Gemara explains that since the Torah requires that everything in an Ir HaNidachat be burned, an Ir HaNidachat cannot be destroyed, so long as it contains even a single Mezuzah. Since a Mezuzah contains Hashem's name, it cannot be destroyed; its destruction would violate the prohibition of erasing Hashem's name (Devarim 12:4, with Rashi's comments)⁶.

This idea has profound implications. One tiny Mezuzah can spare an entire city from the status of an Ir HaNidachat! This teaches that a drop of positive energy has the power and potential to counter much negativity. The Kabbalah expresses this idea in its statement that a little bit of light can dispel much darkness⁷.

One may ask, though, what would happen if a city met the requirements of an Ir HaNidachat and contained not a single Mezuzah. How can the opinion presented by the Gemara claim that an Ir HaNidachat is an impossibility if there is a distinct possibility that the

¹ This is why the Torah issues a death penalty for violations of severe transgressions. However, as is well known, Batei Din very rarely administered the death penalty (Makkot 7a).

² See, however, Ramban's comments in Hilchot Avodah Zarah (4:6).

³ Be'eir Yosef (Parashat VaYishlach) similarly interprets Targum Yonatan ben Uzziel (Shemot 13:18) as teaching that each family that left Mitzrayim adopted the children of the many assimilated Jews that died (according to Chazal, cited by Rashi ad loc. s.v. VaChamushim) during Makkat Choshech.

⁴ The Or HaChayim presents a similar approach.

⁵ Therapists throughout the civilized world often endeavor to ensure that military veterans are not negatively impacted by their combat experiences, even after fighting a morally justified war.

The Netziv similarly explains that Pinechas required a Berit

Shalom (covenant of peace, BeMidbar 25:12) lest his necessary violent actions against Zimri ben Salu and Kozbi bat Tzur negatively impact his personality. The story presented in Sefer Yehoshua (Perek 22), in which Pinechas acts as a peacemaker, demonstrates that Pinechas successfully met this challenge.

⁶ Torah Academy of Bergen County alumnus Avi Eserner ('04) pointed out (during our Shiur in 2003) that this rule would apply even if the solitary Mezuzah was Pesulah (invalid), since it still contains Hashem's name.

⁷ This is one of the many rich themes expressed by our Chanukah candles. It is also expressed in Avraham Avinu's Tefillah that the presence of ten Tzaddikim could spare Sedom from destruction.

Jews in the city have strayed so far from Judaism to the extent that there remains not even a single Mezuzah?

We may answer based on Rashi (Devarim 31:21 s.v. Ki Lo Tishachach MiPi Zar'o), who states that "the Torah has promised that the Torah will never be completely forgotten by the Jewish People." Thus, asserting that an Ir HaNidachat is an impossibility affirms faith in the Jewish People and in the belief that there will never be a city among our people where the inhabitants have strayed to the extent that there is not even one Mezuzah in the town⁸.

Another answer is based on a story told about the Lubavitcher Rebbe. The Lubavitcher Rebbe is reported to have remarked that if he heard that a city was about to be declared an Ir HaNidachat, he would arise at two in the morning and affix a Mezuzah to a home in that city. In other words, were a city to be devoid of any authentic Jewish influence and presence, the Lubavitcher Rebbe would create an authentic center of Jewish life. As is well known, this was not a passing sentiment of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, but rather a life's mission for himself and his followers. An examination of www.chabad.org leads one to marvel at the hundreds of centers of Jewish life established by followers of the Lubavitcher Rebbe in almost every corner of the globe, especially in areas which had a dearth of Jewish life. These efforts are part of the happy story of the resurgence and revitalization of Orthodox Judaism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

The Challenge of the Ir HaNidachat

Thus, we argue that the Torah never intended for us to implement the rules of Ir HaNidachat. Rather, it is a call and challenge to the Jewish People to ensure that a Jewish community never becomes an Ir HaNidachat. For this reason, we suggest that the term "mercy" perfectly suits the idea of an Ir HaNidachat. The presence of this word in the Torah's presenting the rules of the Ir HaNidachat is a signal that an Ir HaNidachat should be interpreted and implemented in a merciful manner. The concept of an Ir HaNidachat is a call for us to take responsibility for each other's spiritual welfare and not a summons to violent action.

Support from Ramban Regarding a Kahal Shogeig

Support for this contention may be drawn from Ramban's comments to BeMidbar 15:22. Ramban asserts that if an entire community does not observe the Torah, its members (not its leaders) are considered to be sinning BeShogeig, inadvertently, since they are merely swept up by the current of the time. Support for this surprising assertion of a Kahal Shogeig (the inadvertent community) may be drawn from a nearby Pasuk (15:26) that states, "*VeNislach LeChol Adat Benei Yisrael...Ki LeChol HaAm BiShegagah,*" meaning that Hashem forgives the entire Jewish people since the communal sin is regarded as unintentional. The importance of this principle is evident from the fact that we recite this Pasuk no less than three times at the conclusion of Kol Nidrei, on the onset of Yom Kippur.

Ramban's "Kahal Shogeig principle," however, seems to run counter to the principle of an Ir HaNidachat, where the death penalty is administered to an entire community for worshipping Avodah Zarah. While inadvertent sinners are not absolved of guilt, they nonetheless hardly deserve the death penalty. According to

Ramban, why should the members of an Ir HaNidachat deserve the death penalty?

We may answer that in practice, the death penalty is not administered to the residents of an Ir HaNidachat, since the Torah challenges us to make sure that a spiritually lacking city does not become an Ir HaNidachat. The Torah does not intend to punish the residents of an Ir HaNidachat, but it rather challenges the Jewish People to mercifully intervene and strengthen the Jewish identity of a wayward community.

Conclusion

"HaTzur Tamim Pa'olo Ki Chol Derachav Mishpat," "Hashem's work is perfect, for all his ways are just"; "Keil Emunah VeEin Avel, Tzaddik VeYashar Hu," "a trustworthy God without impropriety, righteous and fair is He" (Devarim 32:4). Far from being a brutal and unforgiving Halachah, the Ir HaNidachat is, in practice, a law of mercy and kind intervention. It constitutes a Torah mandate that has been fulfilled not only by members of the Lubavitch community, but by many other groups of Jews as well – ranging from the Orthodox Union's National Conference of Synagogue Youth and Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus, to the Aish HaTorah network of institutions, to the Torah Links organizations established in many communities – that serve as beacons of Torah light in otherwise dark places, thereby becoming the solitary Mezuzah in an Ir HaNidachat.

What we have discovered regarding the Ir HaNidachat is true of everything in the Torah. What might appear to be unfair at first glance is, in reality, fair and just. We are challenged to take a deeper look at and properly analyze passages that we might find incompatible with our moral intuitions in order to discover the true meaning and implementation of the Torah's rules. With proper investigation and analysis, we can discover that all of the ways of the Torah are "Darchei No'am" and represent "Netivot Shalom" (Mishlei 3:17).

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⁸ Rav Soloveitchik, in a number of his Shiurim, emphasizes the importance of maintaining faith not only in Hashem, but in the Jewish People as well. For example, Rambam (Hilchot Teshuvah 7:5) rules in accordance with the opinion of Rabi Eli'ezer that the Jewish People will be redeemed only if they

repent. Thus, Rambam's principle of faith that one must have belief in the arrival of the Mashiach includes a belief that the Jewish People will eventually repent, since Mashiach cannot come otherwise.