

Parshas Tzav

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1. G-d's Extreme Reaction to Deprecation

The Gemara in Tractate Megillah states, “**Rava says, “There was no one who spoke *loshan hara* (evil speech) like Haman the evil one.**” Haman was the expert in evil speech. He approached Achashverosh (the king of Persia) to annihilate the Jewish people. Achashverosh however had several reservations. He was afraid that the G-d of the Jews would do to him what He had done to others who had previously attempted to destroy the Jews. Additionally, he was concerned that if he eliminated the Jewish people, who were his subjects, it would diminish his kingdom and leave wide-open gaps or “bald spots.” Haman reassured him by saying that the Jews were dispersed throughout the empire and their elimination would not be noticed.

Haman’s final convincing argument to Achashverosh was “If a fly were to fall into the wine of a Jew, he would simply remove the fly and drink the wine. However if the king (Achashverosh) were to touch the wine of a Jew he would pour it out and not drink it. Therefore they deserve to be destroyed because they do not revere the king.” Haman was the expert in *loshan hara* because he could focus on the negative aspect of something and communicate it in a way that other aspects of that subject no longer existed. When he slandered the Jews, he negated their value to such a degree that they were perceived in the eyes of Achashverosh as a people with no merit. *Loshan hara* thus renders the subject worthless.

Shlomo HaMelech (King Solomon) writes in *Mishlei* (Proverbs), “The deprecator you shall smite. The fool will be wisened.” The Midrash tells us that “the deprecator you shall smite” is Amalek who was the ancestor of Haman. The Amalekites, rather than understanding and internalizing the awesome supernatural events of the splitting of the Sea and thus submitting to G-d, attacked the Jewish people and tried to destroy them. They had no capacity to appreciate the profound aura surrounding the Jewish people that the rest of the world had seen and understood. Despite the fact that G-d had traumatized the world for the sake of the Jew, the Amalekites were not moved. The deprecator focuses only on what he chooses to see.

Thus, *loshan hara* is a behavior pattern that mimics the deprecating characteristic of the Amalekites. When one speaks *loshan hara* he eliminates the total value of the individual regardless of his positive qualities and only pinpoints the negative.

An individual once came to see Reb Aryeh Levin z’tl (the world renown tzaddik of Jerusalem) to communicate something negative about the Satmar Rebbe z’tl because of his position vis-à-vis the State of Israel. Rabbi Levin, who had a sense of what the person was about to say, preempted him by saying, “Before you begin to speak to me about the Satmar Rebbe, I would like you to answer a few questions... Do you feel that the Satmar Rebbe is a tzaddik (righteous person)?” The person responded in the affirmative. He asked him another question, “Do you think the Satmar Rebbe is one of a kind when it comes to being charitable and doing acts of

loving kindness?” Once again, the individual responded in the affirmative. Rabbi Levin continued asking questions of this nature and received affirmative responses to all of them. After this give and take was completed Rabbi Levin asked him, “So what is it that you wanted to tell me about the Satmar Rebbe?” The person responded by saying, “I have nothing to say.” This story illustrates the basis for one’s desire to express negativity about a fellow Jew or any other human being. When one focuses exclusively on the negative that they wish to see (like the deprecator Amalek) one’s expression becomes lethal. However, if one is able to see the total person, he no longer sees him in a negative light.

The Gemara in Tractate *Yomah* tells us that *sinas chinam* (unwarranted hatred) is more serious than the three cardinal sins. The First Bais HaMikdash (Temple) was destroyed because the Jewish people violated the three cardinal sins (idolatry, murder, and incestuous and adulterous relations). The Second Bais HaMikdash was destroyed because of *sinas chinam* (unwarranted hatred), which expressed itself through *loshan hara*. The Gemara tells us that Hashem is willing to look away from our failings, even if they are as serious as the three cardinal sins, with the exception of *loshan hara*. How do we understand this?

As we explained, speaking *loshan hara* is imitating the negative characteristic of the Amalekites. It is imitating the behavior of the deprecator par excellence (Amalek). The Midrash tells us that Hashem said, “My throne is not complete until the Amalekites are obliterated from the world.” Therefore, the Jew who speaks *loshan hara* is assuming the detestable characteristic of Amalek and therefore it is something that Hashem will not tolerate.

Two mitzvos on Purim are intended to encourage and strengthen friendship and brotherhood among Jewish people. The mitzvah of *mishloach manos* is the giving of two types of food items another Jew. In addition, one has the obligation to give charity to two needy Jews so that they are able to purchase food for their Purim Seudah (festive meal). On Purim, one must go beyond himself and give value to his fellow. It is the characteristic of valuing another person that will counteract the deprecation of Amalek in the world.

2. What are We Naturally Inclined to do?

The Torah states, “**Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Urge (Command) Aaron and his sons saying: This is the law of the elevation-offering: It is the elevation-offering [that stays] on the flame, on the Altar, all night until morning...**” Why did Aaron and his sons need to be “urged” more than any other mitzvah in the case of the elevation offering? Rashi cites Chazal who explain that if there is a situation in which there is a loss of money, one needs to be urged to participate. In the case of the elevation offering, the limbs and the fats are burnt throughout the night, which requires the presence of the Kohen (Priest). The Kohen does not receive a portion of the elevation offering (unlike other offerings) because it is totally consumed on the Altar. Thus, the Kohen might feel that it is not worth his while to be awake all night to ensure that the limbs and the fats are burnt. Even though the Kohen’s compensation is the merit of having performed the mitzvah, nevertheless, the Torah tells us that Hashem had to tell Moshe to “urge” Aaron and his sons to do so. How do we understand this?

The Gemara in Tractate *Megillah* tells us that because the Jewish people were not motivated

regarding their performance of mitzvos. They remained in their natural state of inertia and thus did not sufficiently engage in Torah Study. It was because of the lack of Torah study that they did not merit the protection of Hashem and were subject to the decree that was issued by Haman to annihilate the Jewish people. What is the cause of one's lack of motivation?

When one appreciates the value of a deed, he will be motivated and can easily overcome the natural state of inertia. However, if one does not perceive the value, he will not engage in that activity and will therefore need to be urged to act.

The Torah states, **“This is the law of the elevation-offering...”** The Baal HaTurim explains in his commentary that if one studies the verses pertaining to the elevation offering it is valued by G-d as if he brought that offering. The Gemara in Tractate *Menachos* tells us that if one studies and fervently recites the portion of the Torah pertaining to any offering, it is valued as if the person had brought that offering.

The Baal HaTurim explains that there is a commonality between the Torah and the elevation offering. The Torah is referred to as “fire” just as the elevation offering is burnt in fire. In addition, offerings are referred to in the verse as “bread” and a verse in Mishlei refers to the Torah as “bread.” Just as the world cannot survive without bread, which is the staple of life, it cannot survive without Torah.

The Gemara in Tractate *Berachos* tells us that one cannot acquire Torah without personal sacrifice for its own sake. However, if when one truly appreciates the value of this endeavor, then he does not perceive it as a sacrifice, even if he did so initially. Aaron and his sons needed to be “urged” to perform the elevation offering because its true value was not perceived. So too, initially one needs to be “urged” to study Torah because its value is not understood. The Prophet tells us that all existence is sustained through Torah study. There is no mitzvah that has greater value than the study of Torah itself. As our Rabbis teach us, *“Talmud Torah Keneged Kulam* - the study of Torah is equivalent to all the mitzvos combined.”

When one brings an offering, it is referred to as a “sacrifice.” The sacrifice itself is a process that rehabilitates spirituality when it has been diminished because of inadvertent sin. If this is the case, why is it considered a sacrifice? When one pays a doctor for a remedy that heals, it is not considered a “sacrifice.” How do we understand this? Evidently, the Torah is teaching us that recognizing one's failing and feeling remorse is the sacrifice of the individual. Bringing an offering is an expression of that sacrifice. Similarly, Torah study can only come about through sacrifice. Since one naturally values the material more than the spiritual, if one overcomes that predisposition and recognizes Torah study to be primary, then that is true sacrifice. Therefore, regarding Torah study and the elevation offering, one needs to be “urged” to make these sacrifices.

3. The Consequences of Our Actions

The Torah tells us that the same sin, which is transgressed by two individuals, will have different ramifications based on the status of the person. For example, if an ordinary Jew sins, the blood of the sin offering is sprinkled on the outer Altar (which was located in the courtyard). However, if the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) transgresses the same sin, the blood of the sin offering is sprinkled in the direction of the *Paroches* (curtain), which was located in the inner sanctuary (covered sanctuary). The level of sanctity in the Bais HaMikdash (Temple) intensifies as one approaches the Holy of Holies, which was located in the far end of the covered sanctuary. Thus, the service performed in the covered sanctuary has greater spiritual ramifications.

The Chofetz Chaim writes in his work *Shmiras HaLoshan* (Guarding One's Tongue) that the spiritual state of the person transgressing the sin will determine the magnitude of the consequence. He explains that everything in this world is a reflection of the spiritual world. Just as there is the city of Jerusalem on the terrestrial level, there is a Jerusalem on the spiritual level. Just as there is an outer courtyard in the Bais HaMikdash, which was a location of holiness, so too there is a courtyard on a spiritual level, reflecting the physical one. Just as there is an inner covered sanctuary in the Bais HaMikdash, which was considered holier than the outer sanctuary (courtyard), identically there is a spiritual inner sanctuary reflecting the physical.

When the ordinary Jew sins, he causes a diminishment in the outer spiritual sanctuary, which corresponds to the courtyard of the Bais HaMikdash. Thus, the sprinkling of the blood that is required to bring about the required spiritual correction must only be done in the outer courtyard.

The spiritual failing of the Kohen Gadol, whose dimension of spirituality is greater than that of the ordinary Jew, has a more far-reaching consequence which even diminishes the spirituality of the inner sanctuary. Therefore, in order to effect rehabilitation for the Kohen Gadol, the blood of his sin offering must be sprinkled in the direction of the *Paroches*.

The Chofetz Chaim tells us that on Yom Kippur when the Kohen Gadol enters the Holy of Holies, the first service that he performs is that of the incense offering, which is referred to as the "cloud of the Ketores (Incense)." The Gemara explains that the incense offering atones for *loshan hara* (evil speech). The spiritual ramifications are so severe and profound that it detracts from and undermines the most advanced realms of spirituality. Thus, the atonement that is needed for its correction, takes place in the Holy of Holies. Therefore, the Chofetz Chaim explains that when one wishes to engage in the *teshuvah* (atonement) process, one should first repent for the sin of *loshon hara* – (unproductive negative speech). If one has violated this sin he must first attend to what is most serious, followed by the other issues that need to be corrected.

The *Kli Yakar* cites the Midrash, which states that a person who is arrogant and haughty deserves to be judged by fire. The *Kli Yakar* explains that this does not mean that the person deserves to be burnt for his arrogance (G-d forbid), but rather the burnt offering atones for arrogance. The Torah refers to the burnt offering as an elevated offering, which is consumed by fire. When the offering is burnt, the smoke rises and is similar to the one who is arrogant and has an elevated self-image.

The *Kli Yakar* points out that Torah juxtaposes the removal of the ash from the Altar to the law of the burnt offering. What is the significance of this juxtaposition? He explains that the correction for arrogance is humility. Only when one humbles himself is the atonement complete. Avraham, our Patriarch, was one of the most humble people to ever live. He referred to himself, as “I am only dust and ash.” Thus, the juxtaposition of the removal of the ash to the burnt offering indicates that in order for one to be truly atoned for arrogance, he needs to be humbled. However if after one brings the offering he remains arrogant, his offering has little value.

The Gemara tells us that the arrogant person undermines G-d’s place in the world. The person, who believes that he is the cause of his own success and everything that surrounds his life, is actually denying the existence of G-d. In his mind, G-d exists only to do his own bidding. Thus, based on what the Chofetz Chaim had said, the behavior of this type of person decreases the spirituality of all existence. Therefore, the fire of the elevation offering moves upward towards heaven in order to correct the diminishment that was brought about through arrogance. In order for the burnt offering to be fully effective, one needs to internalize the seriousness of the failing and change one’s behavior.

4. How Does One Recognize Truth?

The Torah tells us that Moshe installed Aaron as the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) and his sons as Kohanim (Priests) before the entire assembly of the Jewish people. The Torah states, **“Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Take Aaron and his sons with him, and the garments...Gather the entire assembly to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. Moshe did as Hashem commanded him; and the assembly was gathered to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. Moshe said to the assembly, “This is what Hashem commanded to be done...”**

It is important to note that the assembly of Jewish people was comprised of several million people. How is it possible that all of these people were able to gather in a relatively small space at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting? Rashi cites Chazal who explain that this was one of the few instances in Jewish history that G-d performed the miracle that gave a limited location an unlimited capacity thus enabling the entire Jewish people to stand before the entrance to the Tent. Because of this miracle the entire Jewish people was able to witness the installation of Aaron and his sons as Kohanim.

After the Jewish people assembled at the entrance to the Tent, Moshe spoke to them saying, **“This is the thing that Hashem commanded to be done (to initiate Aaron and his sons)...”** Why did Moshe need to tell the Jewish people that he was acting in accordance with the commandment of Hashem? Was it not obvious since they all witnessed the miracle of the entire Jewish people being contained in a limited location? Nevertheless, Moshe needed to tell the Jewish people, **“This is what Hashem commanded to be done.”** How do we understand this?

The Jewish people witnessed many supernatural events. Some of them, as miraculous as they may have been, caused the Jews to be misled and to succumb to idolatry. For example, when Moshe ascended to receive the Torah in heaven, the Jewish people were told that he would return after

forty days and forty nights. However due to a misunderstanding of the calculation, Satan caused the Jews to believe that Moshe had passed away and would never return to them. Rashi cites Chazal who say that Satan blackened the sky (during the daytime period) and caused the Jewish people to see in it the image of Moshe lying on his funeral bier. It was the first time in history that the sky blackened in the middle of the day, which indicated to the Jewish people that Moshe had actually died. This event caused them to feel abandoned because their leader was no longer with them. Thus, they were vulnerable to the influence of idolatry (sin of the Golden Calf).

Therefore, the fact that the entire Jewish people experienced the miracle of being gathered in a limited location was not sufficient proof that the communication to them was in fact the Word of Hashem. It was only after Moshe told them explicitly "This is what Hashem commanded to be done" that the Jews believed that the installation of Aaron and his children was the Word of G-d. It is possible to witness many miraculous events that may seem to emanate from the Word of G-d however, this may not be the case.

Two of the thirteen tenets of Jewish faith state, "I believe with absolute faith that the Torah in its entirety was given by Hashem to Moshe Rabbeinu. I believe with absolute faith that the Torah is immutable and it will not be exchanged or altered in any way." Every letter of the Written Torah and the entire Oral Law is the Word of Hashem, which was transmitted by Moshe to the Jewish people. If something was not transmitted by Moshe, who was the appointed spokesman for G-d then it should not be accepted. Regardless of the magnitude of miracle, or whether the world becomes dark and an image of Moshe's remains appears it has no meaning whatsoever vis-à-vis the Word of Hashem. The limited location before the Tent assumed an unlimited capacity, yet until Moshe told the Jewish people that it was the command of G-d, it was not to be taken as such.

5. Clarity is Achieved Through Torah Study

The Torah states, "**This is the law of the elevation-offering, the meal offering...**" The *Yalkuto* cites the opinion of *Raish Lakish* who interprets this verse to mean, "One who engages in Torah study, it is as if he brought the elevation offering, meal offering, as well as the other offerings." Rava poses a question to *Raish Lakish*, "How can you extrapolate from the verse that Torah study is the equivalent of bringing offerings when the verse itself is needed to teach us the laws pertaining to these offerings." Rava explains that the Torah is communicating to us, "One who engages in Torah study does not need to bring any of the offerings." If each specific offering (such as the elevation offering, meal offering, and sin offering) are intended to correct a specific spiritual failing, how is it possible that one who engages in Torah study is not in need of them? Additionally it is difficult because Shlomo HaMelech (King Solomon) tells us, "There is no tzaddik in the land who does good and does not sin."

The statement of Shlomo HaMelech that there is no tzaddik who is perfect, means that the tzaddik has some degree of spiritual failing. However, it does not mean to say that the tzaddik has violated an area of Torah that would require him to bring an offering to rehabilitate his spirituality. Such a transgression would be the result of inadvertently violating the Shabbos or inadvertently benefiting from something that was consecrated. Rather, Shlomo HaMelech's statement is referring to the tzaddik whose service to Hashem could have been performed at a more advanced level and it was not.

Thus, Rava's statement that one who engages in Torah study does not need to bring an offering is not speaking about a person who had transgressed; rather, a person who engages in Torah study is given a level of clarity through the Torah, which does not allow him to fail - even inadvertently.

Spiritual failure emanates from a lack of clarity. If a person truly appreciated and internalized the reality of sin, one would not fail- just as one understands the destructive effect of fire and does not put his hand in it. A person who understands that he is walking through a minefield will be especially careful with every step not to accidentally step on a mine (realizing its consequences). Similarly, through the study of Torah, one achieves a level of clarity to appreciate the wrong at a depth that will not allow him to transgress. Thus, Rava explains that a person who engages in Torah study will not be in need of the offering because he will not require spiritual rehabilitation.

During the period of the First Bais HaMikdash (Temple), the Jewish people violated the three cardinal sins of adultery/incest, idolatry, and murder. The introduction to the Midrash *Eicha* tells us that Hashem had said at the time of the First Temple, "I wish that they (the Jewish people) would have abandoned Me but kept My Torah. Because the innate illumination in Torah would have ultimately led the Jews back to the good." Even if a person falls to a level where he transgresses the three cardinal sins, the study of Torah has the innate ability to give him clarity to appreciate the wrong that he had perpetrated – thus causing him to repent. What would be considered proper and sufficient study of Torah to bring this about?

Ramchal explains that the level of Torah study referred to in the Midrash is when one's time and mind are completely occupied with Torah study. A person, who is infused with Torah thoughts continuously, will ultimately be impacted in a way that despite his behavior, he will be given a level of clarity that will cause him to do *teshuvah* (repentance). Torah is inherently enlightening.

The Gemara in Tractate *Taanis* tells us that if one sees a *Talmud Chacham* (Torah Scholar) angered because of a *halachic* issue (Jewish law), one should understand his vantage point. Torah is referred to in the verse as "fire." The *Talmud Chacham*, who is a repository of that Torah, contains something comparable to fire. Rashi explains this statement to mean that because of the Torah that the *Talmud Chacham* possesses he has a greater capacity to sense the wrong of the transgression than the one who did not study Torah. His reaction is only because he has difficulty tolerating the wrong. It does not emanate from the negative characteristic of anger.

Torah study causes one to have a greater capacity to be sensitive to spirituality. It brings about a level of clarity, which protects the person from doing wrong and gives him a greater appreciation for spiritual opportunity (*mitzvos*). This is what Rava means when he says that one who is engaged in Torah study does not need to bring an offering.