
The Aura of Torah

*A Kabbalistic-Hasidic Commentary
to the Weekly Readings*

RABBI LARRY TABICK



[73] Harnessing Our Drives

“Command [tsav] Aaron and his sons. . .”

Leviticus 6:2

CONTEXT

Leviticus 6 opens with the rules for the disposal of the ashes of the whole burnt offering.

The Seer of Lublin, in Poland, was so called because of his reputation for second sight. He was one of the leading lights in the fourth generation of the Hasidic movement, having studied with Elimelech of Lyzhansk. In turn, he inspired, and challenged, an important group of Hasidic leaders of the next generation.

Look, *tsav* [command] is an expression denoting idolatry, as in [the phrase] “precept upon precept [tsav latzav]” [Isaiah 28:10,13]. Look here, we are explaining [the verse] “and in sin did my mother conceive me [yechematni]” [Psalm 51:7], for repentance is called a “mother” because through it a person becomes as if reborn as a new being. Now it is known you need great desire to serve heaven, and that desire comes from the side of the inclination toward evil. Hence, “and in sin did my mother conceive me [yeCHeMatni]” — giving me warmth [CHIM-MuM] for God, to serve God with enthusiasm. Hence, “Command [tsav] Aaron and his sons. . .” — an expression denoting the zeal and desire that come from the inclination toward evil indicated by *tsav*.

Ya’akov Yitzchak HaLevi Horowitz, the Seer of Lublin (1745–1815), *Divrei Emet* [Words of truth (Ecclesiastes 12:10)] (Ashdod, 2004), p. 81b

NOTES

“Precept upon precept [tsav latzav]” [Isaiah 28:10]. From an attack upon the drunkenness of priests and prophets. JPS: “mutter upon mutter.” “And in sin did my mother conceive me [yeCHeMatni].” The Seer reinterprets this phrase to mean: “and through sin, repentance gives me enthusiasm to serve God.”

Desire comes from the side of the inclination toward evil. See *Kohelet Rabbah* 3:15: “If not for the inclination toward evil, no one would build a house, marry, or have children.” Idolatry stems from the inclination toward evil, but, paradoxically, so does the desire to serve God.

“Command [tsav] Aaron and his sons.” As if to say, “Use the enthusiasm derived from the inclination toward evil to serve God as Aaron and his sons did.”

COMMENT

By juxtaposing virtually identical words from quite different contexts, the Seer of Lublin arrives at the notion that our enthusiasm for God derives in fact from our less admirable attributes: our tendency toward idolatry (materialism) and, he implies, lust.

These unsavory aspects of all of us, referred to by the Rabbinic term *yetzer ha-ra* (inclination toward evil), must not be denied but harnessed to the service of God, so that we can bring the same enthusiasm and energy to serving God that we would certainly have brought to pursuing those unworthy goals. A difficult task, but a necessary one, if our service is not to be cold and devoid of passion.

[74] Torah Is What We Make of It

“This is the Torah for the burnt offering [olah], for the meal offering [minchah], for the sin [offering], and for the guilt [offering]. . .”

Leviticus 7:37

CONTEXT

The last verses of Leviticus 7 are the conclusion of the laws of sacrifices begun in chapter 1.

Yisra'el Friedman of Ruzhyn was the great-grandson of Dov Ber, the Maggid of Mezritch, and a well-known Hasidic teacher in his own right. He was persecuted for many years by the Czarist authorities, eventually settling in Sadgora in the Austrian Empire. The dynasty he founded continues to this day.

For the truth is that concerning a person who studies the Torah for its own sake and in order to perform its commandments it is said, “[For the ways of the Eternal are upright;] the righteous walk on them” [Hosea 14:10], while if the opposite [is the case], it is said, “But the wicked stumble on them” [Hosea 14:10]. Hence, the explanation of [the verse] “this is the Torah”—sometimes [it is] “for ascent [*olah*]” and “for a gift [*minchah*]” and sometimes [it is] “for sin and for guilt.” Consider this well!

Yisra'el Friedman of Ruzhyn (1797–1850), *Irin Kadishin* [Holy angels] (n.p., 1885), pt. 2, p. 8a

NOTES

“**This is the Torah.**” The word “torah” in the original context of the verse simply indicates the teaching that follows. JPS: “Such are the rituals of the burnt offering.” The Ruzhyner makes it refer to the whole of Judaism.

“**The burnt offering [*olah*].**” *Olah* usually means “burnt offering,” but is related to the Hebrew root meaning “to ascend, go up,” presumably because virtually the entire *olah* rose upward as smoke.

“**The meal offering [*minchah*].**” *Minchah* can mean a “meal offering” or a “gift” in biblical Hebrew. (Later on, it came to designate the afternoon service.)

“**The sin [offering].**” *Chatat* can mean both “sin” and “sin offering.”

“**The guilt [offering].**” *Asham* means both “guilt” and “guilt offering.”

COMMENT

For the Ruzhyner rebbe, the Torah can either be a vehicle for raising us to new spiritual heights and a gift we offer to God, or it can be a guide to counting up our sins and adding to our guilt. In other words, it can be a source of both positive and negative feelings. The choice is up to us.

[75] Sanctifying Sight

“Moses took the breast [*chazeh*] and raised it as an elevated offering before the Eternal . . .”

Leviticus 8:29

CONTEXT

The ritual for the inauguration of the priests is described. After the sacrifice of the animals is completed, the ritual involves lifting first two cakes of unleavened bread (*matzah*) and then the breast of one of the rams.

Yisra'el ben Shmuel Taub lived in Poland and founded the Hasidic dynasty of Modzhitz. He was more famous for his emphasis on music and for the melodies he wrote than for his teachings. He died in Tel Aviv.

[The term *chazeh*] is an expression denoting “seeing” or “vision,” as in the phrase “[the vision (*chazon*) of Isaiah son of Amotz] which he saw [*chazah*]” (Isaiah 1[:1]). That is to say, “[Moses] took the *chazeh*”—seeing, “and raised it as an elevated offering before the Eternal”—this [refers] to the sanctification of sight.

Yisra'el ben Shmuel of Modzhitz (1849–1921), *Divrei Yisra'el* [Israel's words] (Tel Aviv, 1984), pt. 3, p. 45

NOTE

“**Moses took the breast [*chazeh*].**” The noun *chazeh* (“breast” or “chest”) is related to the verb *chazah* (to see) only by sound and appearance. There seems to be no lexicographic connection. As the example from Isaiah illustrates, the verb is used primarily in a prophetic or poetic context.

COMMENT

How can we sanctify sight? Surely, we have little control over what our eyes see. Actually, we have a great deal, especially nowadays when electronic media are bringing photos and videos into very nearly every part of our lives. Now, more than ever, we choose what to see. So how do we sanctify what we see? I don't think the Modzhitzer is suggesting we avert our eyes from bad events, whether in the news or in our physi-

cal vicinity. Those things cry out for our concern, and we must guard against complacency or indifference. I think he is saying that we need to try to see the good even in bad events if we can, to perceive God at work even in bad news. For even bad news can be a goad to our empathy and positive action.

Shemini

[76] It Depends on You

“This is the thing that the Eternal has commanded you to do that the glory of the Eternal may appear.”

Leviticus 9:6

CONTEXT

The previous parashah ends with a description of the seven-day inauguration ceremony for the priests. Shemini begins with the ritual undertaken on the eighth day.

The Seer of Lublin was an important link between his teacher, Elimelch of Lyzhansk, and the new Hasidic teachers of Poland in the following generation.

We have to say that this is a verse on its own, and that it is not especially intelligible. According to what is said in [the commentary by] R. Moshe Alsheich on the verse “Make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among you” [Exodus 25:1], the Holy One desired to live among us in fact, and not just in the Tabernacle. Israel desired the Tabernacle, and they presumed and expected that, through the Tabernacle, the Shechinah [the Presence of God] would come to dwell [among them], “that the Glory of the Eternal may appear.”

He told them: Do not trust in this, but only in the essential thing, which is [that] “this is the thing which the Eternal has commanded you to do”—it depends on the Torah; then “the Glory of the Eternal may appear.” No Tabernacle is required, and it is obvious that it does not depend on a Tabernacle, but only what you do of “what the Eternal has commanded you.”

Ya’akov Yitzchak HaLevi Horowitz, the Seer of Lublin (1745–1815), *Zikaron Zot* [A memorial of this] (Ashdod, 2004), p. 90