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Rejecting Rationalization

Towards the beginning of the Parsha (9:7), Moshe tells Aharon to approach the mizbeach and effect atonement for himself and the nation. Rashi says that Moshe had to urge Aharon to perform the services of the Mishkan. Aharon was reluctant to do so because of his role in the sinful episode of the golden calf. Rashi continues to say that Moshe responded to Aharon by saying "Why are you ashamed? This is the reason why you were selected."

**Rabbi Noam
Horowitz**
Rebbe

What exactly was Moshe referring to in his reassurance to Aharon?

The human mind has an incredible capacity for producing any number of reasons to justify a given action. One of the many obstacles that often prevents people from making corrections towards personal growth is the inability to admit that they have done something wrong. This denial would be more easily overcome if we did not constantly reinforce it through rationalization. Often these justifications reinforce our denial to the point at which we are unable to perceive a wrong action as incorrect.

There are a number of ways in which the commentaries justify Aharon's participation in the golden calf. Some of them were: Aharon was trying to stall so that Moshe would arrive before anything worse happened; Aharon felt that if he convinced everyone to part with their gold that they would abandon the idea of a gold idol; if he resisted he would be killed and he did not want his death to be at the hands of bnei yisrael as this would render their sin unforgivable. *continued on page 3*

To Bee or Not to Bee?

Whether we enjoy it in our morning tea, relish it with an apple on Rosh Hashana, or savor it in a piece of cake at our Rabbi's Shabbos table, honey is a ubiquitous treat in the Jewish community. However, honey raises a serious Halakhic issue: it emanates from bees, non-kosher insects. How then could bee honey have been a treat enjoyed throughout Tanakh by great leaders such as Shimshon and Yehonasan?

**Elisha
Pearl**
Senior

The source for forbidding bees and their products comes from Parshas Shemini (11:20-23) where the Torah states that all flying insects are repulsive to the Jewish people. In Hilkhos Devarim HaYotzim, Shulkhan Arukh explains that as a rule, all products that come from an animal bear the kashrus status of that animal. For example, lion milk is forbidden because the lion is forbidden. It follows then, that honey should be forbidden as well.

Some might be puzzled by the question. The Torah explicitly states that Eretz Yisrael is an "Eretz zavas chalav u'd'vash- a land flowing with milk and honey." Why would we be promised honey if we could not partake of it? The simple answer is that the Torah refers to date honey, not bee honey. *continued on page 2*

דברי תורה מתלמידי מתיבתא רמב"ם

To Bee or Not to Bee? *continued*

To explain why we do eat honey, it is helpful to understand how honey is produced. Honeybees harvest nectar from flowers through a special biological “straw” and then store in a special sac apart from the stomach where it coagulates until it can be secreted in the beehive. Honey is only concentrated flower nectar in a beehive. Since the bee is merely a conduit for the honey and not its producer, honey is kosher. (Rambam Hilchos Ma’akhhalos Assuros 3:3)

Notwithstanding the scientific explanation, the Gemara (Bechoros 7b) endeavors to find a source in the Torah that permits honey. Rabi Yaakov finds that source in Parshas Shemini (11:21). The Pasuk states: “Akh es zeh tokhlu mikol sheretz ha’of- only this may you eat from the flying insect...” The superfluous word Akh-only teaches we may eat honey.

Although we have established that the Torah allows one to eat bee honey, a final problem remains. Honey is notoriously sticky; as such, numerous bee fragments are often included with consumer honey. (Yes, this is true in modern times as well. A glance at USDA guidelines will reveal that Grade A honey allows for a certain weight in insect particles. There was certainly a greater amount in the times of the Gemara when modern filtration techniques had not been invented!). The major Halakhic decisors seem unconcerned by this, though. Rambam and Shulkhan Arukh both rule unequivocally that honey is kosher. They write that bee fragments add a damaging taste to the honey and as such are null. This argument is contingent on the Halakhic principle of “Nosein Ta’am Lifgam- things that add detrimental taste are nullified in a mixture with permitted food” (see Shulkhan Arukh Yoreh De’ah Hilchos Ta’aruvos). Ran in Maseches Avodah Zarah vehemently disagrees with this logic. He explains that Nosein Ta’am Lifgam only applies as a leniency if the forbidden food spoils. Bee miscellanies are spoiled for human consumption while fresh, so there is no room for leniency. Rather, Ran suggests that bee legs are irrelevant as they are made of bone-like material (chitin) which the Mishna permits (Yadayim 4:7)

Ultimately, Shulkhan Arukh rules in Hilchos Devarim HaYotzim Min HaChai that honey, as a notable exception to the general rule, is completely permissible. So, this Shabbos, as you mix a spoonful of honey into your tea, think of Parshas Shemini and share these words of Torah.

The Enigma of Birchas Kohanim

**Gamliel M.
Hacohen**
Sophomore

Parshas Shemini discusses the Korbanos, and perhaps more importantly, the first Birkas Kohanim. Rashi and the Ramban raise an interesting explanation of the pasuk “Vayisa Aharon Es Yado El Ha’am Vayevrachem”, the verse that corresponds to Aharon blessing the Jewish people with the Priestly Blessing.

What is the Priestly Blessing? Rashi interprets it as: Yevarechecha “you shall bless”, Ya’air and you shall enlighten, and finally Yisah “lift up”. This is the formula that G-d gave the Kohanim to bless the Jewish people. The Ramban, however, notes a dissimilitude in this interpretation and has four interpretations which help elucidate what this pasuk is trying to teach.

The Ramban reasons: If this is where Birkas Kohanim is in the Torah, why then does G-d command that it must be recited in Sefer Bamidbar (6:23). Isn’t this out of order? Ramban resolves this difficulty by saying that both instances of brachos relate to the completion of the Mishkan and the first Korbanos.

Ramban’s second issue concerns the phrase Vayisa- what is its significance? Vayisa represents a physical action, and we have proof of this from a parallel language by Shlomo Hamelech where he too blessed Bnei Yisrael and raised his hands in the air.

A third reason the Ramban offers is the Beraisa of Parshat Miloim in Toras Kohanim. It describes the word Vayevrachem as a “closed” bracha. Meaning that the actual words in the beracha are not specified. This is why the Torah recapitulates in Sefer Bamidbar: to specify the exact words the Kohanim used for generations.

Finally, the Ramban expounds on this last point by resolving all opinions: the Vayevrachem in this instance is obscure. We do not know what words Aharaon used in his blessing, but he did use the hand motion Vayisa; the exact words for the future blessing of Bnei Yisrael by the Kohanim is specified in Bamidbar for Aharon and all his descendants.

Rejecting Rationalization *continued*

Aharon could have used any one of these rationalizations, as well as others, to explain his actions, yet he chose not to do so. Aharon did not allow these justifications to alleviate his guilt. Instead, he decided to face the fact that what he did must be considered a sin, and he held himself culpable for the act.

This was the very greatness of Aharon to which Moshe was referring. Aharon had ample opportunity to extricate himself from the disgrace of complicity, but he instead chose to accept responsibility for his actions. He was reluctant to perform the avodah because he understood his personal fault regarding the golden calf and therefore felt unworthy. Moshe, however, told him that he had been selected as Kohen Gadol precisely because he rejected all the rationalizations that could have absolved him in the public eye. That very self-honesty and lack of denial is the trait necessary for the Kohen Gadol- the person who leads others in their process of atonement.

Insight Unseen

The fifth aliya in this week's Parsha holds some of the most fundamental concepts and values of Judaism. In perhaps the four most overlooked pesukim in this week's parsha, Aharon and his sons apparently defy Moshe's command from Hashem to eat the korban HaChodesh due to their alternate interpretation of Hashem's command. Moshe angrily (vayiktzof) questions Aharon's sons, and when met with Aharon's reply, Moshe suddenly retracts and approves. An immediate question we must ask is, when did Aharon get involved in this? Wasn't Moshe talking to Elazar and Isamar? Also, we know the Torah refrains from wasting words and only repeats a word when it is trying to emphasize something. If that is the case, why did the Torah use the repetitive phrase of *Darosh Darash Moshe*, - "expound did Moshe expound" when it was relating Moshe's command. What was the Torah trying to emphasize?

Rashi explains that Aharon was present during the entire dispute, however out of respect for his older brother, Moshe directed his chastisement at Elazar and Isamar who acted with their father. The fact that Aharon was present also explains why he responded to Moshe and not his two sons. Rashi explains that out of deference to their father, Elazar and Isamar did not respond to Moshe and they remained silent as Aharon replied. According to Medrash Vayikra Rabba, Moshe was actually mistaken in becoming angry at Elazar and Isamar. Although it is important to be passionate about Avodat Hashem, one must remember to keep his passion in check and take the utmost care to deal with his fellow Jew with the highest level of respect.

This short sequence also is, as noted by Rav Tzadok Hacohen, the source in the Torah for human ability to use reason and logic to expound divine laws and their applications from Hashem's commands. This is therefore the perfect place for the Torah to include the emphatic phrase of "Darosh Darash." As the Degel Machane Ephraim points out, these words are the middle two words of the Chamishei Chumshei Torah. The stress on Darosh is emphasizing the requirement of every Jew to truly analyze the Torah using the methods of our Sages to arrive at the truth. Allowing room for interpretation obviously leads to machlokes, but that is not viewed as a problem rather a necessary part of the learning process.

The message behind the dispute between Moshe and Aharon is very simple yet insightful. It is fundamental that a machlokes never be for anything less than the sake of heaven and it is imperative that, despite any disagreements, we must maintain the utmost respect for all our peers as we thoroughly expound the Torah in pursuit of truth.

**Azariah
Hacohen**
Senior

Passionate About Being Dispassionate

Parshas Shemini recounts the unfortunate incident of Nadav and Avihu, Aharon Hacohen's sons, and the Aish Zar, or alien fire, they brought to the Mishkan. They died as a result of the fire sent by Hashem to punish them for this act. The pasuk states "Vayidom Aharon," Aharon was silent after this incident.

**Benjamin
Akhavan**
Sophomore

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Passionate About Being Dispassionate *continued*

The Rashbam interprets this statement to mean that Aharon did not mourn. The Ramban explains that Aharon was originally mourning, but subsequently stopped. The Sforno explains that he comforted himself silently saying that the death of his sons was a Kiddush Hashem. All the meforshim agree that Aharon stopped mourning and was silent.

Rashi comments on the pasuk, stating that Aharon was rewarded for this lack of speech or reaction. He states that Aharon's reward was that the halachos of intoxication of wine were told specifically to Aharon. The Sifsei Chachamim explains that normally Hashem would teach Moshe the halachos, who in turn would teach Aharon the halachos. In this case, Aharon was addressed by Hashem and Moshe had the privilege of learning these halachos as a bystander.

A question can be raised on Aharon's behavior: why did he not express any sense of acceptance or gratitude out loud? Why was he rewarded for being silent when it is a greater thing to pleasantly accept misfortunes that befall a person? After all, we learn regarding Nachum Ish Gamzu, that Gam zu letovah that one must say on every untoward occurrence, "this too is for the best." Similarly, Rabbi Akiva used to say that everything Hashem does is for the best.

The answer lies within the psychological interpretation of the situation. When someone says "this is for the best," it is evident that he is affirming that there was a problem or misfortune and that it did cause a tribulation for himself. Only as soon as that person steps back for a moment and internalizes the situation can he realize it is for the best. On the other hand there is a person who automatically realizes that this situation is for the best. This person is instinctively ready to accept any situation. He is on a higher level than a person that must step back to see the full picture.

Aharon did not need to internalize the message that the situation he had to deal with was for the best. He was silent because he knew that everything that Hashem does has a purpose and is beneficial. This acceptance of Hashem's will is an important role in our lives, as we may have to deal with many problems during our day. The ability to realize that whatever happens is for the best is an ability that one may need to work on to achieve, but it is a quality that is for the best.

After witnessing a Jewish student thrown through a window by Nazi sympathizing students in Vienna in 1929, Mordecai Hacohen was inspired by Zeev Jabotinsky and joined the Betar Youth Movement to prepare him for championing Jewish rights and causes. In Betar, he learned Self Defense, Ivrit and Jewish History. As a teenager after the Anschluss, he risked his freedom to deliver Pesach food to Jews rounded up and imprisoned by the Nazis—never sure they would let him leave the prisons.

Mordecai Hacohen enlisted in the clandestine Af-Al-Pi movement to bring Jews by boats to Eretz Yisrael. He personally led a convoy arriving there Erev Yom Kippur 1938. Mordecai attended Hebrew U, joined the Irgun and established a program to train civil servants for the then future free Jewish State. He later played a key role in setting up Israel's Foreign Ministry. Mordecai Hacohen represented Israel in the UN and wrote his Doctorate envisioning a canal linking the Mediterranean to the Dead Sea to provide desalinated water to irrigate the Negev and hydroelectric power for the country. He went on to establish a network of Jewish schools in Moslem countries and founded the Laniado Hospital in Israel.

After starting his family in New York, he continued advocating for a strong Israel and speaking out against enemies of the Jewish people.

*He was very proud of his grandchildren at Rambam Mesivta
Azariah and Gamliel Hacohen.*

ת.ר.צ.ב.ה.