

The Weekly 'Hi All' by Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

SH'MINI 5783

Tragedy

This past Pesach has tragically been marked with terrorist attacks that have killed innocents. At times like this, we are at a loss to express our grief and anger. The one thought, however, that comes to mind is a comment by Ramban (10:4) in this week's Parsha. When Aharon's two sons, Nadav and Avihu, die, the Torah tells us of Aharon's reaction. VA'YIDOM AHARON, and Aaron was silent." Most commentaries understand his response to be one of stoic acceptance in the face of Gd's will. But Ramban cannot accept this. A father loses two sons. How can he be emotionless? And so, the Ramban says that Aharon cried profusely. He was not quiet, he wept loudly, and then ... he was silent.

There is a lesson here. We experience a tragedy. It is painful and inexplicable. And we cry. How can we not! We hurt for the grieving survivors and the painfully wounded, and we need to show it. And then an indomitable spirit kicks in. We rise and move forward. We will not be defeated in the face of demonic evil. We believe, in the words of the Psalmist (20:9-10), "They drop to their knees and fall, but we arise and are strengthened.

HaShem will save us; may the King answer us (on this day) that we call upon Him." V'CHEIN Y'HI RATZON.

Kashrut

There is a story told about the late great Lubliner Rav, Rav Meir Shapiro zt"l, who visited the US in the 1920s on a fund-raising mission. Upon his return to Poland, he made the following sharp observation about the American Jewish community. "American Jewry has learned to make Kiddush; it has not yet learned how to make Havdala (the ability to distinguish between what is holy and profane)."

The Parsha of Sh'mini discusses the laws of kashrut. Chapter 11 concludes with the following broad reason for the kashrut regulations. "[So that there be] A distinction (L'HAVDIL) between the impure and the pure ..." While the rationale of kashrut is beyond our understanding - it is, after all, denominated as a CHOK - the Torah does in fact see in these dietary laws a discipline which is both central and fundamental to what it means to be human.

In the act of eating, we most resemble the beast. The animal neither can nor wants to limit or restrict its consumption of food. The urge to eat is compulsive and necessary. The message of kashrut is that man is more than animal. He can and must demonstrate his humanitas

by bounding his biological push to consume with both an ethic (food that is stolen is forbidden) and a ritual (you simply cannot eat anything you want). When we behave in such a fashion, when we can make such distinctions (L'HAVDIL), we thereby elevate ourselves to a level where we more resemble G-d than the brute.

Indeed, it's not just kashrut. The dietary laws are emblematic of how we are meant to live our lives as human beings, not as human beasts. We are enjoined to look upon these restrictions on our food consumption as a primary "training ground" of sorts. That is, if we can get it right in disciplining man's most ubiquitous and powerful of physical urges, we ought to be able to "distinguish between every impure and pure" phenomenon in our lives and then act accordingly with the dignity of restraint and with the holiness inherent in our being a mortal who, notwithstanding our physicality, has been created in Gd's image.

This is what the Lubliner Rav lamented after observing an overly indulgent American Jewry. We can only hope that matters have changed.

Siblings

There is a touching and poignant moment in the Parsha - often overlooked - that deserves to be spotlighted.

The Parsha of Sh'mini opens with the dedication of the Mishkan in the desert. It was the eighth day of the ceremonies and at the conclusion of the proceedings, the People eagerly anticipated G-d's response. However, when Aharon saw that even after all the sacrifices had been brought and the various rituals had been performed to inaugurate the Mishkan, HaShem had still not responded, he was convinced it was his fault because of his complicity in the Golden Calf debacle. Rashi (9:23) quotes the Midrash which tells us that Aharon turned to his brother, Moshe, and said: "I entered the Divine service because you so requested. Now, I am shamed because G-d has still not descended."

At this point, Moshe does two things, both of which were completely discretionary, and in their performance demonstrated Moshe's humility and his love for his brother. First, Moshe immediately takes Aharon with him into the Ohel Moed and they both pray for HaShem's mercy. Even though, it was only Aharon who had to answer for the sin of the Golden Calf, Moshe joins him in prayer. It was as if Moshe - by this incredible gesture - was telegraphing G-d that he and his brother were one.

And then, Moshe turns to the People who had been wondering why G-d had failed to respond to the inaugural events, and with sublime modesty

says, "Indeed, the glory of HaShem will appear, and do you know why? Because of Aharon, my brother. You see, he is worthier and more important than I, for through his offerings and service, the Shechina will rest among you, and you will know that HaShem has chosen him."

It is extremely important that we seriously reflect upon this Biblical event. How can we not be deeply moved, even inspired by the astonishing chizuk one brother can give to his sibling. If we are all ACHEINU KOL BEIT YISRA'EL - brothers, then we have it within us to display the compassion and love of a Moshe to his brother. Perhaps with this message, we can all come together, notwithstanding our disagreements, and recognize and remember that, in the end, as BANIM ATEM LASHEM ELOKEICHEM, children of HaShem" (D'varim 14:1), we are all part of one special family! 🙌