**S.A.L.T – PESACH 5778**

**PARASHAT SHEMINI**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

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In memory of former IDF Chief Rabbi

and leading rabbi of Religious Zionism, Avichai Rontzki z"l

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Motzaei Shabbat

Today we will continue our discussion of the controversial proposal of the *Avnei Neizer* (O.C. 381) for those who find themselves unable to reach the *afikoman* stage of the *seder* before *chatzot* (halakhic midnight), as *Halakha* requires (*Shulchan Arukh* O.C. 477:1). The crux of the *Avnei Neizer*’s theory is that the prohibition against eating after eating the *afikoman* extends only until the final time for eating the *afikoman*. Therefore, although we should endeavor to follow the stringent view of Rabbi Elazar, who requires eating the *afikoman* before *chatzot*, we may resume eating after *chatzot* according to this opinion. The *Avnei Neizer* thus proposes eating the *afikoman* just before *chatzot*, and then resuming eating after *chatzot* and eating after the meal another piece of *matza* as the *afikoman* to satisfy the view permitting eating the *afikoman* after *chatzot*.

Later *Acharonim* noted that this premise is contradicted by the reasons given by the *Rishonim* for the prohibition against eating after eating the *korban pesach*. For example, the Ramban, in his *Milchamot Hashem* (Pesachim 26b in the Rif), writes that this prohibition serves to ensure that the *korban pesach* would be eaten “*al ha-sova*,” in a condition of satiation. The Gemara (Pesachim 69b-70a) establishes that the *korban pesach* should be eaten at the end of one’s meal, as it must be eaten “*al ha-sova*,” and for this reason, the other sacrifice brought on Pesach – the *korban chagiga* – would be eaten first, before the *pesach* sacrifice. The Ramban opines that the prohibition against eating after eating the *korban pesach* serves as a safeguard to ensure that people will make a point of eating to satiation before partaking of the *korban pesach*. According to this explanation, there is no reason to assume that Rabbi Elazar would permit eating after *chatzot*. Since the prohibition is intended to ensure that people eat before partaking of the *pesach* sacrifice, it stands to reason that it applies throughout the night, as otherwise people might allow themselves to eat the *korban pesach* first and then eat other foods later.

A different explanation of this law is offered by the *Ba’al Ha-ma’or*, who suggests that the Sages forbade eating after eating the *korban pesach* as a means of ensuring that the people would not forget to recite *Hallel*. The *Ba’al Ha-ma’or* writes that given the crowding in Jerusalem on the night of Pesach, people would go to upper floors of buildings after eating the *korban pesach* (which needed to be done on ground level) where they would continue the *seder* with the recitation of *Hallel*, so that others could use the space on the ground. *Chazal* were concerned that people might forget to recite *Hallel* after leaving the place where they ate the sacrifice, and so they enacted a prohibition against eating so that the taste of the sacrifice would remain in people’s mouths as a reminder of the obligation to recite *Hallel*. According to this reason, too, there is no reason for this prohibition not to extend beyond *chatzot*, as the *Hallel* obligation presumably applies throughout the night even according to Rabbi Elazar.

It stands to reason, however, that the *Avnei Neizer* was well aware of these explanations given for the prohibition, and knowingly disputed them. As we saw earlier this week, the *Avnei Neizer* postulated his theory to answer the question of why Rabbi Elazar does not require eating the meat of the *korban pesach* at the moment of *chatzot*. Rabbi Elazar’s position is derived from the Torah’s command to eat the sacrifice “*ba-layla ha-zeh*” (“on this night” – Shemot 12:8), a term which is used several verses later (12:12) in reference to the plague of the firstborn, which took place precisely at midnight. Seemingly, this inference should require eating the sacrifice **at** *chatzot*, not **before** *chatzot*. The *Avnei Neizer* thus suggested that for this reason the Sages required avoiding further eating after partaking of the *korban pesach*, as the lingering taste of the sacrifice in a person’s mouth at *chatzot* allows him to be considered as though he eats at *chatzot*. This marks a completely different understanding of the prohibition against eating after the *korban pesach*, which the *Avnei Neizer* advanced to resolve what otherwise seems as a serious flaw in Rabbi Elazar’s rationale. Hence, there is no sense in challenging the *Avnei Neizer*’s theory based on the earlier explanations given for the prohibition against eating other foods after eating the *korban pesach*, as he knowingly rejected those explanations in favor of his novel theory which seeks to explain Rabbi Elazar’s reasoning.

Sunday

Today we will continue our discussion of the controversial proposal of the *Avnei Neizer* (O.C. 381) for those who find themselves unable to reach the *afikoman* stage of the *seder* before *chatzot* (halakhic midnight), as *Halakha* requires (*Shulchan Arukh* O.C. 477:1). The crux of the *Avnei Neizer*’s theory is that the prohibition against eating after eating the *afikoman* extends only until the final time for eating the *afikoman*. Therefore, although we should endeavor to follow the stringent view of Rabbi Elazar, who requires eating the *afikoman* before *chatzot*, we may resume eating after *chatzot* according to this opinion. The *Avnei Neizer* thus proposes eating the *afikoman* just before *chatzot*, and then resuming eating after *chatzot* and eating after the meal another piece of *matza* as the *afikoman* to satisfy the view permitting eating the *afikoman* after *chatzot*.

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Monday

The Torah commands in Sefer Shemot (12:43), “*Kol ben neikhar lo yokhal bo*,” which appears to forbid non-Jews from partaking of the meat of the *pesach* sacrifice. Rashi, however, citing the *Mekhilta*, explains the term “*ben neikhar*” as referring to somebody “whose actions are foreign to his Father in heaven” – meaning, a Jew who has abandoned the faith. As Rashi proceeds to note, this includes both members of idolatrous nations and Jewish apostates. (*Meshekh Chokhma* suggests that the *Mekhilta* could not accept the straightforward reading of the verse, as referring only to gentiles, because the command not to partake of the *pesach* sacrifice is not included among the Noachide laws that apply to gentiles.)

An astonishing remark relevant to this law is made by Rav Tzvi Elimelekh of Dinov – the “*Benei Yissaskhar*” – in his work *Derekh Pikudekha* (13:4). He raises the possibility that eating the *korban pesach* is forbidden – on the level of rabbinic enactment – even for those who are guilty of misdeeds which *Chazal* equated with idol-worship. Specifically, the *Benei Yissaskhar* points to anger, about which the Gemara (Shabbat 105b) states, “Whoever gets angry – it is as if he worships a foreign deity.” Anger is equated with idol worship, and thus the *Benei Yissaskhar* considers the possibility that a short-tempered individual who is easily angered might be forbidden from participating in the *korban pesach* ritual. Remarkably, the *Benei Yissaskhar* then goes even further, suggesting that this rule might apply even nowadays, when we do not offer the *pesach* sacrifice, as we eat the *afikoman* in commemoration of the sacrifice, such that an angry person might be unable to eat the *afikoman*.

Whether or not this insight was written as a matter of practical *Halakha*, it reminds us that the designation of *Am Yisrael* as God’s treasured nation at the time of the Exodus obligates us not only ideologically, but also in terms of character. As many have noted, the *pesach* sacrifice served as *Benei Yisrael*’s public and resolute rejection of Egyptian paganism. In conveying God’s instructions regarding the sacrifice before the Exodus, Moshe told the people, “*Mishkhu u-k’chu lakhem tzon*” (literally, “Pull and take for yourselves a sheep”), which the Midrash (*Shemot Rabba* 16:2) famously explains to mean, “Withdraw your hands from idolatry.” And for this reason, people who do not accept the basic beliefs of Judaism are excluded from the *korban pesach* observance, which is intended precisely to demonstrate our withdrawal from conflicting beliefs and devotion to monotheism. The *Benei Yissaskhar* here reminds us that this expression of commitment relates not only to belief, but also to character. Treating people with patience, understanding and forgiveness, and avoiding anger and vindictiveness, are no less critical to our designation as God’s treasured nation as our commitment to Jewish belief. The Exodus from Egypt elevated us to a stature that demands unwavering devotion to God’s laws, but also demands especially high standards of character.

Tuesday

Parashat Shemini begins with the description of the events that took place on the first day Aharon and his sons began officiating as *kohanim* in the *Mishkan*, after the seven-day consecration process. After Aharon and the nation brought to the entrance of the *Mishkan* the animals that would be offered as sacrifices on that day, Moshe introduced his next instructions by saying, “This is the thing that the Lord commanded you to do so that the glory of the Lord shall appear to you” (9:6). Sure enough, after all the sacrifices were offered in accordance with God’s instructions, “the glory of the Lord appeared to the entire nation” (9:23).

*Torat Kohanim*, commenting on Moshe’s introductory statement, “This is the thing that the Lord commanded you to do,” explains that Moshe here was telling the people, “That evil inclination – remove it from your hearts…” Many commentators raised the question as to Moshe’s precise intent in this admonition, and asked why he speaks of “that” evil inclination, as though referring to one particular manifestation of our natural sinful tendencies.

A fairly simple explanation is offered by *Ketav Sofer*, who suggests, in light of the context of Moshe’s remark, that *Torat Kohanim* speaks of the particular vice of pride and arrogance over one’s accomplishments. Our struggle against our negative tendencies does not end even once we persevere and complete a noble undertaking from which our lazy or selfish instincts sought to dissuade us. Even after performing the task, we are faced with the challenge of remaining genuinely humble and avoiding feelings of self-adulation. Pride and arrogance over a meaningful accomplishment, *Ketav Sofer* writes, undermine the value of the accomplishment, as they indicate that the project was undertaken for purposes of self-aggrandizement, rather than out of a sincere desire to serve the Almighty. And thus after *Benei Yisrael*’s successful completion of the major undertaking of the *Mishkan*, having generously donated materials and devotedly performed the work and the consecration process in precise compliance with God’s detailed commands, Moshe warned the people, “That evil inclination – remove it from your hearts.” They needed to ensure to eliminate “that evil inclination” which always presents itself after one accomplishes something outstanding – the natural tendency to feel excessively proud and accomplished. He was reminding the people that in order for God to reside among the people, they needed to remain meek and humble, and recognize their stature as servants and subjects of the Almighty. As the Gemara in Masekhet Sota (5a) comments about an arrogant person, “The Almighty says: He and I cannot live together in the world.” God resides among us only when we are committed to serving and glorifying Him; not when we work to serve our own interests and glorify ourselves. Hence, God’s residence among *Benei Yisrael* in the *Mishkan* depended upon their elimination of “that evil inclination,” of the natural vice of pride, arrogance and self-aggrandizement, and their acknowledging that they were but lowly subjects of the King of the universe.

Wednesday

In the opening section of Parashat Shemini, we read of the dramatic events that took place on the first day the *kohanim* began serving in the *Mishkan*. After Aharon and his sons completed the day’s special rituals, offering sacrifices on the altar in the courtyard of the *Mishkan*, Moshe and Aharon went together inside the *Mishkan*, and then went back outside and blessed the nation (9:23). Several commentators, including the Rashbam, Chizkuni and Ibn Ezra, explain that Moshe and Aharon went inside the *Mishkan* to pray that God should appear to the people. Indeed, the very next verse tells that a fire descended from the heavens and consumed the sacrifices on the altar, in full view of the people, who promptly bowed and gave praise to God. Accordingly, the aforementioned commentators explain that this was Moshe and Aharon’s prayer – that God should demonstrably express His acceptance of the sacrifices offered in the *Mishkan*. We can readily understand the urgency of the matter in light of the anxiety the people must have felt at that time, worrying whether God would reside among them after the sin of the golden calf. *Benei Yisrael* expended a great amount of wealth and effort to construct the *Mishkan*, trusting God’s promise to forgive them and reside among them despite this grievous sin, and now that the *Mishkan* was operational Moshe and Aharon pleaded with God for a clear sign of His residence in the newly-constructed Sanctuary.

This approach is also taken by Rashi, who, citing *Torat Kohanim*, adds further information about Moshe and Aharon’s brief entry into the *Mishkan*. Rashi tells that when Aharon completed the sacrifices and saw no sign of the divine presence, he blamed himself, saying, “I know that the Almighty is angry at me, and it is because of me that the divine presence has not descended to Israel.” Aharon figured that as he had fashioned the golden calf, he bore responsibility for what he presumed was the failure of the entire enterprise of the *Mishkan* to bring God’s presence among the nation. He and Moshe then went inside the *Mishkan* to seek God’s compassion, and He responded favorably.

Rav Yerucham Levovitz pointed to Aharon’s response as an example of how we should be focusing on our own faults and shortcomings, rather than on other people’s faults and shortcomings. The natural tendency of most people is to blame problems and crises on the failings of other people, while absolving themselves of all responsibility. Aharon did just the opposite – personally accepting the blame for the situation, rather than pointing fingers and condescendingly casting the blame on the rest of the nation. His example shows us that the appropriate response to the problems and ills that we observe is to look inward, into ourselves, to see how we can improve our own conduct, rather than rush to point fingers at other people.

Our ability to influence and change other people is very limited, whereas our capacity to change ourselves is far greater. With honesty and determination, we are fully capable of raising our own standards and becoming better. Other people’s conduct, however, depends entirely on their own decisions, upon which we have little influence. If only for this reason, we should be focusing far more on improving ourselves than on complaining about what other people do. When we see the absence of the “*Shekhina*” in the world around us, and feel troubled and disheartened by the evils and problems faced by our society and the world, we should resolve primarily to improve ourselves, rather than decide that all the guilt is found exclusively with other people.

Thursday

Parashat Shemini tells the tragic story of the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, Aharon’s two older sons, who were killed by a heavenly fire after bringing an unwanted incense offering on their first day serving as *kohanim* after their seven-day consecration. *Chazal*, in many different contexts, attribute to Nadav and Avihu a variety of different wrongs which contributed to their deserving of such harsh punishment. One such passage appears in Masekhet Sanhedrin (52a), where the Gemara tells a very disturbing story which seems to reflect these brothers’ brazen, youthful arrogance: “Moshe and Aharon were walking along the way, and Nadav and Avihu were walking behind them, and all of Israel behind them. Nadav said to Avihu, ‘When will these two elders die, and you and I will lead the generation?’” Nadav and Avihu were guilty of no less than wishing for Moshe and Aharon’s death so they could assume the joint mantle of leadership.

Rav Yosef Salant, in his *Be’er Yosef*, suggests mitigating Nadav and Avihu’s guilt somewhat, by ascribing noble motives for their inappropriate anticipation of Moshe and Aharon’s death. He draws upon the Gemara’s emphasis on Nadav and Avihu’s desire to lead “the generation,” which might indicate that they were especially eager to serve that particular generation of *Am Yisrael*. Rav Salant explains that Nadav and Avihu perceived leadership not as an opportunity to assert authority and exert control, but primarily as an opportunity to grow. When the generation is righteous, he writes, then the leader is able to grow and rise to great heights by virtue of his position. Accordingly, Nadav and Avihu passionately and impatiently longed for the opportunity to lead that generation, the generation which beheld God’s miracles and experienced the Revelation at Sinai. They understood that leading a generation of righteous people would enable them to achieve the higher levels of spiritual greatness which they desired. Just as Nadav and Avihu inappropriately offered an unwarranted incense offering in their passionate zeal to serve the Almighty, likewise, they inappropriately looked forward to the death of their leaders so they could assume their position and rise to great heights. Thus, although they certainly spoke inappropriately in wishing for Moshe and Aharon’s passing, a sin for which they were severely punished, they spoke these words out of a genuine desire for spiritual greatness, a desire which, in and of itself, we can admire and learn from.

Rav Salant’s novel reading of the Gemara’s comment reminds us that a leader’s role in not only to guide and instruct, but also to grow together with those under his or her charge. Whether its parents raising their children, teachers instructing their students or community leaders guiding their constituents, they must use their position of leadership not only to steer others, but also to steer themselves, to join together with those they are leading in the pursuit of growth and self-improvement. The process of teaching cannot be separated from the process of learning; to the contrary, we must seek to learn and grow as we seek to guide and inspire others to learn and grow.

Friday

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