



## Parsha Perspectives

RABBI BINYOMIN ADLER

וישא אהרן את ידו אל העם ויברכם וירד  
מעשת החטאת והעלה והשלמים

*“And Aaron raised his hands towards the people and blessed them; then he descended from having performed the sin, elevation and peace offerings” (Leviticus 9:22)*

**T**he Tabernacle, the resting place for the Divine Presence in the wilderness, was ready to be erected. As High Priest, Aaron ascended the Altar and brought his own offerings and then those of the community, and then blessed the people. However, an uneasy atmosphere prevailed. The nation had been waiting anxiously for a heavenly fire to descend. This sign would demonstrate G-d’s love for them and show they had earned atonement for the sin of the Golden Calf.

When the fire did not descend, they complained to Moses. Understanding their pain, both brothers entered the Tabernacle and, prostrating themselves in submission, beseeched G-d to reveal His love to the Jewish people. As the Jewish people looked on, a fire eventually descended and consumed the sacrifices. Filled with boundless love and joy, the awe-struck populace fell to the ground and gave thanks to G-d.

By withholding His fire, G-d wished to demonstrate that sacrificial rites are not a magic formula. G-d desires only a genuine connection with His people; offerings without pure intentions cannot evoke Heavenly love. G-d is prepared to shower us with abundant good, but this can be brought about only through a combination of action and intent.

In 1930, Reb Chaim Elazar Shapiro (the Munkatcher Rebbe) visited Jerusalem to see the elderly kabbalist Rabbi Shlomo Eliezer Alfandri, known as the Saba Kadisha (the Holy Elder). The two men spent long

hours behind closed doors discussing communal matters. At one point, Rabbi Shapiro’s attendant overheard Rabbi Shapiro ask, “Please tell me, when will the Messiah finally arrive and redeem us from this long exile?” Rabbi Alfandri replied sadly, “Unfortunately there are people who are preventing the redemption.” There was silence. After a few moments the attendant heard muffled sobs—Rabbi Shapiro was crying! In a tear-choked voice, he asked, “Am I among those preventing the redemption?”

Despite Rabbi Shapiro’s sincere desire to witness the redemption, he feared he had somehow prevented its onset. The intensity of his emotions pierced the attendant’s heart, and compels Jews the world over to consider whether we are doing enough to break down heaven’s barriers and bring the redemption.

As Jews, we routinely turn to G-d to hasten the arrival of the Messiah and to meet our various needs. It can be discouraging, though, when our prayers seem to go unanswered. This week’s *parshah* offers a

valuable perspective: G-d did not deliver on the Jewish people’s expectations until Moses and Aaron stepped in, with their awareness that prayer is not an automatic ticket for getting a positive response from G-d.

Rather than become discouraged by G-d’s apparent inaction, Moses and Aaron refused to give up and infused their prayer with even greater devotion. While prayer is invaluable, despair can undermine its value; turning to G-d with optimistic perseverance, however, can make all the difference in the world.

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WORD of the WEEK  
by Rabbi Mordechai Becher  
גמל

**“These you shall not eat of those that chew their cud but do not have cloven hooves: the גמל—*gamal*” (Leviticus 11:4). *Gamal* is a camel, and indeed the English word camel, and the Latin and Greek *camelus* and *kamelos*, respectively, are all transliterations of the Hebrew *gamal*. It is interesting to note that the word *gamal* also means “to wean,” as in weaning a child from its mother’s milk, an allusion to the camel’s legendary capacity to go for long periods of time without drinking and with minimal nourishment (Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Genesis 12:16).**

# Table Talk FOR DISCUSSION AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

The *parshah* this week details the laws of kosher and non-kosher species. A kosher animal must have split hooves and chew its cud. Fish must have fins and scales. The Torah provides a list of non-kosher birds.

נ) In Genesis (7:8), the Torah refers to the non-kosher animals entering Noah's ark as "not pure." The Torah could have used the word "impure," which in Hebrew requires eight extra letters. Since every letter in the Torah is significant, the Talmud (*Pesachim 3a*) derives from this that a person should always speak in "clean" language." Yet here in *Parshas Shemini* the Torah repeatedly refers to non-kosher animals as "impure." Why might there be a different way of describing the animals here?

כ) The Torah lists the four non-kosher animals which have only one of the two signs required for kosher animals, chewing its cud and split hooves. When naming the animals, the Torah specifically mentions the sign the animal has, but not the sign it lacks. Yet it is the missing sign that is more important as to its status, rendering the animal non-kosher. Why, then, does the Torah list the sign that is present?

## HEY, I NEVER KNEW THAT! by Rabbi Mordechai Becher

Moses is described as seeking out or inquiring into a specific offering. The words "sought after" or "inquired" are the middle words of the entire Torah (as noted in *Kiddushin 30a*). This fact seems to imply a more global lesson about Moses seeking or inquiring. We believe that everything in the Torah has significance and is conveying a message to the reader, and this is no exception. An author once said, "Nothing is as irrelevant as the answer to a question that was not asked." Maybe this is the message of the middle words of the Torah. In order for the Torah to be interesting and relevant to us, we need to be seeking something, or asking something. If a person goes through life without any questions and without a desire to seek out truth, then the Torah will indeed be quite boring and irrelevant. A person, like Moses, who is a seeker and an inquirer will find the Torah interesting and always relevant (based on an essay by Rabbi Natan Lopez-Cardoza).

## A QUESTION FOR THE RABBIS by Rabbi Mordechai Becher

And every small animal (insect) that teems (breeds) on the land shall not be eaten by you" (Leviticus 11:41). A number of years ago some people became aware that New York City drinking water contained small crustaceans called copepods. Rabbis were asked whether this posed a kashrut problem based on the prohibition against the consumption of insects. One issue is whether the insects can be seen with the naked eye. If they are too small to be seen by the naked eye, then they are permitted according to Jewish law. However if they are large enough to be seen, but because of their coloring or transparency it is difficult to see them, then they are prohibited according to most authorities. If they can be seen, but are not recognizable as insects, then there appears to be no clear ruling, but since an insect is a Biblical prohibition, we would generally have to be stringent in a case of doubt. Many authorities concluded that one should only drink filtered water in NYC, although there are authorities who are lenient. Obviously one should consult their local rabbi for a ruling (*Minchat Asher, Vayikra, Section 16*).



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