

# OHRNET

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## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### Vayikra

### An Insulting Ant

*“He shall split it (the fowl) – with its feathers.” (1:17)*

**W**hen people feel insulted they sometimes use extreme words to describe their insult: “They put a knife in my heart.”

Really? A word is no more than a puff of air with a feeble sound wave attached to it. And yet sometimes it feels like a knife in our heart.

How does a puff of air turn into a knife?

The answer is that it is the recipients of these insults who are the ones who turn the insulting words of others into a knife. Few things are as precious to us as our self-esteem. And yet for most of us, our sense of value comes from others. If other people ask our advice, we feel smart. If they seek our company, we feel likeable. If they criticize us, we feel demeaned. If they reject us, we worry that perhaps we are unworthy. Insulting words turn into knives because we allow those words to define us.

Imagine if one day an ant crawls across your car’s windshield, and as he passes you he turns his head and says: “Loser.” After you get over the shock of a talking ant, I don’t think this experience would make much of a dent in your self-esteem. Why would I let an ant define who I am?

But, nevertheless, humans can be deeply sensitive.

In this week’s public reading, the Torah mandates that an offering of a fowl should be burned together with all of its feathers, even though few things are as repugnant as the smell of burning feathers. Why should this be? Usually, an offering of fowl was brought by a poor person, someone who could not afford anything more. Better the odor of burning feathers than allowing the poor person to be embarrassed by the skinny, almost non-existent size of the bird without its feathers.

- Sources: Rashi and an idea from Mr. Michael Rothschild

“משנכנס אדר  
מרבין בשמחה”

# PARSHA INSIGHTS

Tzav

## Arnold Toynbee's Philo-Semitism?

*"And he (the kohen) should separate the ash..." (6:3)*

**A**rnold Toynbee (1889-1975) was an English historian who is widely quoted as calling the Jews "the fossils of history." What Toynbee actually meant by this is not clear. It does not take a philosopher of history to see that if we are "fossils," we are still extremely sprightly and we are doing, as Mark Twain wrote, a lot better than the ancient Greeks, ancient Romans, Parthians and many other nations who no longer exist in their original form, if at all.

In a lecture to the British section of the World Jewish Congress delivered in 1959 and entitled "*Is There a Jewish Future in the Diaspora?*" it seems that Toynbee either clarified or revised his views by saying: "The future of Judaism is to convert the world. It is an extraordinary thing that twice in history the Jews have allowed outsiders to run away with their religion, and spread it over the world. Does not the real future of the Jews and Judaism lie in spreading Judaism, in its authentic form, over the whole world?"

Jacob Agus wrote in "Commentary" (September 1961) "Toynbee's call for Jews to bring masses of converts to 'the religion of Deutero-Isaiah.' ... He repeatedly expressed fear that the State of Israel, particularly in its present precarious position, will bring about a complete substitution of Jewish nationalism for Jewish religious purpose. He believes that the physical interests of Anglo-American Jewry call for a maximum of concentration upon the religious content of Judaism and a reduction of its nationalistic entanglements to the vanishing point."

*"And he (the kohen) should separate the ash..."*

Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch's commentary on the taking of ash in the service of Hashem in the Beit Hamikdash emphasizes a national declaration that the Jewish People will continue to serve Hashem as we did yesterday, according to the dictates of His will, and not according to our own desire for parity and national identity among the nations of the world.

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# Q & A - VAYIKRA

## Questions

1. Who does the word "eilav" in verse 1:1 exclude?
2. Name all the types of animals and birds mentioned in this week's Parsha.
3. What two types of sin does an olah atone for?
4. Where was the olah slaughtered?
5. What procedure of an animal-offering can a non-kohen perform?
6. Besides the fire the kohanim bring on the altar, where else did the fire come from?
7. At what stage of development are torim (turtledoves) and bnei yona (young pigeons) unfit as offerings?
8. What is melika?
9. Why are animal innards offered on the altar, while bird innards are not?
10. Why does the Torah describe both the animal and bird offerings as a "satisfying aroma"?
11. Why is the term "nefesh" used regarding the flour offering?
12. Which part of the free-will mincha offering is burned on the altar?
13. The Torah forbids bringing honey with the mincha. What is meant by "honey"?
14. When does the Torah permit bringing a leavened bread offering?
15. Concerning shelamim, why does the Torah teach about sheep and goats separately?
16. For most offerings the kohen may use a service vessel to apply the blood on the mizbe'ach. For which korban may he apply the blood using only his finger?
17. Who is obligated to bring a chatat?
18. Where were the remains of the bull burned while in the wilderness? Where were they burned during the time of the Beit Hamikdash?
19. What two things does a voluntary mincha have that a minchat chatat lacks?
20. What is the minimum value of a korban asham?

## Answers

1. 1:1 - Aharon.
2. 1:2,14, 3:12 - Cattle, sheep, goats, turtledoves (torim), and doves (bnei yona).
3. 1:4 - Neglecting a positive command, and violating a negative command which is rectified by a positive command.
4. 1:5 - In the Mishkan Courtyard (azarah).
5. 1:5 - Ritual slaughter.
6. 1:7 - It descended from Heaven.
7. 1:14 - When their plumage turns golden. At that stage, bnei yona are too old and torim are too young.
8. 1:15 - Slaughtering a bird from the back of the neck using one's fingernail.
9. 1:16 - An animal's food is provided by its owner, so its innards are "kosher." Birds, however, eat food that they scavenge, so their innards are tainted with "theft."
10. 1:17 - To indicate that the size of the offering is irrelevant, provided your heart is directed toward G-d.
11. 2:1 - Usually, it is a poor person who brings a flour offering. Therefore, G-d regards it as if he had offered his nefesh (soul).
12. 2:1 - The kometz (fistful).
13. 2:11 - Any sweet fruit derivative.
14. 2:12 - On Shavuot.
15. 3:7 - Because they differ regarding the alya (fat tail). The lamb's alya is burned on the altar but the goat's is not.
16. 3:8 - The chatat.
17. 4:2 - One who accidentally transgresses a negative commandment whose willing violation carries the karet (excision) penalty.
18. 4:12 -
  - a. Outside the three camps.
  - b. Outside Jerusalem.
19. 5:11 - Levona and oil.
20. 5:15 - Two shekalim.

# Q & A - TZAV

## Questions

1. What separated the kohen's skin from the priestly garments?
2. How often were the ashes removed from upon the mizbe'ach? How often were they removed from next to the mizbe'ach?
3. If someone extinguishes the fire on the mizbe'ach, how many Torah violations has he transgressed?
4. The portion of a flour-offering offered on the mizbe'ach may not be chametz. But is the kohen's portion allowed to be chametz?
5. When a kohen is inaugurated, what offering must he bring?
6. What three baking processes were used to prepare the korban of Aharon and his sons?
7. What is the difference between a minchat kohen and a minchat Yisrael?
8. When is a kohen disqualified from eating from a chatat?
9. What is the difference between a copper and earthenware vessel regarding removing absorbed tastes?
10. Can an animal dedicated as an asham be replaced with another animal?
11. How does an asham differ from all other korbanot?
12. Unlike all other korbanot, what part of the ram or sheep may be placed on the mizbe'ach?
13. What three types of kohanim may not eat from the asham?
14. In which four instances is a korban todah brought?
15. Until when may a todah be eaten according to the Torah? Until when according to Rabbinic decree?
16. How does a korban become pigul?
17. Who may eat from a shelamim?
18. What miracle happened at the entrance of the Ohel Moed?
19. Other than Yom Kippur, what other service requires that the kohen separate from his family?
20. What are the 5 categories of korbanot listed in this Parsha?

## Answers

1. 6:3 - Nothing.
2. 6:4 -
  - a) Every day.
  - b) Whenever there was a lot.
3. 6:6 - Two.
4. 6:10 - No.
5. 6:13 - A korban mincha ~ A tenth part of an ephah of flour.
6. 6:14 - Boiling, baking in an oven and frying in a pan.
7. 6:15 - The minchat kohen is burnt completely. Only a handful of the minchat Yisrael is burnt, and the remainder is eaten by the kohanim.
8. 6:19 - If he is tamei (spiritually impure) at the time of the sprinkling of the blood.
9. 6:21 - One can remove an absorbed taste from a copper vessel by scouring and rinsing, whereas such a taste can never be removed from an earthenware vessel.
10. 7:1 - No.
11. 7:3 - It can only be brought from a ram or sheep.
12. 7:3 - The tail.
13. 7:7 - A t'vul yom (a tamei kohen who immersed in a mikveh yet awaits sunset to become tahor); a mechusar kipurim (a tamei person who has gone to the mikveh but has yet to bring his required offering); an oman (a mourner prior to the burial of the deceased).
14. 7:12 - Upon safe arrival from an ocean voyage; upon safe arrival from a desert journey; upon being freed from prison; upon recovering from illness.
15. 7:15 - a) Until morning b) Until midnight
16. 7:18 - The person slaughters the animal with the intention that it be eaten after the prescribed time.
17. 7:19 - Any uncontaminated person (not only the owner).
18. 8:3 - The entire nation was able to fit in this very small area.
19. 8:34 - The burning of the parah aduma (red heifer).
20. Olah (6:2); mincha (6:7); chatat (6:18); asham (7:1); shelamim (7:11)

# For the younger ones

## Questions

1. How many countries did Achashverosh rule over?
2. How many days did the first feast last?
3. What are the names of Achashverosh's two servants who tried to kill him?
4. How did Haman choose the date that he did for killing the Jews?
5. How many people did Esther invite to her parties?
6. Where did Mordechai live after Haman was hung by Achashverosh?

## Answers

1. 127 (1:1)
2. 180 (1:4)
3. Bigtan and Teresh (2:21)
4. With a lottery (3:7)
5. Two: Achashverosh and Haman (5:4 & 5:8)
6. In Haman's house (8:2)

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# For the 'older' ones (with a sense of humor)

*(A Working Knowledge of Hebrew and a Copy of Megillat Esther Required!)*

## Questions

1. How many beds did Achashverosh have?
2. How many mothers did Vashti have?
3. What position did Mordechai play in the Shushan Soccer Team?
4. What job did Haman have in the Shushan Dairy Company?
5. How old was Achashverosh when Haman came to power?
6. What did Haman think was strange about Esther's face?

## Answers

1. 6 (1:6)
2. Two (1:9)
3. Goalkeeper (2:21)
4. He made butter (3:5)
5. 12 (3:7)
6. She had no nose. (5:12)

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# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

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by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

## Words for Wine (Part 1)

In this special two-part essay in honor of Purim we get into the holiday spirit by discussing the various Hebrew words for Achashverosh's favorite alcoholic beverage – wine. In Part 1 we focus on the Hebrew words *yayin* and *tirosh*, attempting to differentiate between the two and tracing their etymologies to their most rudimentary roots. In Part 2 we visit a whole bevy of words for “wine,” such as *chamar*, *shechar*, *sava*, *assis*, and *smadar*, trying to pinpoint their exact meanings and etymologies.

The word *yayin* (or *yayn* in the construct form) is, by far, the most popular word in Biblical Hebrew for “wine.” This word in its various forms appears more than 140 times throughout the Bible. By contrast, the word *tirosh* appears less than 40 times in the Bible. In most instances, *tirosh* is coupled with the word *dagan* (“grain”) and appears in an agricultural context. According to archeologists, the idolaters of ancient Canaan/Ugarit deified the concept of wine and actually named their wine-god Tirosh. There is even an entry devoted to discussion of this deity in the scholarly work *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*.

Although some Bible scholars claim that *tirosh* is an archaic Hebrew word for “wine” that was later replaced with the more modern word *yayin* in the Bible, this explanation does not really explain the difference between the two terms and why the newer term did not just completely supersede the older term. As an aside, *Machberet Menachem* defines *yayin* as *tirosh*, but Rabbi Yosef Kimchi (1105-1170) in *Sefer HaGalui* takes umbrage with this definition by declaring that nobody ever had any question as to what *yayin* meant. He further notes that Menachem using the word *tirosh* to define *yayin* does not add to one's understanding, and is incorrect. This suggests that he understood that these two terms are not perfect synonyms. In fact, the Talmud (*Yoma* 76b) already notes the existence of two Hebrew words for “wine” and

explains that each word represents a different aspect of the drink.

First, the Talmud explains that the word *yayin* alludes to the fact that wine brings *yelalah* (“wailing,” “lamenting”) to the world. Rashi clarifies that this refers to the reality that wine often leads to promiscuity, which brings punishment to the world. Rashi also notes that the word *yayin* is related to the phrase *ta'aniyah v'anayah*, meaning “wailing and moaning” (Isa. 29:2, Lam. 2:5), which is an expression of mourning.

Second, the Talmud exegetically expounds on the word *tirosh* as relating to the Hebrew words *rosh* (“head”) and *rash* (“pauper”), noting that one who merits (to drink wine in moderation, as Rashi comments) becomes a “head” (because wine has the potential to broaden his intellectual abilities), but one who does not merit becomes a “pauper.” Rabbeinu Elyakim seems to explain that this refers to a person becoming addicted to wine and spending all his money in pursuit of it. However, Rabbi Yaakov Emden (1697-1776) explains that this means that a person's body will physically become weak and “poor” from overdrinking.

Let's unpack some of the ideas presented in this Talmudic passage. The negative connotation of the word *yayin* is also seen in the connection between the word *yayin* and *ona'ah*, which essentially means “to profit by ripping somebody off” (see Rashi to Jer. 46:16 and Mahari Kara there). Despite the fact that earlier grammarians (like Menachem Ibn Saruk, Yonah Ibn Janach, and the Radak) understand *yayin* to represent a trilateral root of its own (YOD-YOD-NUN), Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740-1814) sees both *yayin* and *ona'ah* as derivatives of the biliteral root YOD-NUN (“trickery” or “deception”). Both words relate back to this core meaning, because *ona'ah* uses trickery and deceit to make a profit off of someone else, while wine deceives the drinker by

tasting sweet at the onset, but later betraying him by causing inebriation and taking away his capacity to think properly. Other words that Rabbi Pappenheim sees as derived from this root include *yaven* (“quicksand,” which gives off the impression of being dry land that one can tread upon, but actually drowns a person if he attempts to do so) and *yonah* (“dove,” because this bird is especially naïve and gullible, and so it is susceptible to trickery).

What is fascinating is that Rabbi Pappenheim’s theory about the etymology of *yayin* is actually supported by the Samaria Ostrakon (discovered by archeologists in the early 20th century) and other ancient texts found by archeologists. In those epigraphical specimens, the Hebrew word *yayin* is spelled with one YOD (although we cannot know for sure if it was pronounced *yayin* with the initial diphthong that we are familiar). This gives some support to the notion that the root of the *yayin* is indeed YOD-NUN, not YOD-YOD-NUN.

Dr. Edward Yechezkel Kutscher (1909-1971) theorized that the original form of *yayin* was actually spelled with an initial VAV (making it *vayin*), but as often happens when VAV is the first letter of a *shoresh*, it later turned into a YOD. Kutscher further notes that although he is of the opinion that similarities between Indo-European words and Semitic words are typically coincidental, in this case, he sees a clear link between the Hebrew *yayin* and its counterparts in various Indo-European languages (*woinos/oinos* in Greek, *vinum* in Latin, *wein* in Germanic, and *vino* in Slavic), and ultimately the very word *wine* in English (as well as its cognates like *vine*, *vinegar*, *vintage*, and *oenology*). Nevertheless, the *Oxford English Dictionary* (s.v. *wine*) remains ambivalent about the Hebraic origins of the English word *wine*, noting simply “the nature of the connection... is disputed.”

As mentioned above, the Talmud connects the word *tirosh* to the word *rosh*. Midrash Sechel Tov (to Gen. 27:28) offers the same exegetical connection, but explains it differently, arguing that “wine” is first and foremost (*rosh*, literally, “the head”) among all remedies, as the Talmud (*Bava Batra* 58b) says: “First among all medicines, I am wine. In a place where there is no wine, people require [other] medicines.”

Rabbi Pappenheim also connects *tirosh* to *rosh*, explaining that both words derive from the biliteral root REISH-SHIN, whose core meaning is “head,” but can be expanded to anything that is considered foremost in terms of value, importance or chronology. Based on this, he connects *tirosh* to *rosh* in the sense of “beginning” (think: *b’reishet*) and explains that *tirosh* specifically denotes “new” wine in its early stages, while it still remains sweet and rather non-intoxicating.

Rabbi Pappenheim’s explanation of the etymology of *tirosh* reflects an earlier tradition that identifies *yayin* as “old wine” and *tirosh* as “new wine” (see Nachmanides to Deut. 14:22, Radak in *Sefer HaShorashim*, and *Tosafot Rid* to Yoma 76b). In fact, Rashi (to Yoma 76b, *Menachot* 86b) also follows this approach by explaining that wine is called *yayin* only forty days after beginning production, while until then it is called *tirosh*. Rabbi Moshe Ibn Ezra (1055-1138) writes that while a majority of the time *tirosh* refers to “new wine,” it can sometimes refer to the very grapes from which wine is produced (that is, the fruit of the wine press).

In line with the commentators cited above, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Deut. 32:14) also explains *tirosh* as freshly-squeezed grape juice – before the wine had undergone fermentation. He also connects the Biblical phrase “the blood of grapes” (*dam anavim* in Deut. 32:14) to this stage of wine production. Rabbi Dr. Yehuda Felix (1921-2004) similarly concludes that the Biblical term *tirosh* actually refers to “grape juice” that had yet to ferment and become wine.

The prophet Hoshea criticizes the Jews of the Kingdom of Israel for their constant engagement in *zenut* (“promiscuousness”), *yayin*, and *tirosh* (Hoshea 4:11). In line with the above, Rabbi Yosef Kara (there) explains that Hosea refers to their overindulgence in immoral permissiveness, as well as in both “old wine” (*yayin*) and “new wine” (*tirosh*). Radak (there) adds that excessive “new wine” is especially sinful and deleterious because it makes a person drunk even faster than aged wine.

The Vilna Gaon (to Hoshea 4:11) offers an alternate reading of Hoshea’s prophecy, shedding light on another way of differentiating between *yayin* and *tirosh*. He explains that the crux of Hosea’s criticism was that the Jews of the Northern

Kingdom were engaged in sin during all hours of the day – at night, they busied themselves with immorality; in the morning, they drank regular wine (*yayin*); and in the afternoon, they drank the sweet wine that was customarily drunk after lunch (*tirosh*). According to this, the difference between *yayin* and *tirosh* is not in the wine’s age, but in its level of sweetness and the time of day when it was typically drunk.

Although in Biblical Hebrew the word *tirosh* was an alternate term for “wine,” in Rabbinic times, it evolved in popular parlance to refer to any sort of “sweet” and “juicy” product, but specifically *not* wine (Babylonian Talmud *Yoma* 76b and Jerusalem Talmud *Nedarim* 7:1). However, this usage is no longer in vogue (see responsa *Divrei Malkiel* vol. 6:18).

The trilateralist Hebrew lexicographers, like Yonah Ibn Janach and the Radak (in their respective *Sefer HaShorashim* works), classify the word *tirosh* as a derivative of the trilateral root YOD-REISH-SHIN (“inherit,” “bequest,” “conquer”), but concede that this word is unrelated to the core meaning of that root. Among the biliteralists, I have come across two approaches: Menachem Ibn Saruk totally ignores the word *tirosh* and does not provide its etymological root in his *Machberet Menachem* (although, as mentioned above, he uses the word *tirosh* to define *yayin*). Rabbi Pappenheim, as previously noted, traces this word to the biliteral REISH-SHIN, while he also traces YOD-REISH-SHIN to that biliteral root, explaining that whoever “inherits” an estate becomes its “head.”

Rabbi Yehuda Aryeh of Carpentras in *Ohalei Yehuda* offers two original etymologies for the word *tirosh*. First, he proposes understanding the word as comprised of the roots YOD-VAV-REISH (“shoot, throw”) and ALEPH-SHIN (“fire”), explaining that the way alcohol affects a person’s senses is related to the elemental power of fire, as if drinking wine causes a fire to burn within a person. Second, he suggests viewing the root of *tirosh* as SHIN-YOD-

REISH (“song”) by way of the metathesis, explaining that this word alludes to wine’s tendency to arouse people to sing when under the influence.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (to Gen. 9:20, 21:10, Ex. 15:9) also offers a novel explanation of *yayin* and *tirosh*, noting that these terms focus on the relationship between a grape and the juice/wine within it. Like the grammarians mentioned above, Rabbi Hirsch sees *tirosh* as derived from YOD-REISH-SHIN. He explains that this etymology refers to the way that the wine had been “driven out” by force from the grape wherein it originally rested. This is similar to the act of inheriting/conquering a land, by which one might displace the previous inhabitants by driving them out through force. In fact, Rabbi Hirsch sees YOD-REISH-SHIN as related to GIMMEL-REISH-SHIN (“chasing/sending away”) via the interchangeability of YOD and GIMMEL.

Similarly, Rabbi Hirsch sees the word *yayin* as derived from the trilateral root YOD-NUN-HEY (“trickery,” “deception,” or “profiting by ripping somebody off,” as discussed above). When a person separates the grape from its juice, that person is – from the grape’s perspective – unfairly profiting by using underhanded tactics (like pressing the grape) to force the grape into giving away what rightfully belongs to the grape.

Rabbi Aharon Marcus (1843-1916) similarly sees *yayin* as derived from that trilateral root, and adds that the name *Yavan* (“Ionia,” i.e., Greece) also derives from this root because, he alleges, the ancient Greeks were known as plunderers, thieves and plagiarists. Rabbi Marcus even goes as far as to claim that everything in ancient Greek poetry, mythology and philosophy was either stolen from other nations or is wholly untrue and imaginary.

*To be continued...*

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# PARSHA OVERVIEW

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## Vayikra

The Book of Vayikra (Leviticus), also known as *Torat Kohanim* – the Laws of the Priests – deals largely with the *korbanot* (offerings) brought in the Mishkan (Tent of Meeting).

The first group of offerings is called a *korban olah*, a burnt-offering. The animal is brought to the Mishkan's entrance. For cattle, the person bringing the offering sets his hands on the animal. Afterwards, it is slaughtered, and the *kohen* sprinkles its blood on the Altar. The animal is skinned and cut into pieces. The pieces are arranged, washed and burned on the Altar.

A similar process is described involving burnt-offerings of other animals and birds. The various meal-offerings are described. Part of the meal-offering is burned on the Altar, and the remaining part is eaten by the *kohanim*. Mixing leaven or

honey into the offerings is prohibited. The peace-offering, part of which is burned on the Altar and part eaten, can be from cattle, sheep or goats.

The Torah prohibits eating blood or *chelev* (certain fats in animals). The offerings that atone for inadvertent sins committed by the *Kohen Gadol*, by the entire community, by the Prince and by the average citizen, are detailed. Laws of the guilt-offering, which atones for certain verbal transgressions and for transgressing laws of ritual purity, are listed. The meal-offering for those who cannot afford the normal guilt-offering – the offering to atone for misusing sanctified property, laws of the "questionable guilt" offering, and offerings for dishonesty – are detailed.

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# PARSHA OVERVIEW

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## Tzav

The Torah addresses Aharon and his sons to teach them additional laws relating to their service. The ashes of the *korban olah* – the offering burned on the Altar throughout the night – are to be removed from the area by the *kohen* after he changes his special linen clothing. The *olah* is brought by someone who forgot to perform a positive commandment of the Torah. The *kohen* retains the skin. The fire on the Altar must be kept constantly ablaze. The *korban mincha* is a meal-offering of flour, oil and spices. A handful is burned on the Altar and a *kohen* eats the remainder before it becomes leaven. The Torah portion describes the special *korbanot* to be offered by the *Kohen Gadol* each day and by Aharon's sons and future descendants on the day of their inauguration. The *chatat*, the *korban* brought after

certain accidental transgressions, is described, as are the laws of slaughtering and sprinkling the blood of the *asham* guilt-*korban*. The details of *shelamim*, various peace *korbanot*, are described, as well as the prohibition against leaving uneaten until morning the remains of the *todah*, the thanksgiving offering. All sacrifices must be burned after they may no longer be eaten. No sacrifice may be eaten if it was slaughtered with the intention of eating it too late. Once they have become ritually impure, *korbanot* may not be eaten and should be burned. One may not eat a *korban* when he is ritually impure. Blood and *chelev* (certain animal fats) are prohibited to be eaten. Aharon and his sons are granted the breast and shank of every *korban shelamim*. The inauguration ceremony for Aharon, his sons, the Mishkan and all of its vessels is detailed.

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# COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

## THE AMIDAH (PART 8) – BLESSING OF REPENTANCE

*“Prayer is not a miracle. It is a tool, man’s paintbrush in the art of life. Prayer is man’s weapon to defend himself in the struggle of life. It is a reality. A fact of life.”*

(Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer)

The fifth blessing reads: “Bring us back, our Father, to Your Torah, and bring us near, our King, to Your service, and influence us to return in perfect repentance before You. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who desires repentance.”

After having requested wisdom from Hashem, we now turn to Him to request His help in attaining repentance for the undesirable and harmful things we have done, both to ourselves and to others. In three different places in the Talmud (*Yoma* 38b, *Avodah Zarah* 55a, *Menachot* 29b), our Sages unconditionally state that a person who sincerely comes to purify himself will be given Divine assistance. The first step in achieving repentance is to *want* to repent and possess a longing to draw closer to Hashem.

In our blessing we refer to Hashem as both “our Father” and “our King.” In general, a father has infinite compassion and mercy for his child. Even when the child behaves in a reprehensible way, the father will always do his best to try finding some redeeming factors in order to forgive and assist his child. An honorable king, on the other hand, needs to rule firmly and fairly, and to dispense justice in a moral and ethical way. A king cannot always be compassionate and benevolent because this would mean risking losing the respect and the loyalty of his citizens. This explains why we refer to Hashem as “our Father” first, and, only then, as “our King” when we ask for repentance. It is our hope that Hashem will relate to us in our moments of weakness with infinite love – as would a father – and not as an uncompromising monarch who must ensure that his power not be undermined.

The famed Chassidic Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Morgenstern (1787-1859) of Kotzk, would point out that it is the way of the world for parents to feel the pain of their children, while the children are

oblivious to the suffering of their parents. Then he would add, in his incisive style, that in a similar way, Hashem feels our pain, but we are blind to His misery, as it were.

The Vilna Gaon teaches that the only way to become the recipients of Hashem’s *overt* love is by accepting upon ourselves the Torah and the mitzvahs. Only through the Torah can we purify ourselves and return to Hashem in the optimal way. This is why our blessing first mentions returning to Hashem and His Torah, and only later mentions the concept of perfect repentance. Only by striving to live our lives according to His Torah and dedicating ourselves to understanding His Torah can we reach such perfection.

The Vilna Gaon’s primary disciple was Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin (1749-1821). He founded and headed the foremost Yeshiva in his generation, which subsequently served as the prototype for all Yeshivas in Eastern Europe established afterwards. In his seminal work called *Nefesh haChaim* he writes that when we mention the Torah we refer to Hashem as our Father, but when we mention the mitzvahs we call Him our King. He explains that it is only when we are studying Hashem’s precious Torah that we can be described as being His children and that He is our Father. When, however, we perform the mitzvahs by rote, by going through the motions without studying His Torah, we are like servants following the commands of the king without any true understanding and without any real feeling. When we serve Him like that, we have distanced ourselves from Him, and we have turned our Father into our King.

The sequence of the blessings is now clear – the more wisdom a person accumulates, the greater is their ability to identify what needs correction in their life. When we ask to be brought back to Hashem’s

Torah, we are acknowledging that the Torah belongs to Hashem, and that without it we are powerless to be able to do His Will.

What is the meaning of the blessing's conclusion: "Blessed are You, Hashem, Who desires repentance"? Why was "desires" the word chosen by the Men of the Great Assembly to summarize our blessing? Rabbi Yitzchak Blazer (1837-1907), one of the foremost students of Rabbi Yisrael Salanter and the Chief Rabbi of Saint Petersburg, which was the capital city of the Russian empire, writes that there are times

when a person has been treated so badly that he would prefer that the wrongdoer not ask for forgiveness. In that way they can be punished by Heaven for their appalling behavior. In such cases, even when the perpetrator asks for forgiveness, very often the wronged party does not forgive them in their heart. Rather, the resentment lingers and festers, and any forgiveness granted to the wrongdoer is merely superficial. Our blessing is teaching us that Hashem is not like that. Regardless of what we have done to Him, Hashem *desires* and waits for our repentance.

To be continued...

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## PEREK SHIRA: The Song of Existence

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by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

### THE SONG OF THE TREES OF THE FIELD

The Trees of the Field say: "Then will sing the trees of the forest, from before Hashem, for He has come to judge the Earth." (*Divrei Hayamim* I 16:35)

**T**rees can tower mightily and live longer than any other organism on the planet. When they rustle excitedly in the invisible wind, they sing of Hashem's unseen presence in this world. Their song is an excerpt of the description of the future joy that will reverberate throughout the world when Hashem will judge His universe, fix its faults and rule over all in majesty and with benevolence. In Eretz Yisrael, even the barren trees will again bear fruit as they once did before the curse of Adam. Then the titanic trees will shake with a full expression of their song.

Man is compared to trees since we produce with our endeavors, bear children and sprout Torah – similar to the way in which trees produce fruit. No matter how mighty, respected and confident one is, he should sway to the will of Hashem like the trees, and perform His mitzvahs with rustling excitement. Although the spiritually impoverished generations prior to the coming of the Mashiach are likened to barren trees, they will yet experience a national rebirth, soon, when Hashem rectifies His world and the song of mankind will finally be fully expressed.

- Sources: *Kesuvot* 112b and *Maharsha* there; *Sifra Bechukosai* 10:6; *Tosafot Succah* 37b; Cf. *Yitzchak Yeranen*

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# TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

## Chagigah 16-29

### Before Creation

*“One who looks into four things, it would be better for that person to not have been born: ....and what came before [the world’s creation].”*

In order to help us understand this statement in the *mishna*, a *mashal* (analogy) is taught in the *gemara* by both Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Elazar. To what is looking into the nature of pre-Creation similar? To a human king who tells his workers to build him a palace in the place which is currently a garbage disposal site. The workers do as the king commanded. Would it not be a great disrespect and lack of honor for them to later mention that the palace stands on what was once a place for garbage? (Of course it would be a show of great disrespect to the king.)

So, too, we should not think about, speak of, or try to examine what existed before Creation (except for Hashem, of course). Doing so would constitute disrespect for the King of kings, Hashem.

One point in our *gemara* that requires explanation is that the analogy seems incorrect. The human king built his palace in place of something that already existed, whereas Hashem created the world from absolute nothingness and also not in place of anything previously there. One approach is to view our *gemara* as following the Midrashic teaching that Hashem first created many worlds and destroyed them before being “pleased” (so to speak) with the Creation we are cognizant of, and is the Creation taught in Chumash. (Also, see the Maharsha here, who discusses the possibility that the analogy refers to the Ramban’s explanation of Hashem initially creating *tohu u’vohu* – matter without form – which Hashem then used for completing the Creation in the exact form desired by Hashem.)

Another point that commentaries ponder is the exact nature of the disrespect and dishonor exhibited by looking into what preceded Creation. We can understand why a human king would feel hurt, but is it not a sign of Hashem’s omnipotence to look into the idea that He created the world from absolute nothing? Where is the lack of honor and respect for Hashem in our doing so?

The Maharsha explains the problem as attributing to Hashem the concept that he changed His mind, as it were. To ask and try to understand why he first made an existence of emptiness and nothingness, and then seemingly “changed His mind” and created the world and all that fills it. The mere suggestion of Hashem “making a change” – from our perspective – is a concept that is utterly wrong and disrespectful.

▪ *Chagigah 16a*

### Gourmet Atonement

*Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish said, “In the days when the Beit Hamikdash stood, the sacrificial Altar helped a person receive atonement for a wrongdoing, but nowadays a person’s dining table helps the person receive atonement.”*

Rashi explains that the generous acts of *chessed* a person does by providing sustenance and hospitality to others in need, in particular by keeping his dining table open “overtime,” helps the kindhearted host to atone for wrongdoings. It would amaze me if any reader does not know at least one family member, friend or neighbor who excels in this practice, not to have a special reputation, but just because it is the correct inborn trait of a descendant of Avraham Avinu.

▪ *Chagigah 27a*

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# LETTER AND SPIRIT

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*Insights based on the writings of Rav S.R. Hirsch by Rabbi Yosef Herschman*

## Drawing Close With a Korban

In *Sefer Vayikra* we are introduced to the concept of *korban*, generally translated as “sacrificial offering.” It is unfortunate that there is no word in Western languages that can capture the essence of what *korban* is, and even more unfortunate is that the words used distort the concept.

Both terms commonly used, “offering” and “sacrifice,” are at odds with the meaning of *korban*. Sacrifice denotes destruction, annihilation and loss – a connotation antithetical to the Hebrew concept of *korban*. Even “offering” does not do the term justice, as “offering” implies a prior request or need on the part of the one to whom the object is offered, and the purpose of the offering is to meet his request or to satisfy his need.

*Korban*, a word used only in the context of man’s relationship to Hashem, derives from the root *karev* – closeness. In the verb form it means “to draw close.” It follows, then, that a *korban* is the means to achieve a closer relationship. A *korban* draws close. It is far removed from any connotation of destruction, annihilation and loss. And its object is not to appease or satisfy the Recipient, but to bring the giver closer.

The Midrash notes that the name *Elokim* is never used in the context of *korbanot* – but rather only the Divine Name, the Tetragrammaton, beginning with the letters *yud* and *heh*. The name *Elokim*, representing strict justice and retribution, is never associated with *korban* because the purpose of *korban*

is not to appease a vengeful Deity. Rather, the Name of mercy, His essential Name, appears – a Name which hints to His past, present and future existence and involvement. *Korban* is associated with His liberating love, as Creator, Sustainer and Granter of the future. It is brought as a means of connecting to that force, of commitment to a life more noble and worthy.

This can be sensed in the very first mention of *korban* in the Torah. Kayin brings his offering from the fruit of the ground, and Hevel brings his from the finest of his flock. Kayin’s is rejected and Hevel’s is accepted. But the text does not say: “Hashem turned to Hevel’s offering, but to the offering of Kayin, He did not turn.” Rather, the text reads: “Hashem turned to Hevel and his offering, but to Kayin and his offering He did not turn.” The difference is in the personalities and intentions of the offerers, and not in the offerings themselves. The purpose of *korban* is to bring close, and *korban* is effective (in this case accepted) only when it serves that purpose by the offerer’s seeking nearness and creating connection.

Careful study of the details of the various *korbanot* and attendant procedures reveals vast symbolic significance furthering the main goal of the *korban*, to bring close. See Rav Hirsch’s *Commentary* in the Torah portions of Vayikra and Tzav, and his *Siddur* on pages 22-36.

- Sources: *Commentary, Vayikra 1:2, Ber. 4:3-6*

## Mishloach Manos with Shemitta Produce

by Rabbi Yehuda Spitz

**W**ith Purim rapidly approaching in our Shemitta year, and with *Sheviis* produce now commonly commercially available, an important question is raised. Although we know that the Purim mitzvah of *Mishloach Manos* (sending food items to a friend) is intended to foster brotherhood and camaraderie, may one gift his friend produce with *Kedushas Sheviis* for *Mishloach Manos*? Alternatively, are these 'holy fruits' perhaps considered too 'holy' for such Purim use? Interestingly, there is no clear-cut solution to this Purim dilemma, and contemporary authorities are divided as to the halacha.

However, to properly understand the issues involved, some background is necessary.

Chazal derived several essential Shemitta laws pertaining to the sanctity of *Kedushas Sheviis* produce from several verses in *Parshas Behar*.

The Torah states (*Vayikra* 25:6-7) regarding the Shemitta year, “*V’haysa Shabbos Ha’aretz Lachem L’achla...V’livhemtach V’lechaya Asher B’artzecha Tihiyeh Kol Tevuasa Le’echol* - And the resting of the Land should be for you to eat... and for your domesticated animals and the wild animals in your fields, all the produce should be for consumption.”

### Personal Uses

One important halacha inferred from these verses is:

*Lachem* – for you, *lechol tzarcheichem*, for all of your needs. (*Succah* 40a and *Bava Kama* 102a)

According to the Mishna (*Sheviis* 8:2), and as duly codified as halacha, *Kedushas Sheviis* produce is not only permitted to be eaten, it is even allowed to be utilized in whichever manner the owner deems it necessary: drinking, anointing, dyeing, and even lighting. However, there is a very important caveat: the owner's use of it during Shemitta must be that

product's *main use* year round. Otherwise, it would be considered as 'ruining' the 'holy' fruit and duly prohibited.

But what happens when the owner needs it for a purpose he may not halachically benefit from? For example, there is a well-known Talmudic dictum that '*Mitzvos lav lehenos nitnu*, which means that [utilizing something by] fulfilling a mitzvah is not considered receiving benefit' (*Erwin* 31a). Although technically regarded as a 'need,' fulfilling a mitzvah is not deemed an actual personal benefit. If so, may one use Shemitta produce to fulfill such a mitzvah or obligation?

The answers to these questions will guide us as to whether one may gift *Kedushas Sheviis* produce as *Mishloach Manos* on Purim. The crux of the matter seems to be defining whether this Purim mitzvah is considered an outright obligation or a personal need.

### View # 1 – Akin to Paying a Debt

A number of *Poskim*, including the *Ben Ish Chai*, the *Rogatchover Gaon*, *Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv*, *Rav Betzalel Zolty*, *Rav Shmuel Halevi Wosner*, *Rav Mordechai Eliyahu*, *Rav Chaim Kanievsky*, and the *Mishnas Yosef*, maintain that since the mitzvah of *Mishloach Manos* is obligatory, sending *Kedushas Sheviis* produce for *Mishloach Manos* is classified as akin to using Shemitta produce to pay a debt, an action that should be prohibited under the Shemitta restriction of *L'achlah* – to be eaten, and not for *sechorah*, referring to merchandise or commercial use.

Since this restriction includes paying a debt, these authorities hold that one may not send *Mishloach Manos* with Shemitta produce. These *Poskim* assert that this especially holds true regarding the common custom of 'returning the favor,' reciprocating with giving *Kedushas Sheviis Mishloach Manos* to one who has already gifted you with *Mishloach Manos*.

## View # 2 – It’s Personal

On the other hand, it is reported that the Steipler Gaon would send *Mishloach Manos* consisting of Shemitta produce, emphasizing that we may perform mitzvahs with *Kedushas Sheviis* fruits. Other authorities who ruled this way include Rav Elazar Menachem Mann Shach, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, the *Minchas Yitzchak*, Rav Yisrael Yaakov Fischer, Rav Menashe Klein, Rav Nissim Karelitz, and Rav Asher Weiss.

These authorities maintain that the obligation of a mitzvah, although binding, is nevertheless not considered akin to monetary debt to be excluded from appropriate Shemitta uses. Rather, they maintain that it is considered a personal use, akin to betrothing a woman, which may indeed be fulfilled with Shemitta produce. Hence, ‘Holy *Mishloach Manos*’ would indeed be permitted.

## View # 3 – No Reciprocation

Rav Nosson Gestetner maintains a novel, in-between approach. He concludes that sending the first *Mishloach Manos* with Shemitta produce is permitted. Yet, he holds that one may not reciprocate for a *Mishloach Manos* received with a *Mishloach Manos* consisting of Shemitta produce, since the idea of reciprocating (“*tagmulin*”) *Mishloach Manos* is based on a sort of ‘ethical debt’ to repay someone who did something nice for you.

### *Caveat Emptor*

It is important to note that even those who rule strictly agree that their proscription applies only to the first *Mishloach Manos* one gives or sends, since a person’s obligation is fulfilled after giving just one set of foods to one person. After that first package, they allow giving all additional customary *Mishloach Manos*

to others with Shemitta produce because the actual requirement has already been fulfilled.

It is important to note that if one chooses using Shemitta produce as part of one’s *Mishloach Manos*, the recipient should be notified that the gift contains ‘holy fruits’ so they will know to treat it accordingly. If a sender suspects that the recipient will not treat the fruit as properly befits *Kedushas Sheviis* produce, one should not use such fruit for this mitzvah.

### The *Biur* Necessities

Although not too relevant for this year’s Purim, one should still be aware of another important issue relevant to using Shemitta fruit for *Mishloach Manos*: it is subject to the laws of *Biur*. This refers to taking *Kedushas Sheviis* produce out of the house to a public place, and then giving up all rights to the fruit by announcing it as ‘*hefker*’ (ownerless) in front of three people. Every type of Shemitta fruit has its own specific *Zman Biur*, the time of year when this procedure must be performed, as it depends on when each species of fruit is no longer commonly available in the fields, in the eighth year.

This means that if one chooses to give *Mishloach Manos* with *Kedushas Sheviis* produce, it must be prior to that individual fruit’s *Zman Biur*. This Purim would not pose an issue, but it certainly would apply next year when Shemitta produce will still be extant. If one neglected to properly perform *Biur* at its appropriate time, said produce will actually become prohibited. Certainly, while fulfilling a mitzvah one would not want to *Chas Veshalom* be the cause of another’s transgression. Just some food for thought when discussing *Kedushas Sheviis* produce, especially when dealing with the seemingly innocuous festive mitzvah of *Mishloach Manos*.

*A freilichen Purim to all of Klal Yisrael!*

*This article was written L’iluy Nishmas this author’s beloved grandmother, Chana Rus bas Rav Yissachar Dov (Spitz) and uncle Yeruchem ben Rav Yisroel Mendel (Kaplan), and l’zechus Shira Yaffa bas Rochel Miriam v’chol yotzei chalatzeha for a yeshua sheleimah teikif u’miyad!*

Rabbi Spitz’s recent English *halacha sefer*,  
“Insights Into Halacha - Food: A Halachic Analysis,” (Mosaica/Feldheim)

is more than 500 pages and features over 30 comprehensive chapters, discussing a myriad of halachic issues relating to food. It is now available online and in bookstores everywhere.

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## SPECIAL PURIM FEATURE

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### The Reacceptance of the Torah on Purim

by Rabbi Chaviv Danesh

“And Moshe brought the nation toward Hashem from the camp and *they stood beneath the mountain.*” (Shemot 19:17)

“*They stood beneath the mountain*”: Rav Avidni bar Chama said, “This comes to teach us that Hashem held the mountain over them like a barrel, saying: ‘If you accept the Torah, then fine, but if not, there it will be your burial place...’” Rava said, “*Nevertheless, they reaccepted it (voluntarily) during Achashverosh’s days,* as it says, ‘The Jews fulfilled and accepted’ – they fulfilled that which they previously accepted.” (Tractate Shabbat 88a)

The commentaries point out a few fundamental apparent problems with the above Gemara. Firstly, how are we to understand the forceful nature of the acceptance of the Torah in light of the verse (Shemot 24:7) that says the Jewish People *voluntarily* accepted the Torah by declaring “*na’aseh v’nishma*” (“we will do and we will hear”)? Furthermore why did it take until Purim, hundreds of years later, for them to reaccept it? Finally, in what way was the period of the story of Purim the opportune time for this undertaking?

In order to answer these questions we must delve into the essence of the holiday of Purim. The Gemara asks, “Where is Esther’s name mentioned in the Torah? The verse states (Devarim 31:18): “*haster astir panai bayom hahu*”... (I shall hide my face on that day) – (Tractate Chullin 139b)

Rashi: During the time of Esther there will be a “hiding of the face” (of G-d), and this will be a time of great troubles.

The above Gemara elegantly describes the period of the events of Purim as a time when G-d hid His presence from being revealed to the world. This is because at the time, the Beit Hamikdash, the place

from which G-d’s presence radiates to the entire world, was in ruins and the Jewish nation was in exile. Additionally, Achashverosh, the king of the country to which they were exiled, hated everything they stood for and was throwing a party in honor of the seventieth anniversary of the destruction of the Beit Hamikdash (Tractate Megillah 11b). It was a significant anniversary celebrating (according to Achashverosh’s false calculations) the fact that Yirmiyahu’s prophecy in verse 29:10, which was that the Beit Hamikdash would be rebuilt in seventy years, wasn’t fulfilled. If that wasn’t enough there was also the decree of Haman, the second in command to the king, to kill all the Jewish men, women and children in one day. At first glance it seemed like G-d had totally lifted His providence from His chosen nation.

Even the final deliverance of the Jewish People in the story of Purim was unique in this regard. Unlike the redemption from Egypt in which G-d performed open miracles to reveal Himself to the world, the final salvation of the Jewish People in the story of Purim was seemingly through natural means. Achashverosh’s feast, Vashti’s execution, Esther’s election as queen, Haman’s rise to power, Mordechai’s act of saving the king’s life, and the victory over Amalek did not disobey the laws of nature. Rabbi Simcha Zissel points out that the fact the occurrences described in the *megillah* happened over a span of nine long years could have easily led the people experiencing the events to label each event as a separate, independent coincidence. In other words, through examining the events of the story of Purim superficially, one could very well have attributed it all to chance.

Through analyzing the *Megillah*, however, a person is given a glimpse behind how every single event was a piece of a puzzle put in place, ultimately depicting the

guiding hand of G-d. By presenting so many unrelated and unlikely events as part of one long story, the *Megillah* forces us to ask, “Who is the One orchestrating so many things to happen at precisely the perfect time?” This idea is hinted at in the name that is given to this *megillah*, Megillat Esther. The word *megillah* shares the same root as the word “*megaleh*,” which means to reveal. Furthermore, the name Esther shares the same root as the word “*nistar*” which means hidden. Hence, Megillat Esther literally means “revealing that which is hidden”. Revealing the hidden hand of G-d is exactly what the *megillah* is meant to do. This is precisely why the *megillah* never explicitly mentions the name of G-d. G-d’s name was purposely left out of the *megillah* to teach us to search for the guiding hand of G-d even when it is not revealed, and thereby come to realize that G-d is not only the driving force behind open miracles but also nature as well.

With this in mind we can gain an insight into the custom of wearing costumes on Purim. A mask covers the identity and to a certain degree the existence of the one wearing it. It is only when we lift the mask that we can see who is behind it. In Hebrew the word “*olam*” (world) shares a root with the word “*ne’elam*” (hidden). This is because the consistent

laws of nature “hide” the presence of G-d, as a mask hides the identity of the one behind it. It is left up to us to see through the mask and reveal G-d’s presence in the world. Purim, by the nature of its hidden miracles, is the perfect time to remind ourselves that there is more to the world than what meets the eye – hence the custom to wear costumes on this day.

We can now understand the idea behind the reacceptance of the Torah on Purim. When the Jewish People left Egypt they were on a spiritual high. The miracles, and thus G-d’s presence in the world, was so clear that all doubts disappeared. It was this clarity that the Midrash metaphorically refers to as a mountain hanging over the Jewish People. At the time, the revelations were so intense and the significance of the Torah was so apparent that it was almost as if there was no option but to accept the Torah. Therefore, even though their acceptance of the Torah was essentially voluntary, it also had an element of compulsion. On Purim however, when G-d’s presence was hidden, the Jewish People reaccepted the Torah without the coercion of the “mountain” of clarity. This is the reason why it took until Purim to reaccept the Torah. In the midst of G-d’s concealment Purim was indeed the most opportune time for the Jewish People to reaccept the Torah through exercising the full extent of their free will.

