

וְהָיָה
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THE PATH
TO FOLLOW

Nº 130
TAZRIA-METZORA
24 NISSAN 5766
APRIL.22.2006

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**“WHO TEACHES US MORE THAN THE ANIMALS OF THE EARTH
AND MAKES US WISER THAN THE BIRDS OF HEAVEN?”**

On the verse, “When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male” (Leviticus 12:2), Rashi brings the following Midrash: “Rabbi Simlai said: ‘Just as the creation of man [took place] after that of every animal, beast and bird in the work of Creation, so too are his laws specified after the laws of the animal, beast and bird’ ” (Vayikra Rabba 14:1). One may consult the book Nitfei Maim on this subject.

This demands an explanation. With respect to the work of Creation, we can understand why man was created on the sixth day, after the creation of land animals and bird. The Gemara explains that it was necessary that man find everything prepared so as to immediately observe the mitzvah of Shabbat (Sanhedrin 38a). It was also necessary that he could be told, in case he became arrogant, that even a flea was created before him. Finally, it was in order that man not claim that he had participated in the work of Creation [for it is only man who testifies to Creation by reciting, “The sixth day. And the heavens and the earth and all their hosts were completed,” thus becoming a partner with G-d in the work of Creation (Shabbat 119b)]. Man was created on the sixth day for all these reasons. Nevertheless, why are the laws that concern man here given after those concerning animals? What does the Torah teach us by this, and would that change if the subject of man and his leprosy were mentioned before the subject of animals?

The answer is that the Torah in this way enjoins us to learn a few basic principles from domestic and wild animals, as it is written: “Who teaches us more than the animals of the earth and makes us wiser than the birds of heaven?” (Job 35:11). I will elaborate on this idea point by point:

1. The simple fact that animals and birds exist proves G-d’s existence, Who gives each of them their nourishment, as it is written: “He gives to an animals its food, to young ravens that cry out” (Psalms 147:9). How much more does He nourish man, who is the work of His hands (Kohelet Rabba 3:14)? This is why we always find animals and birds near man: Their mission

is to constantly remind him that if G-d sees to their needs, He will also sees to his.

2. We may also learn the importance of self-sacrifice from animals, for they demonstrate extraordinary loyalty. For example, the frogs in Egypt went into each nook and cranny, including burning stoves, to obey G-d’s command (Pesachim 53b). We find the same behavior with Hanania, Mishael, and Azaria, who in Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylon gave their lives for the sanctification of G-d’s Name, for they reasoned a fortiori on the basis of the frogs’ behavior. The Torah also mentions dogs during the exodus from Egypt: “But against the Children of Israel, no dog shall whet its tongue” (Exodus 11:7). How is it possible for the Children of Israel to have entered and left the Egyptians’ homes without a dog even growling (see Shemot Rabba 14:3)? The answer is that the dogs clearly understood that such was G-d’s will, and they loyally obeyed Him. In addition, the Zohar asserts that when a serpent appears, it only does so at G-d’s command, for it too acts loyally (Zohar II: 68b). When the prophet Elijah sacrificed one ox to G-d and a second to Baal on Mount Carmel (I Kings 18:23), the ox destined for Baal protested that it did not want to go (Yalkut Shimoni ibid. 214). Elijah then said to it, “In the same way that G-d’s Name will be sanctified by the other ox, it will also be sanctified by you,” and it unselfishly consented. All people can and must learn self-sacrifice from animals and birds in order to be inspired, and they must constantly strive to sanctify G-d’s Name.

3. There are also many traits to be learned from animals, as the Sages have said: “If the Torah had not been given, we would have learned modesty from the cat, honesty from the ant, chastity from the dove, and good manners from the rooster” (Eruvin 100b).

The lesson is clear: When a person becomes boastful, we may say to him: “Even a flea was created before you” (we don’t tell him this if we know beforehand that he won’t heed

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our words, for we only admonish those who listen). Similarly, from animals a person should learn to conduct himself with self-sacrifice, for an animal's devotion goes to the point of accepting to be sacrificed for man. Otherwise, when a person commits a sin, why would an animal be sacrificed for him? It is only because of self-sacrifice.

Commenting on the meaning of the sacrifices, the Ramban writes on Leviticus 1:9 that when an animal is being slaughtered, a person should realize that everything being done to it should really have been done to him, for the entire aim of a sacrifice is for a person to examine his life. The Rambam, however, believes that sacrifices uniquely teach us not to behave as non-Jews (Moreh Nevuchim 3:46) who worship different kinds of animals. According to him, sacrifices exist only to teach man to not devote himself to materialism or desires.

Thus people learn from animals that G-d constantly watches over them, that there has no reason to be proud, and that one also must generously give of himself. Animals also teach us that there is no reason to sin, since they are carrying out Hashem's will. This is why the laws dealing with animals are mentioned before those dealing with people (with respect to sacrifices), showing us just to what point animals give of themselves by allowing to be sacrificed in our place. It was also for this reason that they were created before man, namely to be ready to be sacrificed if man sins (so that he may continue to live), for the world was created primarily for man (Shabbat 30b). The Midrash also states that the word bereshith (normally translated as "in the beginning") means, "for Israel, which is called reshith [first fruit]," hence the world was created for the Jewish people (Bereshith Rabba 1:4).

This is absolutely amazing. If there were no sacrifices, or if man had been created before animals and had sinned at that time, he would have incurred death. In reflecting upon this, we fully understand why man was not created before animals. It was necessary that he see all of Creation, so that by understanding that everything existed for him, he would not become filled with pride, which would show him the pathway to repentance.

G-d is obviously aware of man's nature, which is to become filled with pride. This is what may happen to him if he sees all of Creation, for he will imagine himself to be of great importance. This is why he was created last. Thus if he boasts, he can be told that even a mosquito was created before him. Furthermore, he can learn self-sacrifice and good behavior from animals. Even though it is easier for animals to control themselves, since they have no evil inclination (contrary to man), this can also be the case in man, for the Torah was given to him in order that he fight the evil inclination. In the words of the Gemara, "I created the evil inclination, and I created the Torah as its remedy" (Kiddushin 30b).

According to what we have said, we may understand the command that G-d gave to the Children of Israel at the time of the exodus from Egypt, namely: "On the tenth of this month they

shall take for themselves – each man – a lamb for each father's house" (Exodus 12:3). Furthermore, G-d commanded that they attach their lambs to their beds in view of the Egyptians, and then to slaughter the lambs before the eyes of the Egyptians, who witnessed all this yet did nothing (Zohar I:256a). Now as we know, the lamb was an Egyptian god (Shemot Rabba 11:4), and the Sages considered this incident to be miraculous, which is one of reasons why this Shabbat is called Shabbat Hagadol (the Great Shabbat).

All this becomes clear in light of the Rambam and Ramban's views on the reasons for sacrifices. According to the Rambam, G-d wanted the Children of Israel to discard their Egyptian concepts. We said that those idolaters took animals as their gods and worshipped them, thus when lambs were attached to the beds of the Children of Israel, the Egyptians were forced to conclude that lambs were simply animals that possessed no divinity whatsoever, and so only G-d is worthy of worship. Furthermore, when the Children of Israel slaughtered their lambs, they dealt a deathblow to the idea that an animal could be divine, for their hearts harbored none of the beliefs held by the Egyptians. This was also the reason why G-d commanded them to take the blood of a lamb and to put it on the doorposts and lintel of their homes (Exodus 12:7), signifying that they saw no importance in the lamb's blood (which symbolized divine vitality to the Egyptians), and that they only believed in Hashem. This act of faith would earn them deliverance, for G-d would pass over their doors and not let the destroying angel strike them (v.23), for they proved that they did not believe in pagan divinities, but rather in G-d alone.

If we go according to the view of the Ramban, we may say that the goal of sacrifices is to restore the Children of Israel from impurity, meaning that the fact they attached lambs teaches that a person should always stay attached to the service of G-d by giving his best, just as the lamb that was to be slaughtered for G-d. This also demonstrated that lambs (which the Egyptians considered as gods) really only exist to heal and serve man (Tanna D'vei Eliyahu Rabba 1). Thus the Children of Israel merited deliverance, for they courageously attached lambs to their beds without fear of the Egyptians, to the point that the latter could do them no harm.

From all this emerges the idea that when a person performs a mitzvah without reservation, he will end up being saved and a miracle will be performed for him. However this is only on condition that his mitzvah performance is complete, without awaiting a miracle, for "Whoever gives his life believing that a miracle will be performed for him, that person will not see one" (Sifra Vayikra 22:32). A person must act solely to sanctify G-d's Name, which is why G-d commanded that the blood be placed on the doorposts and lintel of their homes. The blood alludes to the warmth of the body when a person unselfishly carries out a mitzvah, to the extent that this mitzvah taught the Children of Israel to behave valiantly, without fearing the Egyptians. We learn all this from the laws concerning animals.

IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM

RABBI AVRAHAM TZVI KAMAI – THE LAST RAV OF MIR

In the Diaspora there have been communities large and small that have gained worldwide renown because they were places of Torah.

One of these blessed places was the small town of Mir. It earned everlasting renown in the Jewish world by the merit of the light of Torah that burned there for more than a hundred years, specifically in the famous Mir yeshiva, known around the world.

The city of Mir also knew many great rabbis, rich in Torah and wisdom. The last Rav of the city was Rabbi Avraham Tzvi Kamai, known for his scholarship as well as his sterling character traits and good deeds. He was pure and wise, possessed of great humility. Everyone loved him because of his refinement and natural goodness.

Rabbi Avraham Tzvi was born in 5620 (1860) in the small Lithuanian town of Shkod. His father, Rabbi Eliyahu Baruch, was a great Rav and famous Rosh Yeshiva. From childhood he demonstrated an extraordinary memory and a sharp sense of comprehension, and he was known as a child prodigy. By nature he was a frail boy with a pale complexion, and his father did not want to send him to study at the yeshiva that was far from their house. The boy therefore stayed at home while his father taught him Torah. He acquired great understanding in the Talmud and Poskim, and while still young he was already known as a Torah great.

After his marriage to the daughter of Rabbi Moshe Grodzinski, he continued to study Torah day and night. He did not wish to become a Rav or to use the Torah for personal ends, for by nature his was a noble and sensitive soul, very humble and fleeing from honor.

He chose to earn a living by opening a pharmacy in the city of Keidan, and thus the Gaon and Tzaddik Rabbi Avraham Tzvi became a pharmacist. The residents of Keidan preferred to buy their medicines at the Rav and Tzaddik, their “pharmacist,” for they believed that luck would accompany them in so doing, bringing them a complete and speedy healing. When the Prime Minister of Czarist Russian, Peter Stolypin, was passing through the Keidan region, he too would personally go and purchase his medicines at the “Talmudist,” for he also believed that the pharmacist’s medicines brought healing.

When the Rav of Keidan passed away, the residents of the town came to the pharmacist and asked him to become their new Rav. Rabbi Avraham Tzvi, who during his entire life fled from that position, as well as from all forms of honor, at first did not even want to hear of this. He felt that he had already spent the majority of his life as a simple man, a pharmacist, and he did not want to accept the responsibility for a community in his old age. However after extremely vigorous insistence, he agreed to become their Rav, but only on condition that he could continue to live off the earnings that he made from his pharmacy.

When word began to circulate that in Keidan, an important Jewish center at the time, the town pharmacist had been appointed as Rav, people understood that this pharmacist was a Gaon and a Tzaddik. Everyone marveled at the fact that he had managed to hide his greatness in Torah. This tremendous modesty accompanied him throughout his life, even when he became known in the yeshiva world upon succeeding his father, the Gaon Rabbi Eliyahu Baruch, as the Av Beit Din and Rosh Yeshiva of Mir.

His father Rabbi Eliyahu Baruch passed away in Minsk during the First World War. All the Torah greats of the generation, as well as hundreds of rabbis who had taken refuge in Mir, attended the funeral. Included among them were Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik, Rabbi Raphael Shapira of Volozhin, Rav Shapira of Kovno and others. In his eulogy, the Gaon

Rabbi Eliezer Rabinowitz (“the Gadol of Minsk”) announced the appointment of Rabbi Avraham Tzvi, the Rav of Keidan, as the Av Beit Din and Rosh Yeshiva of Mir. He stated, “Standing alive before us is Rabbi Eliyahu Baruch, one thirty years younger than the Rabbi Eliyahu Baruch that has left us.” Rabbi Avraham Tzvi then contested the words of the Gadol of Minsk by saying that there was absolutely no comparison between himself and his father.

A new phase of his life began in Mir. He was loved by the entire community, as well as by anyone who came into contact with him. The Rav’s home was open to all, and whoever came to ask for help was warmly received. Even though he was immersed in four cubits of Halachah, he never neglected community affairs. He was like a devoted father to the residents of Mir and its yeshiva students. A resident of Mir once caught tuberculosis, and his doctors ordered him to leave his small apartment and to go live in a larger place. The Rav had the man come and live with him, and he cared for him as if he were his own son. The man stayed there until his dying day.

Doctors once forbid the Rav’s sister to fast on Yom Kippur. Before the fast, he went to pay her a visit and saw that this prohibition caused her great heartache. He therefore told her, “I am ready to switch with you: I will give you the mitzvah for my fast on Yom Kippur in exchange for your mitzvah of eating. I’ll even add a few mitzvot on my part.”

While still a famous Rav and Rosh Yeshiva, who counted among his students hundreds of rabbis and Talmidei Chachamim, Rabbi Avraham Tzvi acted like a friend and brother with each of his students and the residents of Mir. He never angered anyone, and no harsh words ever left his mouth. Wisdom illuminated his face, and through his sweet and pleasant language he brought hearts closer to Torah and the fear of Heaven. He understood the ways of this world and was aware of everything that was going on around him, yet he remained innocent, upright, and pure in heart.

Rabbi Avraham Tzvi once went into a bookstore and wanted to purchase a book of kinot for Tisha B’Av. The book dealer asked a price of 40 zlotys. The Rav bargained and proposed a price of 20 zlotys. Surprised, the book dealer said to the Rav, “Excuse me, but you’ve purchased hundreds of books from me in the past, and you’ve always paid without discussing the price. What happened today?” The Rav replied, “I purchased the other books to last my entire life. However I’ve purchased this book of kinot for this year only, for next year Mashiach will arrive and I will no longer need kinot. For a single year, 20 zlotys are enough.”

When the Second World War erupted, the Mir yeshiva moved to Vilna, but the Rav said that he would stay with the community and suffer along with it.

On Heshvan 19, 5702 (Nov 9, 1941) 2,300 Jews of Mir were murdered – men, women, and children – along with their Rav and leader, the Gaon and Tzaddik Rabbi Avraham Tzvi Kamai.

Rav Zalman Miranker, a native of Mir, recounts what happened at that time: “When all the residents were assembled to be brought towards the trenches dug on the outskirts of town, the Rav said to all the Jews, ‘Let us accept all of this with love, as did the Tanna Rabbi Akiva, who at his final hour accomplished “ ‘With all your soul’ – even if He takes your soul!’ ” ”

Rabbi Avraham Tzvi Kamai was 82 years old when he met death as a martyr. May G-d avenge his blood.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY FROM THE MAGGID OF DUBNO

Yalkut: It is written, “To relate your kindness in the dawn and your faith in the nights” (Psalms 92:3). What enables Israel to attain the joy of the World to Come? It is the faith that they demonstrate in this present world, which is entirely night.

To understand this, let us first examine an idea contained in the Talmud:

“Rabbi Chiyya ben Abba said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: ‘All the prophets only prophesized about the days of the Messiah. As for the World to Come, however, “No eye has seen it, O L-RD, but You” [Isaiah 64:3]’ ” (Sanhedrin 99a).

Many thinkers have pondered over the fact that nothing is written concerning punishment in the hereafter, to the point that we may say, “No eye has seen it.” However we must remember that there may be two ways of comparing two different things: Either one is a little worse than the other (yet both are generally the same), or one is of immeasurably greater quality than the other.

Let us illustrate this with a parable:

When we go to a store and find some merchandise that is not particularly beautiful, but not damaged either, and in another store we find the same type of merchandise, yet it is full of defects, it is obvious that if we are going to purchase something, it will be from the first store, not the second. However it sometimes happens that we find exceptionally beautiful merchandise in the second store. If that is the case, then it is obvious that we must purchase this second store’s merchandise, even though the merchandise sold in the first store is perfectly acceptable. Almost despite himself, the owner of the second store draws the buyer’s attention to the enormous advantage of purchasing such beautiful merchandise, and so he boasts about its qualities. Otherwise, why would he not purchase merchandise from the first store, since it has no discernable defects? Alternatively, if one store has terrible merchandise that is full of defects, whereas at another store the opposite is true and its merchandise is of impeccable quality, this is a case of two opposites: Some merchandise is exceptionally good, while the other merchandise is exceptionally bad. There will then be two reasons for the buyer to make his purchase at the second store, and the owner will not need to convince him to buy it. Clients will come to his store in any case!

If this present world were good and the World to Come even better, the Holy One, blessed be He, would show us what the World to Come has to offer. This would be in order that, by making us aware of it, we would strive to obtain it. However since this present world reveals the concept expressed by the verse, “A twisted thing cannot be made straight” (Ecclesiastes 1:15) – whereas the World to Come is infinitely good and pleasant – why does Hashem need to extol its virtues? Even if the World to Come were not so amazing, it would still be worth clinging to the Torah, be it only to be delivered from the dangers of this present world. However a person achieves the realization that this present world is “entirely night” only by the faith he demonstrates in the Torah. This is why this “faith in the nights” (Psalms 92:3) allows Israel to attain the joy of the World to Come.

THE STORY OF THE WEEK THE POWER OF A SIGH

The Baal Shem Tov recounted the following story to his disciples:

Two neighbors lived in a single residence. One of them was a scholar and the other a blacksmith. Both of them arose before dawn for their occupations: One went to the Beit Midrash to study, while the other went to the metal shop to work.

When the time for breakfast arrived, these two men both went home. On the way, the blacksmith hurried to the Beit Midrash in order to “grab” a quick morning prayer. Each day the two neighbors met one another on the way. A slight smile of self-content could be seen on the face of the scholar, and his eyes conveyed a certain look of disdain for his neighbor, as if he were thinking: “We both work hard. I study a few pages of Gemara, purify myself in the mikveh before prayer, and my prayer is said calmly and with concentration, as if I were counting money, whereas for him....”

On the other hand, the face of the blacksmith was filled with worry, and his eyes expressed the suffering he felt. It was as if they were saying, “Woe to my years that are going up in smoke! My neighbor has certainly filled himself with much Torah today, while as for me – what have I filled my life with? I’m always next to the anvil, always with horseshoes and horses. What’s going to become of me?”

Years passed, and both men left this world and were called before the Celestial Court to answer for their deeds. The Talmid Chacham was summoned first to give his accounting. He approached with an air of confidence, his head held high and sure of himself. He said, “Supreme judges, I am not coming before you as one poor and needy. I have learned much Torah and performed many mitzvot. Each day before the rooster crowed, I was seated before the Gemara. I unified the Names of G-d during prayer, and I was meticulous in carrying out mitzvot, both easy and difficult.”

Angels for the defense emerged from the Celestial Treasury carrying a stack of all the pages of Gemara that he studied during his lifetime, and they placed them on the right side of a balance. They also added his prayers and yihudim, all being verified and weighed. There was no doubt that the judges would grant him an honorable place in Gan Eden. However before the supreme judge opened his mouth, the accuser raised his hand and said, “The Celestial Treasury contains a slight smile of self-content and a look of disdain that this Talmid Chacham had on his face whenever he encountered his neighbor the blacksmith.” All while saying this, the accuser took out this smile and deposited it on the left side of the balance. It too was also carefully verified and weighed, and it turned out that this small smile was so weighty that it tilted the balance to the left, such that the scholar’s sentence was one of condemnation!

The scholar departed and in his place the blacksmith came forth with great sobs. His head was lowered, and with a soft voice he said, “I stand before you, equitable judges, as a vessel filled with shame. I did not learn Torah, and my prayers were always said in haste. All the days of my life, from the wee hours of the morning until late at night, I put horseshoes on horses and greased wheels. On my neck I carried the yoke of providing for my family, since I had a wife to feed and daughters to marry off.”

When the blacksmith finished speaking, the angels brought the two bags that accompany all men. On the right side of the balance they placed his bag of mitzvot, and on the left his sins. This time as well, the weight of each mitzvah, as well as the nature of each sin, was verified and weighed, and the balance swung from right to left. The defending angel then came forward and said, “I kept a sigh in reserve, a small ‘woe’ that escaped the blacksmith’s heart whenever he saw his neighbor the scholar, a sigh of grief for not being able to study Torah like him. May this sigh be regarded in his merit!”