

# OHRNET

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## COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS : PESACH EDITION

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

### THE CASE OF THE MYSTERIOUS MISSING BRACHA

One of the most noticeable dimensions of Judaism is the emphasis placed on reciting *brachas* (blessings). For almost every detail in our lives there is a corresponding *bracha*. The birth of a child, a *Bris*, a *Pidyon Haben*, under the *Chuppah*, and even at a funeral, there is always an accompanying *bracha*. A *bracha* is an integral part of every Shabbat and Yom Tov, when they begin and when they conclude. We recite *brachas* before everything we eat and afterwards as well. The concept of *brochas* is so important that *Chazal* teach (*Brachot* 35b) that one who derives benefit from the physical world without first making a *brocha* is considered to have stolen from Hashem. The Maharsha explains this is because “the entire world belongs to Hashem.” (*Tehillim* 24:1), and making a *bracha* is therefore a prerequisite (Rashi, *ibid.*). *Brachas* are so essential to our connection to Hashem that a person is obligated to make a minimum of one hundred *brachas* each day (*Bamidbar Rabbah*, *Korach* 18). Almost from the moment that we wake up until we go to sleep at night, we are occupied with *brachas*.

Yet, there is a moment in the year that lacks a *bracha*. Not just a “regular” moment, but one of the most uplifting and intensely spiritual moments of the entire year. At the beginning of Pesach, as we sit down to fulfill the sublime, once-in-a-year mitzvah of recounting the story of the Exodus from Egypt, it would seem to be essential to begin the

Haggadah with a *bracha*. But there is not one. It seems incongruous that on one of the most elevated nights of the year, there is no *bracha* said over a mitzvah unique to *Leil HaSeder*. And, if that were not difficult enough to understand, some say that there actually is a *bracha* for the Haggadah – just not at the beginning, but rather only at the end of the *Maggid* section. Just before we make the *bracha* over the second cup of wine, we recite a paragraph that ends with the words, “*Baruch Atah Hashem, Ga'al Yisrael* – Blessed are You, Hashem, Who has redeemed *Yisrael*.” According to some halachic authorities, this is the *bracha* for the mitzvah of saying the Haggadah. But why would we be making a *bracha* at this point, of all places? As a rule, a *bracha* is recited immediately before doing the mitzvah. Yet, here, on *Leil HaSeder*, why would we wait to recite the *bracha* only much later.

Rabbi Uziel Milevsky explains that it is only at this point that we are actually capable of making a *bracha* for the mitzvah of the Haggadah. Up until this moment, we have been enslaved to Pharaoh. Not just physically enslaved, but mentally as well. A little over two centuries of servitude is sufficient to completely destroy a nation's sense of self-worth. It is more than enough to leave a nation psychologically bound to their captors – even if they have left the geographic location of their slavery. So it is only now, at the end of *Maggid*, that we have finally succeeded in breaking the chains that bind us to Pharaoh. Not just the Pharaoh of ancient Egypt, but all the “Pharaohs” we have been subjected to over many generations. After watching the enormous might of the Egyptian army destroyed in front of their eyes, the Jewish nation finally understands, as clearly as can be, that it is Hashem Who runs the world. Hashem alone.

The *Yesod v'Shores Ha'Avodah* writes that when we reach this paragraph in the Haggadah, we should feel an immeasurable sense of gratitude to Hashem for His having redeemed us. And each of us should feel as if we are the personal beneficiaries of the redemption. As the Malbim explains, despite the fact that the *bracha* is phrased in the past tense, the seeds of all the future redemptions are contained within the Exodus from Egypt. The Malbim cites a verse to support this idea, when Hashem declared, “As in the days that you left the land of Egypt, I will show you wonders.” (*Michah* 7:15)

What a moment! It is perhaps the most climatic moment in the entire Haggadah. As we anticipate the Final Redemption, we are being promised that whatever was experienced at the Exodus will be experienced once more as we enter the Messianic era.

Please accept my *bracha* that we all will be blessed by Hashem with an uplifting and inspiring Seder night, one full of novel and thought-provoking ideas and replete with intellectual delicacies (and the edible kind, too!). And, as we each reach the *bracha* of *Ga'al Yisrael*, let us pause for a moment to comprehend the enormity of what we are saying. Then, with hearts overflowing with sincere longing to experience the Final Redemption, let us join together and enter into the spiritual realms that can be accessed only on the Seder night.

**The Ohr Somayach Family wishes all our  
students alumni, friends and the entire  
Jewish People a  
“*Chag kasher v'somyach.*”  
May you all enjoy a festive, meaningful  
and kosher Passover!**

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# Q & A

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## METZORA

### Questions

1. When may a *metzora* not be pronounced *tahor*?
2. In the *midbar*, where did a *metzora* dwell while he was *tamei*?
3. Why does the *metzora* require birds in the purification process?
4. In the purification process of a *metzora*, what does the cedar wood symbolize?
5. During the purification process, the *metzora* is required to shave his hair. Which hair must he shave?
6. What is unique about the *chatat* and the *asham* offered by the *metzora*?
7. In the *Beit Hamikdash*, when the *metzora* was presented "before G-d" (14:11), where did he stand?
8. Where was the *asham* of the *metzora* slaughtered?
9. How was having *tzara'at* in one's house sometimes advantageous?
10. When a house is suspected as having *tzara'at*, what is its status prior to the inspection by a *kohen*?
11. What happens to the vessels that are in a house found to have *tzara'at*?
12. Which type of vessels cannot be made *tahor* after they become *tamei*?
13. Where were stones afflicted with *tzara'at* discarded?
14. When a house is suspected of having *tzara'at*, a *kohen* commands that the affected stones be replaced and the house plastered. What is the law if the *tzara'at*:
  - a. returns and spreads;
  - b. does not return;
  - c. returns, but does not spread?
15. When a person enters a house that has *tzara'at*, when do his clothes become *tamei*?
16. What is the status of a man who is *zav* (sees a flow):
  - a. two times or two consecutive days;
  - b. three times or three consecutive days?
17. A *zav* sat or slept on the following:
  - a). a bed; b) a plank; c) a chair; d) a rock.If a *tahor* person touches these things what is his status?
18. What does the Torah mean when it refers to a *zav* who "has not washed his hands"?
19. When may a *zav* immerse in a *mikveh* to purify himself?
20. What is the status of someone who experiences a one-time flow?

*All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.*

### Answers

1. 14:2 - At night.
  2. 14:3 - Outside the three camps.
  3. 14:4 - *Tzara'at* comes as a punishment for *lashon hara*. Therefore, the Torah requires the *metzora* to offer birds, who chatter constantly, to atone for his sin of chattering.
  4. 14:4 - The cedar is a lofty tree. It alludes to the fact that *tzara'at* comes as a punishment for haughtiness.
  5. 14:9 - Any visible collection of hair on the body.
  6. 14:10 - They require *n'sachim* (drink offerings).
  7. 14:11 - At the gate of Nikanor.
  8. 14:13 - On the northern side of the *mizbe'ach*.
  9. 14:34 - The Amorites concealed treasures in the walls of their houses. After the conquest of the Land, *tzara'at* would afflict these houses. The Jewish owner would tear down the house and find the treasures.
  10. 14:36 - It is *tahor*.
  11. 14:36 - They become *tamei*.
  12. 14:36 - Earthenware vessels.
  13. 14:40 - In places where *tahor* objects were not handled
  14.
    - a. 14:44-45 - It is called "*tzara'at mam'eret*," and the house must be demolished;
    - b. 14:48 - the house is pronounced *tahor*;
    - c. 14:44 - The house must be demolished.
  15. 14:46 - When he remains in the house long enough to eat a small meal.
  16. 15:2 -
    - a. He is *tamei*;
    - b. he is *tamei* and is also required to bring a *korban*.
  17. 15:4-5 - Only a type of object that one usually lies or sits upon becomes a transmitter of *tumah* when a *zav* sits or lies on it. A *tahor* person who subsequently touches the object becomes *tamei* and the clothes he is wearing are also *tamei'im*. Therefore:
    - a. *tamei*;
    - b. *tahor*;
    - c. *tamei*;
    - d. *tahor*.
  18. 15:11 - One who has not immersed in a *mikveh*.
  19. 15:13 - After seven consecutive days without a flow.
  20. 15:32 - He is *tamei* until evening.
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# Q & A

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## ACHAREI MOT

### Questions

1. Why does the Torah emphasize that *Parshas Acharei Mos* was taught after the death of Aaron's sons?
2. What is the punishment for a *Kohen Gadol* who inappropriately enters the *Kodesh Kodashim*?
3. How long did the first *Beis Hamikdash* exist?
4. What did the *Kohen Gadol* wear when he entered the *Kodesh Kodashim*?
5. How many times did the *Kohen Gadol* change his clothing and immerse in the *mikveh* on Yom Kippur?
6. How many times did he wash his hands and feet from the *Kiyor* (copper laver)?
7. The *Kohen Gadol* offered a bull *Chatat* to atone for himself and his household. Who paid for it?
8. One of the goats that was chosen by lot went to *Azazel*. What is *Azazel*?
9. Who is included in the "household" of the *Kohen Gadol*?
10. For what sin does the goat *Chatat* atone?
11. After the Yom Kippur service, what is done with the four linen garments worn by the *Kohen Gadol*?
12. Where were the fats of the *Chatat* burned?
13. Who is solely responsible for attaining atonement for the Jewish People on Yom Kippur?
14. From one point in history, installation of the *Kohen Gadol* through anointing was no longer used but was conducted by donning the special garments of that office. From when and why?
15. What is the penalty of *karet*?
16. Which categories of animals must have their blood covered when they are slaughtered?
17. When a person eats a kosher bird that was improperly slaughtered (a *neveilah*), at what point does he contract *tumah*?
18. The Torah commands the Jewish People not to follow the "*chukim*" of the Canaanites. What are the forbidden "*chukim*"?
19. What is the difference between "*mishpat*" and "*chok*"?
20. May a man marry his wife's sister?

*All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.*

### Answers

1. 16:1 - To strengthen the warning not to enter the *Kodesh Kodashim* except on Yom Kippur.
2. 16:2 - Death.
3. 16:3 - 410 years.
4. 16:4 - Only the four linen garments worn by an ordinary *Kohen*.
5. 16:4 - Five times.
6. 16:4 - Ten times.
7. 16:6 - The *Kohen Gadol*.
8. 16:8 - A jagged cliff.
9. 16:11 - All the *Kohanim*.
10. 16:16 - For unknowingly entering the *Beit Hamikdash* in the state of *tumah*.
11. 16:23 - They must be put into *geniza* and not be used again.
12. 16:25 - On the outer *Mizbe'ach*.
13. 16:32 - The *Kohen Gadol*.
14. 16:32 - Anointing ceased during the kingship of *Yoshiahu*. At that time, the oil of anointing was hidden away.
15. 17:9 - One's offspring die and one's own life is shortened.
16. 17:13 - Non domesticated kosher animals and all species of kosher birds.
17. 17:15 - When the food enters the esophagus.
18. 18:3 - Their social customs.
19. 18:4 - A "*mishpat*" conforms to the human sense of justice. A "*chok*" is a law whose reason is not given to us and can only be understood as a decree from Hashem.
20. 18:18 - Yes, but not during the lifetime of his wife.

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# Q & A

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## Kedoshim

### Questions

1. Why was *Parshat Kedoshim* said in front of all the Jewish People?
2. Why does the Torah mention the duty to honor one's father before it mentions the duty to honor one's mother?
3. Why is the command to fear one's parents followed by the command to keep Shabbat?
4. Why does Shabbat observance supersede honoring parents?
5. What is "*leket*"?
6. In *Shemot* 20:13, the Torah commands "Do not steal." What does the Torah add when it commands in *Vayikra* 19:11 "Do not steal"?
7. "Do not do wrong to your neighbor" (19:13). To what "wrong" is the Torah referring?
8. By when must you pay someone who worked for you during the day?
9. How does Rashi explain the prohibition "Don't put a stumbling block before a sightless person"?
10. In a monetary case involving a poor person and a rich person, a judge is likely to wrongly favor the poor person. What rationale does Rashi give for this?
11. When rebuking someone, what sin must one be careful to avoid?
12. It's forbidden to bear a grudge. What example does Rashi give of this?
13. The Torah forbids tattooing. How is a tattoo made?
14. How does one fulfill the mitzvah of "*hadarta p'nei zaken*"?
15. What punishment will never come to the entire Jewish People?
16. What penalty does the Torah state for cursing one's parents?
17. When the Torah states a death penalty but doesn't define it precisely, to which penalty is it referring?
18. What will result if the Jewish People ignore the laws of forbidden relationships?
19. Which of the forbidden relationships listed in this week's Parsha were practiced by the Canaanites?
20. Is it proper for a Jew to say "I would enjoy eating ham"?

### Answers

1. 19:2 - Because the fundamental teachings of the Torah are contained in this Parsha.
2. 19:3 - Since it is more natural to honor one's mother, the Torah stresses the obligation to honor one's father.
3. 19:3 - To teach that one must not violate Torah law even at the command of one's parents.
4. 19:3 - Because the parents are also commanded by Hashem to observe Shabbat. Parents deserve great honor, but not at the "expense" of Hashem's honor.
5. 19:9 - "*Leket*" is one or two stalks of grain accidentally dropped while harvesting. They are left for the poor.
6. 19:11 - The Torah in *Vayikra* prohibits monetary theft. In *Shemot* it prohibits kidnapping.
7. 19:13 - Withholding wages from a worker.
8. 19:13 - Before the following dawn.
9. 19:13 - Don't give improper advice to a person who is unaware in a matter. For example, don't advise someone to sell his field, when in reality you yourself wish to buy it.
10. 19:15 - The judge might think: "This rich person is obligated to give charity to this poor person regardless of the outcome of this court case. Therefore, I'll rule in favor of the poor person. That way, he'll receive the financial support he needs without feeling shame."
11. 19:17 - Causing public embarrassment.
12. 19:18 - Person A asks person B: "Can I borrow your shovel?" Person B says: "No." The next day, B says to A: "Can I borrow your scythe?" A replies: "Sure, I'm not stingy like you are."
13. 19:28 - Ink is injected into the skin with a needle.
14. 19:32 - By not sitting in the seat of elderly people, and by not contradicting their statements.
15. 20:3 - "*Karet*" - being spiritually "cut off."
16. 20:9 - Death by stoning.
17. 20:10 - *Chenek* (strangulation).
18. 20:22 - The land of Israel will "spit them out."
19. 20:23 - All of them.
20. 20:26 - Yes.

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# Q & A

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## EMOR

### Questions

1. Which male descendants of Aharon are *exempt* from the prohibition against contacting a dead body?
2. Does a *kohen* have an option regarding becoming ritually defiled when his unmarried sister passes away?
3. How does one honor a *kohen*?
4. How does the Torah restrict the *Kohen Gadol* with regard to mourning?
5. The Torah states in verse 22:3 that one who "approaches holy objects" while in a state of *tumah* (impurity) is penalized with excision. What does the Torah mean by "approaches"?
6. What is the smallest piece of a corpse that is able to transmit *tumah*?
7. Who in the household of a *kohen* may eat *terumah*?
8. If the daughter of a *kohen* marries a "*zar*" she may no longer eat *terumah*. What is a *zar*?
9. What is the difference between a *neder* and a *nedavah*?
10. May a person slaughter an animal and its father on the same day?
11. How does the Torah define "profaning" the Name of G-d?
12. Apart from Shabbos, how many days are there during the year about which the Torah says that work is forbidden?
13. How big is an *omer*?
14. On what day do we begin to "count the *omer*"?
15. Why do we begin counting the *omer* at night?
16. How does the *omer* differ from other *minchah* offerings?
17. The blowing of the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah is called a "*zichron teruah*" (sound of remembrance). For what is it a reminder?
18. What is unusual about the wood of the *esrog* tree?
19. Who was the father of the blasphemer?
20. What is the penalty for intentionally wounding one's parent?

*All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.*

### Answers

1. 21:1 - Challalim - those disqualified from the priesthood because they are descended from a relationship forbidden to a *kohen*.
2. 21:3 - No, he is required to do so.
3. 21:8 - He is first in all matters of holiness. For example, a *kohen* reads from the Torah first, and is usually the one to lead the blessings before and after meals.
4. 21:10-12 - He may not allow his hair to grow long, nor attend to his close relatives if they die, nor accompany a funeral procession.
5. 22:3 - Eats.
6. 22:5 - A piece the size of an olive.
7. 22:11 - He, his wife, his sons, his unmarried daughters and his non-Jewish slaves.
8. 22:12 - A non-*kohen*.
9. 22:18 - A *neder* is an obligation upon a person; a *nedavah* is an obligation placed upon an object.
10. 22:28 - Yes. The Torah only prohibits slaughtering an animal and its mother on the same day.
11. 22:32 - Willfully transgressing the commandments.
12. 23:7-36 - Seven.
13. 23:10 - One tenth of an eipha.
14. 23:15 - On the 16th of Nissan.
15. 23:15 - The Torah requires counting seven complete weeks. If we begin counting in the daytime, the seven weeks would not be complete, because according to the Torah a day starts at nightfall.
16. 23:16 - It was made from barley.
17. 23:24 - The akeidas (binding of) Yitzchak.
18. 23:40 - It has the same taste as the fruit.
19. 24:10 - The Egyptian killed by Moshe (Shemos 2:12).
20. 24:21 - Death.

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# WHAT'S IN A WORD?

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by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein

## Pesach: Putting Pressure

The Torah commands that when presenting *bikkurim* (“first fruits”) to the Kohen in the Temple, one must make a verbal declaration, affirming the history of the Jewish People and encapsulating the Exodus story: “An Aramean [tried to] destroy my father, and he descended to Egypt... and the Egyptians did evil to us and they afflicted us, and they placed upon us hard labor. And we cried out to Hashem, G-d of our forefathers, and Hashem heard our voice, and He saw our affliction and our toiling and our pressure (*lachatx*). And Hashem took us out of Egypt...” (Deut. 26:7). The *Haggadah Shel Pesach* expounds on this verse by explaining that the aforementioned *lachatx* (“pressure”) refers to *d’chak* (“pressure”), and proceeds to cite another Biblical passage concerning the Exodus, wherein G-d again mentions this “pressure”: “And now – behold! – the crying out of the Children of Israel has come to Me, and I saw the pressure (*lachatx*) that the Egyptians were pressuring (*lochatzim*) them” (Ex. 3:9).

This exegesis in the *Haggadah Shel Pesach* begs for a deeper explanation, because it defines the term *lachatx* in Deuteronomy 26:7 as referring to *d’chak*, and then proceeds to adduce this explanation by simply citing another verse wherein a cognate of *lachatx* appears! What is the difference between *lachatx* and *d’chak*, and how does Exodus 3:9 show that the *lachatx* mentioned in Deuteronomy 26:7 really refers to *d’chak*?

In trying to explain this passage in the *Haggadah Shel Pesach*, Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi (1512-1585) in *Maase Hashem* stipulates that the term *lachatx* does not necessarily imply anything nefarious on the part of whoever is applying pressure. Rather, that term typically connotes somebody applying pressure in an effort to extract some sort of benefit from the one being pressured. However, when the *Haggadah* explains that the *lachatx* referenced here is actually *d’chak*, this means that the Egyptians did not simply pressurize the Jews in order to reap the benefits of

their work, but that they had negative, malevolent intentions in enslaving the Jews and causing them harm.

Conversely, Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim of Breslau (1740-1814) differentiates between the Biblical terms *lachatx* and *d’chak* (see Judges 2:18, Yoel 2:8) by explaining that *lachatx* refers to pressuring somebody chiefly as a means of causing that person to suffer or to otherwise negatively affect that person, while *d’chak* primarily refers to one who pressures another for one’s own benefit (even if it might come at a loss to the one is put under pressure). In its crudest sense, *d’chak* refers to “pushing” somebody out of his spot with the intention that somebody else would take his position. In that case, the main intention is not to hurt the one who is pushed away, *per se*, but to benefit the one who replaces him.

In line with this, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that even though the Bible characterizes the pressure that the Egyptians exerted over the enslaved Jews as *lachatx*, this does not mean that their primary objective was to hurt the Jews. Instead, he argues that the Egyptians’ primary goal was to benefit themselves, and the fact that the Jews had to suffer discrimination was merely collateral damage. Thus, by defining *lachatx* as *d’chak*, the *Haggadah Shel Pesach* means to stress that only in situations when the Jews’ interests conflicted with the Egyptians’ were the Jews “pushed away” in deference to the Egyptians, but in general, the Jews in Egypt were granted the same rights and privileges given Egyptian citizens.

Rabbi Shimon Schwab (1908-1995) offers a fascinating explanation that sheds light on the exegesis under discussion. He posits that the word *lachatx* focuses on the party who is applying pressure on another, while *d’chak* implies pressure that is strong enough to actually *force* the hand of the one upon whom the pressure is applied. In some situations, one under pressure might be resilient

enough to withstand the pressure placed upon him, and the pressure will not affect him, while, in other situations one might be too weak to bear the pressure and will be forced into submission. Both of those possibilities are included in the term *lachatz* because that term focuses on the one applying the pressure, not the one who might yield to such pressure.

In other words, Rabbi Schwab explains that *d'chak* refers specifically to the sort of *lachatz* ("pressure") that is enough to push the other party into doing what it is being pressured to do. In this case, Deuteronomy 26:7 simply states that the Egyptian applied *lachatz* upon the Jews, but says nothing about whether that *lachatz* ultimately affected the Jews and pushed them into doing what the Egyptians wanted. As a way of clarifying what that verse means, the *Haggadah Shel Pesach* explains that the *lachatz* the Egyptians applied could also be termed *d'chak* because it indeed succeeded in pushing the Jews into doing the Egyptians' bidding.

As Rabbi Schwab puts it, this notion is seen from Yechezkel 3:9, which uses a verb cognate of the word *lachatz*, with the Egyptians being the subject of the verb and the Jews being the object. That syntax implies that the *lachatz* in question was not merely applied from the perspective of the Egyptians (who put pressure on the Jews), but also affected the Jews who became subject to that *lachatz* and were affected by it.

Rabbi Dr. Refael Binyamin Posen (1942-2016) argues that the Biblical Hebrew *lachatz* can refer to two different types of "pressure" – physical pressure and psychological pressure. Accordingly, he notes that when the Bible refers to *lachatz* in the sense of "physical pressure," Targum Onkelos renders that term in Aramaic as a cognate of *d'chak*. For example, when Balaam's donkey caused Balaam's foot to "press" against the wall (Num. 22:25), the Bible uses a cognate of *lachatz* and Targum Onkelos uses a cognate of *d'chak*. However, when the Bible uses the term *lachatz* in reference to "psychological pressure," Targum Onkelos renders the term into cognates of the root AYIN-VAV-KUF, which refer to such tensions (as in Yechezkel 22:20, which forbids exerting *lachatz* on the stranger). In the case of the *lachatz* mentioned in Deuteronomy 26:7, Targum Onkelos translates the term as *d'chak*. Based

on this, Rabbi Posen argues that when the *Haggadah Shel Pesach* claims that the *lachatz* that Hashem saw, in the lead-up to the Exodus, means *d'chak*, it means to explain that Hashem not only pitied the Jews because of the "psychological pressures" they endured in Egypt, but that even the mere "physical pressures" (*d'chak*) were enough to sway His decision to release them from bondage.

In response to Moses' early attempts to release the Jews from their bondage, Pharaoh decreed that he would no longer supply his Jewish slaves with straw, but would still demand that they continue to meet the same quota they had filled before. As the Bible states, "The taskmasters (*nogsim*) pressured (*atzim*)" the Jews to continue working as though they were still supplied with straw (Ex. 5:13). In this passage we encounter two more terms that refer to "pressure" – *negisah* (from where *nogsim* derives) and *atz* (from where *atzim* derives).

Indeed, Targum Neofiti (to Ex. 5:14) translates *nogsei* as *dachkoi*, thus cementing the connection between *negisah* and *d'chak*. Similarly, when forbidding a lender from collecting his debts after the Sabbatical year, the Torah says, "He (the lender) shall not press (*yigos*) his fellow" (Deut. 15:2), and the Targum known as Yonatan translates the word *yigos* (a cognate of *negisah*) into a cognate of *d'chak*.

Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim traces the term *negisah* to the biliteral root GIMMEL-SHIN (even though *negisah* is spelled with a SIN), which he defines as "closeness." Other words that Rabbi Pappenheim sees as derived from this root include *gishah* ("nearing as close as possible"), *gush* ("clump/cluster" of closely-packed contents), and *geshem* ("rain," which falls from rain clouds comprised of highly-concentrated vapor). Rabbi Pappenheim even suggests that the Land of Goshen (the only area in Egypt where the Jews were allowed to settle) got its name from the fact that that fertile area had much "compact dirt" (as opposed to the rest of Egypt, which was apparently sandier). Thus, Rabbi Pappenheim explains that *negisah* is characterized by multiple, repeated encounters between the one placing the pressure and the one he is pressuring, as though the two parties were very "close" to each. In idiomatic English, we might say that the former was so close to the latter that "he didn't give him space to breathe" or was "breathing



down his neck.” The Malbim to Yeshayahu 3:5 writes that *negisah* refers to pressuring somebody to pay up money he does not actually owe, while *nosheh* refers to pressuring somebody to pay money that he is already otherwise obligated to pay.

When the angels pressured Lot to flee the city of Sodom before it was destroyed, the Bible uses the word *vaya'itzu* (Gen. 19:9), a cognate of *atz*. Targum Onkelos translates this term into a cognate of *d'chak*. Based on this translation, Rabbi Dr. Posen argues that the angels did not just *verbally* try to convince Lot to leave, but actually *physically* “pushed” him in order to encourage his exit.

However, Rabbi Pappenheim takes a different approach in understanding the term *atz*. He traces it to the biliteral root ALEPH-TZADI and ultimately to the monoliteral root TZADI, which he defines as “exiting” or “going out.” Consequently, Rabbi Pappenheim explains *atz* as encouraging somebody to do something “faster” (thus, the angels encouraged Lot to leave Sodom *faster*, and the *nogsim* in Egypt pressured the Jews to work *faster*). He connects this understanding back to the core meaning of TZADI by explaining that one who is pressed into doing something “faster” does not have the patience to slowly get to the next stage, but rather feels compelled to “go out” of his current situation forthwith.

When the Bible reports that Delilah exerted “pressure” (*alatz*) on her husband Samson to divulge the secret behind his super-human strength, the Bible (Judges 16:16) uses a cognate of the triliteral root ALEPH-LAMMED-TZADI to denote the pressure she applied. As Rashi (there) and *Machberet Menachem* point out, this is the only appearance of that root in the Bible, thus making it a *hapax legomenon*.

The Targum (to Judges 16:16) translates *alatz* as *d'chak*. Similarly, Nachmanides (to Gen. 32:25) sees the ALEPH of *alatz* as interchangeable with the CHET of *chalatz*, which he understands as a metathesized permutation of *lachatz*. Radak in *Sefer HaShorashim* also associates *alatz* with *lachatz*. (Interestingly, Ibn Janach explains the verb *alatz* as

“making him angry,” as opposed to “putting pressure on him.”)

Rabbi Pappenheim traces *alatz* to the biliteral root LAMMED-TZADI (“logical verbalizations”). In that sense he explains that *alatz* refers to adeptly using words to cajole and convince somebody into doing something. Other words derived from this root include *melitzah* (“verbal justification/defense” or “translation”) and *leitzanut* (“scorn” or “mockery”).

Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yechiel Michel Weiser (1809-1879), better known as the Malbim, seems to somewhat contradict himself in how he differentiates between the terms in question:

- In his commentary to Judges 2:18, the Malbim writes that *lachatz* refers to financial pressure (i.e., taxes) and forced labor, while *d'chak* refers to spatial limitations on where one was allowed to settle.
- In his commentary to Exodus 3:9, the Malbim writes that *negisah* refers to financial pressure and forced labor, while *lachatz* refers to spatial limitations on where one was allowed to settle.
- In his commentary to Yeshayahu 3:5, the Malbim again repeats that *negisah* refers to applying pressure on somebody in order to extract from them money or free labor, while *d'chak* and *lachatz* do not imply trying to take something from the person under pressure.
- In his commentary *Midrash Haggadah* to the *Haggadah Shel Pesach*, the Malbim explains that *lachatz* can mean “pressure” that results from a lack of basic provisions (see I Kings 22:27, Isa. 30:20, II Chron. 18:26) or “pressure” that results from physical constriction. Based on that, he explains that when the *Haggadah Shel Pesach* explicates *lachatz* as referring to *d'chak*, it means that in the context of the Jewish enslavement the *lachatz* in question refers to the second sort of *lachatz* – which was the result of the Egyptians placing limitations on where in the country the Jews may live, thereby causing physical constriction and cramped conditions.

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# PARSHA OVERVIEW

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## Metzora

The Torah describes the procedure for a *metzora* (a person afflicted with *tzara'at*) upon the conclusion of his isolation period. This process extends for a week and involves *korbanot* and immersions in a *mikveh*. Then, a *kohen* must pronounce the *metzora* pure. A *metzora* of limited financial means may substitute lesser offerings for the more expensive animals. Before a *kohen* diagnoses that a house has *tzara'at*, household

possessions are removed to prevent them from also being declared ritually impure. The *tzara'at* is removed by smashing and rebuilding that section of the house. If the *tzara'at* signs reappear, the entire building must be razed. The Torah details which bodily secretions render a person spiritually impure, and thereby prevent his contact with holy items. And the Torah defines how one regains a state of ritual purity.

## Acharei Mot

Hashem instructs the *kohanim* to exercise extreme care when they enter the Mishkan. On Yom Kippur, the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) is to approach the holiest part of the Mishkan after special preparations and wearing special clothing. He brings offerings unique to Yom Kippur, including two identical goats that are designated by lottery. One is "for Hashem, and is offered in the Temple, while the other is "for Azazel," to be in the desert. The Torah states the individual's obligations on Yom Kippur: On the 10th day of the seventh month, one must "afflict" oneself. We are to

abstain from eating and drinking, anointing, wearing leather footwear, washing and marital relations.

Consumption of blood is prohibited. The blood of slaughtered birds and undomesticated beasts must be covered. The people are warned against engaging in the wicked practices that were common in Egypt. Incest is defined and prohibited. Marital relations are forbidden during a woman's monthly cycle. Homosexuality, bestiality and child sacrifice are prohibited.

## Kedoshim

The nation is enjoined to be holy. Many prohibitions and positive commandments are taught:

**Prohibitions:** Idolatry; eating offerings after their time-limit; theft and robbery; denial of theft; false oaths; retention of someone's property; delaying payment to an employee; hating or cursing a fellow Jew (especially one's parents); gossip; placing physical and spiritual stumbling blocks; perversion of justice; inaction when others are in danger; embarrassing;

revenge; bearing a grudge; cross-breeding; wearing a garment of wool and linen; harvesting a tree during its first three years; gluttony and intoxication; witchcraft; shaving the beard and sideburns; tattooing.

**Positive:** Awe for parents and respect for the elderly; leaving part of the harvest for the poor; loving others (especially a convert); eating in Jerusalem the fruits from a tree's fourth year; awe for the Temple; respect for Torah scholars, the blind and the deaf.

## Emor

The *kohanim* are commanded to avoid contact with corpses in order to maintain a high standard of ritual purity. They may attend the funeral of only their seven closest relatives: father, mother, wife, son, daughter, brother, and unmarried sister. The Kohen Gadol may not attend the funeral even of his closest relatives. Certain marital restrictions are placed on the *kohanim*.

The nation is required to honor the *kohanim*. Physical irregularities that invalidate a *kohen* from serving in the Temple are listed. *Terumah*, a portion of the crop that is given to the *kohanim*, may be eaten only by *kohanim* and their household. An animal may be sacrificed in the Temple after it is eight days old and is free from any physical defects.

The nation is commanded to sanctify the Name of Hashem by insuring that their behavior is always exemplary and by being prepared to surrender their lives rather than murder, engage in licentious relations or worship idols.

The special characteristics of the holidays are described, and the nation is reminded not to do certain types of creative work during these holidays. New grain may not be eaten until the *omer* of barley is offered in the Temple. This Torah portion explains the laws of preparing the oil for the Menorah and baking the *lechem hapanim* in the Temple. A man blasphemes Hashem, and is executed as prescribed in the Torah.

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# PEREK SHIRA

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by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

## THE SONG OF THE WHEAT STALK

*The wheat stalk says: "A song of ascents, from the depths I call out to You, Hashem." (Tehillim 130)*

The wheat kernel is planted within the soil, dark and far from life. The seed remains buried throughout the cold winter, sprouting only in the summer. It strikes its roots very deeply and it stubbornly pushes its sheaves to the surface. Its ascent from the physical depths symbolizes a Jew's ascent from spiritual depths. Hence, the wheat stalk sings, "A song of ascents, from the depths I call out to You, Hashem."

As with any seed, when a wheat kernel is planted, it seems to rot, and only then does it sprout. This represents that no matter how impure a person may become as a result of sin and spiritual stagnation, the

main part of the soul, the *neshamah*, remains pure and untainted. Therefore, the person can sprout to greatness beyond his former state if he chooses to repent. When the wheat stalk matures to proud fruition, with countless life-giving grains, the weighted stalk is bent over in seeming humility. This pose suggests that it recalls its humble beginnings.

A wheat kernel is a pristinely white object that is covered with coarse chaff. It symbolizes the pure good inclination of a person that is clouded over by the evil inclination due to sin. Just as clouds cover over sunlight and darken the world, sin prevents inner goodness from shining forth. Indeed, before Adam transgressed and brought sin into the world, the wheat kernel was bare of chaff, and in parallel, the world was

filled with pure goodness. This can be understood best according to the opinion that the Tree of Knowledge was a wheat stalk.

Nevertheless, in the same way that chaff can be removed and clean flour can be extracted through a procedure of breaking and grinding of the grain, so too, repentance and entreaty “from the depths” of a broken heart serve to free the good inclination of the bad inclination’s darkening influence. The full procedure of preparing bread from wheat involves ten steps. This is one of the reasons why we hold the bread with ten fingers and recite a blessing for bread that consists of ten words (“*HaMotzi*”) before eating it.

The wheat stalk’s song carries a message of inspiration. Sometimes, one has to descend to the depths of misery

in order to reach the heights. A difficult period in life is not a reason to halt prayer and communication with Hashem. In the depths, it is time to call from the depths of the heart, from the pure core of the soul. Greatness awaits.

- Sources: *Bereishis Rabbah* (13:19); *Perek B'Shir* (by *Rav Chaim Kanievsky*); *Zimras HaShamayim V'HaAretz*; *Zohar* (*Bamidbar* 247a and *Devarim* 265b); *Chessed L'Avraham* (1:19; see there further); *Nefesh HaChaim* (1:18); *Maharash*; *Nachalei Devash*; *Abudraham* (*Birkas HaLechem V'HaPas*)
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- \*In loving memory of *Harav Zeev Shlomo ben Zecharia Leib*

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## TALMUD TIPS

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by Rabbi Moshe Newman

### Yevamot 16-50

#### How To Be Holy

Rava says that holiness is achieved by sanctifying oneself by abstaining, at times, from what is actually permitted to do, eat or say.

Rava gave this definition in regard to the term “*kedusha* prohibitions,” which was coined by some Sages to describe distant relatives forbidden to marry per Rabbinic law. “*Kedusha*” means holiness, and perhaps is better translated as “maintaining separation.” It is applied to the laws our Sages instituted to be a “fence around the Torah” to ensure that the Jewish People would not marry relatives that are forbidden by Torah law.

The *nazir*, who abstains from drinking kosher wine, is referred to in the Torah as *kadosh* – a holy one. Yje Maharsha notes that similarly, the Rabbinic laws banning certain marriages permitted by the Torah are laws of holiness.

Rava’s basic definition of holiness has been applied by the great Torah ethicists to virtually every aspect of life. Only when one is prepared to sacrifice even what is permitted to him in order to discipline and elevate himself can he be considered as truly holy.

- *Yevamot 20a*

#### Righteous Converts

Rabbi Elazar said, “Why did our Sages say that converts to Judaism were not accepted in the glorious days of King David and King Shlomo, and that they also will not they accepted in the days of the Mashiach? The Prophet Yeshayahu (54:15) declared in the Name of Hashem, “Those who become converts when I appear to *not* be with you (i.e. in these days of trouble - Rashi) will merit to be with you in the World to Come.”

During the days of David Hamelech and Shlomo Hamelech, the Jewish People were the envy of all nations, with their unprecedented spiritual and earthly wealth and success. It was only natural for people of other nations to want to convert to share in this glory. However, conversion requires a sincere desire to take shelter under the wings of the Divine Presence, as it were, something virtually impossible to discern during that era.

- *Yevamot 24b*

### A Fence That Will Guard

Abayei said, “Our Sages sometimes were stricter in enforcing the laws they made than they were with regard to Torah laws.”

The commentaries explain this phenomenon in the following manner. With the passage of time, the experience of our standing together as nation when Hashem gave the Torah on Mount Sinai unfortunately became a less intense memory to some. As a result, our Sages enacted certain rules to help ensure optimal Torah observance and closeness to Hashem. However, human nature being as it is, some may view these enactments as less binding than Torah laws and not treat them with the necessary seriousness. Therefore, our Sages needed to be stricter and more vigilant regarding laws of Rabbinic origin than the Torah laws. If they would not do this, their efforts to have continuity of Torah observance throughout the ages would be in jeopardy.

- *Yevamot 36b*

### Marital Treachery

*We have learned in a beraita: Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov says, “One should not marry a woman whom he intends to divorce.”*

In the same *beraita*, Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov explains that he bases this teaching on a verse in *Mishlei* (3:29), “One should not secretly plot evil against another who trusts him enough to live with him.”

However, the commentaries refer us to another *gemara* (*Gittin* 90a), where this same verse is applied by Rava to forbid a man to live with his wife if he is secretly planning to divorce her. The children from a marriage with this despicable thought in mind will be negatively affected in character (although possible for them to remedy), and are referred to elsewhere in *Shas* as “the offspring of one with divorce in his heart.” (*Nedarim* 20b)

- *Yevamot 37b*

### Good Days and Better Days for Teshuva

Rav Nachman said in the name of Rabbah bar Avuha, “When the Torah rhetorically asks, 'Who is like Hashem, our G-d, whenever we call to Him' (*Devarim* 4:7), it refers to the repentance and prayer of the *many*, while the limiting time-frame of the Prophet Yeshayahu (54:6) 'to seek Hashem when He makes Himself available to you' refers to the *individual*, who has a special opportunity to repent during the ten days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.”

- *Yevamot 49b*

**For many other articles regarding the Pesach themes and ways to enhance your Pesach experience**

**See <https://ohr.edu/holidays/pesach/>**

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# LETTER AND SPIRIT

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

## Israel's Magna Charta

If we were to point to one act as the moment of the birth of our nation, it would be the *korban Pesach*, undertaken by our ancestors more than three thousand years ago. The words conveying this instruction is, in Rav Hirsch's words, the Magna Charta of Israel, setting forth the foundational elements of Jewish service. Below we present some of those fundamental teachings.

The instruction specifies that *every individual* must participate. Judaism is not a "representative religion." The nation is built on the personal awareness and practice of every individual member. Yet, all members participated in the same service at the same time, creating a unified nation with a singular mission. The lamb – the most docile and pliant of the domesticated animals – was the object of the offering. The lamb, because of its joyful submission to the guidance of its shepherd, served as a symbol of what the Jew was to become vis-à-vis Hashem. As sheep of His pasture, each individual and the nation as a whole stood in devoted obedience before His guidance.

Each *home* was to have a lamb. But the instruction, as written, alludes both to a parent's home (*seh labeit avot*) and to an individual's own future home (*seh labayit*). A Jewish home is built on the foundations of the parents' home, where the ethical guidance and moral mission of man is taught. Even more than houses of

study, we are instructed: *Create homes!* Human affairs – from the most sublime to the most ordinary – are entrusted to the clean hands, pure minds and unsullied spirit of the loving Jewish home. No bastion of education or cultural establishment can ever take the place of the Jewish home.

But if the house is *too small* to consume an entire lamb, then he is to go to his neighbor and divide up the lamb in accordance with the number of individuals. Family comes first – he takes care of his own household first, from the blessings which Hashem has bestowed. But if that blessing is too large for the size of his family, the Torah teaches to join with one's neighbor. It is not need, but overabundance; not destitution, but longing for love; not sympathy but duty which unites the homes of the Jewish people! It is not the *poor* man that seeks out the rich, but the *rich* man who seeks out the poor to apply the surplus blessing granted to him.

Our national birth was realized when we assumed the role of the sheep, adopting the fundamentals of nationhood. With these commitments, we become the loyal flock, led by the Shepherd, over high and low pastures, through centuries and millennia, up to the eternal goal.

- *Sources: Collected Writings I, pp. 103-111*

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# PARSHA INSIGHTS

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by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

## Metzora

### Fit to Print

*“This will be the torah (the law) of the Metzora...” (14:2)*

It always fascinates me how exactly the same amount of news takes place every day. The proof for this is that every day the newspapers contain exactly the same number of pages.

In 1887, Adolph Ochs, the new proprietor of the New York Times, coined the phrase, "All the news that's fit to print", which would be better phrased as "All the news that fits, and if it doesn't fit, I'm sure we can add a little bit here and there."

In fact, most of the news that's printed is far from fit to print. The stock in trade of most newspapers is gossip, be it financial gossip or entertainment biz gossip or political gossip or sports gossip, or just plain gossip gossip.

In Jewish Law, gossip, even when true, is prohibited. No word can emerge from our lips before it is vetted to make sure that it's 'fit to print'.

The *Chovot HaLevavot* explains that when someone speaks slander or gossips, the sins of the victim are transferred to the slanderer, and the Torah and good deeds of the slanderer accrue to the account of the victim. We learn this from a verse in this week's Torah portion: *“This will be the torah (law) of the Metzora on the day of his purification...”* This means that on the day he purifies himself and repents for speaking slander, his Torah is considered his own again. However, until he does this, the merit of his Torah belongs to his victim.

In Europe before the war, Rabbi Zvi Dovid, the head of the Krakow Beit Din, fell prey to a tide of untrue rumors and gossip. Disparaging comments could be heard from all quarters, the lies even emanated from the local taverns.

That Shabbat, the Rabbi stood up to address the congregation, "King David said in *Tehillim*, 'Those who sit by the gate talk about me and make up drinking songs of drunkards'." Said Rabbi Zvi Dovid, "Seemingly, King David is only concerned because *ruffians* that sit by the gate talk slander about him. Would he be any the happier were great rabbis to talk about him thus?"

The Rabbi concluded, "Actually, were Torah scholars to have spoken badly of King David he would have been able to console himself that all their Torah and good deeds would be transferred to 'his account.' In the situation in which I find myself, however, I seriously doubt how much Torah and mitzvahs will accrue to me – so I am losing out in this world and the next."

▪ Source: *Iturei Torah*

## Acharei Mot

### The Power of Silence

“Any person shall not be in the Tent of Meeting when he (Aharon) comes to provide atonement in the Sanctuary...” (16:17)

The Kohen Gadol, the High Priest, would come into the Holy of Holies only once a year, and his first service in that awesome place and on that awesome day was not to seek forgiveness for the people for the sins of spiritual contamination, of rebellion either through desire or even for thoughts of atheism, or for that matter, any sin between man and God. Rather, it was to seek atonement for gossip and slander – the sins that destroy the cohesion of society, that break the bond between one person and another.

The tongue can give life and the tongue can kill as it says in Mishlei, Proverbs (18:21), “Death and life and in the hand of the tongue.” The agency of the atonement on Yom Kippur is through the *ketoret* – the spice offering. It is the nose that senses the *ketoret*, and it is the nose that can discern between life and death. Life was breathed into man through his nostrils, and thus the first organ that can detect the absence of life – death – is the nose. When things die, they smell offensive, and nothing is more offensive than a human cadaver, the greatest recipient of life.

It is specifically Aharon who can bring atonement for the sins of the mouth because it was Aharon who was able to be silent in the face of the greatest tragedy, when he lost two sons on the same day, as it says, “And Aharon was silent...” (10:3)

## Kedoshim

### Being Holy

“You shall be holy...” (19:2)

Rabbi Yonatan Eybeschutz was born in Cracow (Poland) in the year 5450 (1690). Apart from being a genius in Torah, he was also greatly esteemed by prominent non-Jewish scholars, among them the Jesuit bishop Hasselbauer. Rabbi Eybeschutz used his good offices to obtain permission from the bishop to print the Talmud which had been forbidden by the Church who charged that the Talmud had anti-Christian references. One of these references was the Gemara in Yevamot (60b) that says that the Jewish People “are called ‘man’ and the nations of the world are not called ‘man.’”

The bishop took deep and dangerous offence to this Gemara and accused Reb Yonatan that the Jews were racist and hated non-Jews.

Rabbi Yonatan replied that there were four Hebrew expressions for man: *Enosh*, *gever*, *ish*, and *adam*. The plural of *enosh* is *anashim*. The plural of *gever* is *gevarim*, the plural of *ish* is *ishim*. The word *adam* has no plural. There is no such word as *adam-im*. When the Gemara says that we are called *adam* and the nations of the



world are not called *adam*, it is not because they are less human than us. Rather, the Jewish People are, in essence, one. We all come from the same soul root.

I am writing this after just returning from the funeral of Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky, *zatzal*, a person who embodied what it means to be *adam*.

I had the merit to meet Reb Chaim only once. I guess I'm something of what is known as, in Yeshiva circles, "a cold Lithuanian Jew." I am not impressed by stories of miracle-working and near supernatural powers. But to me it seemed that Reb Chaim's face radiated light. No exaggeration. "*You shall be holy.*"

Reb Chaim showed us what it meant to be *adam*.

## Emor

### Beyond the Four-Minute Mile

*"...for each one is holy to his G-d." (21:7)*

"When I was a youngster in Illinois in the 1950s, the world of sport was shocked by the feat of Roger Bannister...On May 6, 1954 he broke the four-minute barrier in the mile. While improving upon the world record by only a few seconds, he changed the complexion of distance running in a single afternoon... Track records fell like ripe apples in the late 50's and 60's. Will the same happen to the field of Cancer treatment?"

Dr Bruce Chabner wrote this in 2001 about the then revolutionary Cancer treatment Gleevec in "The Oncologic Four-Minute Mile."

"Chabner's analogy was carefully chosen. Bannister's mile remains a touchstone in the history of athletics not because it was a record that could never be broken, as the current fastest mile is a good fifteen seconds under Bannister's. For generations, four minutes was thought to represent an intrinsic physiological limit, as if muscles could not be made to move any faster or lungs breathe any deeper. What Bannister proved was that such notions about the intrinsic boundaries are mythical. What he broke permanently was not a limit, but the idea of limits."

Rarely are we limited by our limitations. Usually, we are limited by the limitations we place on our limits. As much as this is true in athletics or the search for a Cancer cure, it is equally true in our spirituality. If we would but realize that each one of us is capable of reaching not only further than we think, but further than we could dream, we would run our own spiritual four-minute mile in record time.