

Parshiot Tazria - HaChodesh, 5776, 2016:

Serving Hashem with Authenticity

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Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yecheiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, HaRav Yosef Shemuel ben HaRav Reuven Aharon, David ben Elazar Yehoshua, the *refuah shlaimah* of Devorah bat Chana, and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Rosh Chodesh is the topic of this week's additional Torah reading: "The L-rd spoke to Moses and to Aaron in the land of Egypt, saying: 'This month shall be to you the head of the months; to you it shall be the first of the months of the year.'" (*Sefer Shemot* 12:1- 2, this, and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*) According to the *Mechilta d'Rabbi Yishmael*, the halachic Midrash to *Sefer Shemot*, Rosh Chodesh was one of three, or perhaps four cases, wherein it was necessary for the Master of the Universe to teach Moshe by example. The other instances were *Sheratzim* (the forbidden Creeping Animals), the *Menorah* in the *Mishkan* and, according to some, the Laws of *Schechitah* (Ritual Slaughtering):

Rabbi Akiva said: this [i.e. Rosh Chodesh] was one of three subjects that proved quite difficult for Moshe, and necessitated the Omnipresent One's demonstration by example (*b'etzba*) [of all details pursuant to each topic]. This is similar in kind to, "And this is unclean for you among creeping creatures that creep on the ground..." (*Sefer Vayikra* 11:29) So, too, do we find regarding the construction of the *Menorah*: "This was the form of the Menorah..." (*Sefer Bamidbar* 8:4) There are those that say that this was the case, as well, [i.e. that Moshe needed to be taught directly by Hashem], in regard to the innate difficulties surrounding *Schechitah*. As the verse states: "And this is what you shall offer upon the altar..." (*Sefer Shemot* 8:29, *Mechilta* translation and brackets my own)

The *Mechilta* determined that these commandments involved direct instruction by Hashem to Moshe based upon the occurrence of the word "zeh" ("this") in the cited proof texts. "Zeh," it should be noted, is an expression that always connotes a sense of

immediacy and of seeing something of great import. Therefore, at the miracle of *Kriyat Yam Suf* (the Splitting of the Sea of Reeds), our ancestors proclaimed, “**Zeh kali v'anvahu**” (“This is my G-d, and I will glorify Him,” *Sefer Shemot* 15:2).

At this juncture, we might well ask, “Why did each of these *mitzvot* prove such daunting challenges to Moshe?” In addition, “What, if any, quality do they share in common?” I believe we can answer both of these questions with one answer: In my estimation, Rosh Chodesh, the Creeping Animals (*Sheratzim*), the *Menorah* and the Laws of *Schechitah* share the common thread of great complexity. Allow me to elaborate upon my explanation.

Rosh Chodesh is completely dependent upon the nuances of the phases of the moon for its determination. This is by no means a simple matter as, “Moon phases depend on the position of both the Sun and Moon with respect to the Earth. The four primary phases of the Moon are: new, first quarter, full and third quarter. The intermediate phases between the primary phases are waxing crescent, waxing gibbous, waning gibbous, and waning crescent.” (<http://www.timeanddate.com/calendar/aboutmoonphases.html>) Little wonder, then, that centuries later, when examining would-be unlearned witnesses in reference to the New Moon, the Mishnah teaches us: “Rabban Gamliel used to have a diagram of phases of the moon on a tablet [hung] on the wall of his upper chamber, and he used to show them to the unlearned and say, ‘Did it look like this or like this?’” (*Talmud Bavli, Rosh Hashanah* 24a, translation, *The Soncino Talmud*)

It is also very easy to understand Moshe's confusion upon hearing the names of the various *Sheratzim*, since the eight creeping animals that are mentioned in *Sefer Vayikra* 11:29-31 are comprised of mammals, amphibians, reptiles and mollusks. As such, we can certainly identify with Moshe's need for clarity from Hashem when he heard the following *pasukim* (verses):

And this is unclean for you among creeping creatures that creep on the ground: The weasel, the mouse, and the toad after its species; the hedgehog, the chameleon, the lizard, the snail, and the mole. These are the ones that are unclean for you, among all creeping creatures; anyone who touches them when they are dead will be unclean until evening.

The *Menorah* was an incredibly intricate and holy vessel, comprised of highly elaborate and stunningly beautiful parts – all forged out of one solid block of gold. Moshe was not Betzalel, the architect of the *Mishkan* and its vessels, who had the unique ability to literally visualize Hashem's word and create the blueprints to implement His commands. Nor was he Oholiab, the individual gifted with the talent and insight to ensure that Betzalel's vision would become a physical reality. (See *Sefer Shemot* 31:1 and onwards) Once again, we can hardly be surprised that Moshe needed Hashem's direct intervention to teach him the requisite halachic and aesthetic requirements of the *Menorah*. As G-d's faithful servant, he needed his Creator's help to ensure the complete fulfillment of His commands.

The Laws of *Schechitah* are numerous and challenging to master. In addition to the five *pasulim* (ritually unacceptable actions) of *Schechitah*, namely, *shehiyah* (delay or pausing of the knife), *derasah* (pressing or hacking), *chaladah* (digging or burying the knife rather than leaving it visible), *hagramah* (cutting in the wrong location on the animal's throat) and *iqqur* (tearing the esophagus or trachea), there are countless laws regarding

the sharpness and smoothness of the knife and who may or may not be a *schochet* (ritual slaughterer). The *Shulchan Aruch* of Rav Yosef Karo (1488-1575) contains 28 exceptionally detailed chapters discussing this crucial area of Halacha. Here, too, Moshe was blessed with having the Master of the Universe as his teacher.

Like *Moshe Rabbeinu* (Moshe our Teacher), we frequently face difficult and confusing halachic situations. Unlike Moshe, however, we do not have a direct line to Hashem so that He can provide us with demonstrable proof as to the correct path we must follow. Instead, we must turn to the holy and inspired words of our Sages, past and present, for guidance as to how we can authentically keep Hashem's laws. As the Rambam (Maimonides, 1135-1204) noted approximately 800 years ago:

The Supreme *Sanhedrin* in Jerusalem is the essence of the Oral Law. They are the pillars of instruction from whom statutes and judgments issue forth for the entire Jewish people. Concerning them, the Torah promises [*Sefer Devarim* 17:11]: "You shall do according to the laws which they shall instruct you..." This is a positive commandment. Whoever believes in Moses and in his Torah is obligated to make all of his religious acts dependent on this court and to rely on them. Any person who does not carry out their directives transgresses a negative commandment: "Do not deviate from any of the statements they relate to you, neither right nor left." (*Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Mamrim* I:1-2, translation, Rabbi Eliyahu Touger)

Sadly, since the destruction of the Second *Beit Hamikdash* (Holy Temple), we have been without the Supreme *Sanhedrin*. Throughout the ages, however, *Chazal* (our Sages of blessed memory) have acted as their *shlichim* (emissaries) until our own historical moment. Therefore, let us ever turn to them for guidance "in the laws which they shall instruct us," so that we, too, may face the complexities and challenges of keeping Hashem's holy Torah in a faithful and genuine manner. *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

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They may also be found on YUTorah.org using the search criteria of Etengoff and the parasha's name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email rdb718@gmail.com.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on “*Tefilah: Haskafah* and Analysis,” may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

*** I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.