

(Dvar Torah continued from the front page...)

Israelites) said "how can we sacrifice that which is an abomination to the Egyptians before their eyes and not have them stone us?" (Exodus 8:22). God responded to them: Now you will see the miracle that I perform for you. They went and set aside a lamb to keep it until the fourteenth of the month.

In the continuation of the midrash, the Egyptians see the Israelites setting aside lambs in order to slaughter them and the Egyptians want to kill the Israelites as an act of revenge. God afflicts the Egyptians with diseases and protects the Israelites. The midrash concludes, "In remembrance of this miracle performed for Israel on the Shabbat before Pesah, the Shabbat before Pesah is called Shabbat Hagadol." In summary, what makes this Shabbat "gadol" – great – is what God has done for us.

However, in other sources there is a somewhat different explanation for Shabbat Hagadol. In a work called Sefer Abudraham written in 13<sup>th</sup> century Spain we find, "It is called Shabbat Hagadol for it was on this Shabbat that the Israelites performed their first mitzvah." Using the same chronology as above, the Israelites left Egypt on Thursday, making the tenth of the month, Shabbat, the day they set aside the lamb that they would eventually sacrifice (see Exodus 12:3). We celebrate Shabbat Hagadol not in remembrance of what God did for us, but what we did for God by performing our first mitzvah.

These two different explanations for Shabbat Hagadol (God's miracle or first mitzvah) foreshadow the process that we begin on Pesah and complete on Shavuot. The first explanation of Shabbat Hagadol focuses on God. On the Shabbat before Pesah, God performed a miracle for the Israelites, one that allowed them to observe a critical commandment. On Shavuot we accept upon ourselves the mitzvot, which through their performance ensure God's continued presence among the people. This is, indeed, the essence of the covenantal relationship: God manifests God's bond to us by protecting us, and by making God's presence known when we are performing the commandments. The two acts are inseparable, both this week in Shabbat Hagadol, and in the inseparability of Pesah from Shavuot.



**Fuchsberg Jerusalem Center**  
Conservative Yeshiva

## TORAH SPARKS

### Parashat Tzav

#### Shabbat Hagadol

**April 4, 2020 | 10 Nisan 5780**

Annual | Leviticus 6:1-8:36 (Etz Hayim p. 613-625; Hertz p. 429-438)

Triennial | Leviticus 8:1-8:36 (Etz Hayim p. 613-617; Hertz p. 429-432)

Haftarah | Malachi 3:4-24 (Haftarah: Etz Hayim p. 1296-1298; Hertz p. 1005-1008)

### D'var Torah: What is Shabbat Hagadol?

*Dr. Joshua Kulp, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty & Rosh Yeshiva*

Leading up to Pesah there are five special Shabbatot: Shekalim, Zakhor, Parah, Hachodesh, and Shabbat Hagadol. Of all of these special Torah readings/Shabbatot, Shabbat Hagadol is the only one not mentioned in the Talmud.

The origins of the term and concept Shabbat Hagadol seem to be in the Middle Ages, probably in France/Germany. It is first mentioned in a work called Sefer HaOreh which is a collection of halakhic rulings issued by Rashi's students (11<sup>th</sup> century, Germany). There we find:

People are accustomed to call the Shabbat before Pesah "Shabbat Hagadol (the Great Shabbat)," but they don't know why it is greater than any other Shabbat. The reason seems to be that the Israelites left Egypt on the fifth day of the week, which means that they would have set aside their paschal lamb on the tenth of the month, which was the Shabbat before Pesah. They (the

**Fuchsberg Jerusalem Center**

Agron Street 8 • P. O. Box 7456 • Jerusalem, Israel 94265

Tel: 972-2-625-6386 • israel@uscj.org • uscj.org • conservativeyeshiva.org

(Dvar Torah continued on the back page...)

## D'var Haftarah: Hope from an Unlikely Source

*Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty*

This is going to be a painful Pesah. We are going to have to celebrate Leil Haseder – the night of the Seder – with few of our family and friends around the table. Family visits during the Hag are unlikely. It is as close to an apocalyptic event for those of us who have never experienced war as any of us can remember. We are stuck in the house with nothing to ponder but fear. Fear for ourselves, fear for our loved ones and fear that life may never get back to normal.

And this is especially troublesome since nothing is more central to Pesah, the festival where we celebrate our people's freedom from Egyptian bondage, than the meeting of generations, the passing on of the stories and traditions of our families, of our people: the Four Questions, the Four Children; the songs and tunes and the key obligation of the evening: "You shall tell your child this day, this is done [the Pesah observance] because of what God did for me when I came out of Egypt" (Exodus 13:8)

The haftarah has an answer for this year's pain. Malachi, the last of the prophets, ends his prophecy with a message of what Eliyahu the prophet, will enact in the future: "Behold I will send you Eliyahu the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of parents to the children and the heart of the children to the parents." (3:23-24) Rashi explains that this means that Eliyahu will inspire both the children to bring their parents back to God and the parents to do the same for children.

This role is ironic since the biblical Eliyahu is anything but a prophet of comfort. He is an angry prophet, one who fearlessly confronts kings, who takes on idolaters and destroys them. He is severe and dour, a man who inspires fear even in kings. And yet, here he is transformed into a harbinger of hope. It will be he who brings families together again, who restores wholeness to life, who helps restore the telling of the story to the way it should be.

Let us hope that Eliyahu's transformation will inform our future, that the "anger" will be attenuated and that the restoration will come quickly so that we can get back to normal, where children and parents and grandparents can once again share the story of the redemption at one table where Eliyahu will be a welcomed guest.

*At the Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem, we offer students of all backgrounds an opportunity to engage with Jewish texts in a dynamic, inclusive, and collaborative environment. We help students gain the skills necessary for Jewish learning and spiritual growth as individuals and in their communities in North America, Israel, and around the world.*

## Parashah Study: Gratitude - Do We Practice It?

*Vered Hollander-Goldfarb, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty*

The Thanksgiving (*Todah*) offering is part of the *Shlamim* (peace/wellbeing) offerings. It is offered voluntarily by an individual, not by the community. The HaGomel blessing that individuals say today is somewhat parallel to this offering.

### **Text: Vayikra 7:11-15**

*This is the ritual of the peace offering that one may offer to the LORD: (12) If he offers it for thanksgiving, he shall offer together with the offering of thanksgiving unleavened cakes... unleavened wafers... and cakes of choice flour.... (13) And with cakes of leavened bread added he shall offer his offering along with his thanksgiving offering of peace... (15) ... [it] shall be eaten on the day that it is offered; none of it shall be set aside until morning.*

- How do we see in the text that the offering is given by an individual and it is voluntary?
- Why do you think that a person might choose to bring a thanksgiving offering? Why is thanksgiving important? How do/should we express it today?

### **Commentary: Rashi Vayikra 7:12**

***If he is bringing it as a Thanksgiving-offering:*** i.e., if [he is bringing the offering] to give thanks for a miracle that had happened to him, for instance, those who made a sea-voyage or journeyed in the desert, or those who had been imprisoned, or a sick person who recovered. All these are required to give thanks, for regarding them, it is written, "They shall give thanks to the Lord for His kindness and for his wonders to the children of men. And they shall slaughter sacrifices of thanksgiving" (Ps. 107)..

- Under what circumstances does a person offer a *Todah* offering?
- Based on this, why is this an offering that is brought by an individual? Why should it be voluntary?

### **Commentary: Ha'Amek Davar: The Natziv of Volozin Vayikra 7:13**

*The Torah expanded the bread and decreased the time of eating the Todah (Thanksgiving offering) [compared to] all the Shlamim offerings. So that he will [gather] many acquaintances for one dinner on the day of offering and so the story of the miracle will be told before many people... It is a thanks for his well being (Shalom) as he was released from a perilous situation.*

- According to the Natziv, why was so much food given so little time to be consumed?
- Based on this comment, what is the central element of expressing thanks?
- What religious and social practices of expressing thanks do we have today that function with a similar idea in mind? How careful are we to practice this?