## Comments on Tzav: The Small 2-Mem, The Soul, The Grain Offering, Bitya, and Senator Joe Lieberman z'l. Rabbi Eliot Malomet March 30, 2024 20 Adar II 5784 Shabbat Parah

<mark>X-</mark> Small <i>Aleph</i>	<mark>آڍٰڍُڵ</mark> ڷؠ	<mark>vayikra</mark>	And He called
<mark>≱-</mark> Small <i>Mem</i>	מוֹלְקְדָה		<mark>on the blazing</mark> hearth

Small letters are a bit of a coincidence at the beginning of the first two parashas of Vayikra. The remaining orthographic diversity in Vayikra is comprised of large letters:

large vav	בָּחוֹן	Lev. 11:42
large gimmel	רָהָתְּאַּלֶּת	Lev. 13:33
large <i>peh sofit</i>	₹ only according to some	Lev. 26:24

The small letter at the beginning of our parasha, מוֹקְיָהָ, once again draws our attention. Here is the verse it is in:

צו אֶת אַהָרוֹ וְאֶת בָּנָיו לֵאמֹר זֹאת תּוֹרַת הָעֹלָה הָוֹא הָעֹלָה עַל <sup>מּזְקְדָהְ</sup> עַל הַמִּזְבָּה כָּל הַלַּיְלָה עַד הַבֹּקֶר וְאֵשׁ הַמִּזְבָּה <mark>תּוּקְדַ בּוֹ.</mark> (ויקרא ו:ב)

Command Aaron and his sons, saying: This is the Instruction [for] the offering-up— that is what goes-up on the blazing-hearth on the altar all night, until daybreak, while the fire of the altar is kept blazing on it: (Lev. 6:2)

The context: The main categories of sacrifice were listed in last week's parasha; here, we get more specific details: 1. the *olah-burnt offering* was to remain burning the whole night and 2. the priest had to dispose of the ashes in the morning. To do so, the priest had to change his clothing (he could not wear the priestly garb outside the sanctuary). The fire was never allowed to go out: אָשׁ הַּמִּיךְ עֵּל הַמִּוְבָּהַ לֹּא A regular fire is to be kept-blazing on the altar—it is not to go out! (1:6). As we learned last week, there are numerous imaginative explanations for each orthographic anomaly. To understand the small a, we have to examine the word "הַּקָּהַה which means blazing hearth. Fire as a

<mark>יקד</mark>	<mark>burn</mark>
<mark>לְנַקֵּד</mark>	to kindle
<mark>תוקד</mark>	to be kept burning

metaphor for the soul is very common in Judaism. The source quoted most often for this is. Proverbs 20:27.

בר הי נְשְׁמֵח אָּדָם -the soul of a person is God's light (candle flame). This idea informs the kindling of a yahrzeit candle and is often cited as an explanation for swaying or shukling during prayer. Just as a candle flickers when lit, so too, the soul flickers inside the body. We find this idea mainly in Jewish mysticism and in Hasidism. Hassidic commentary on this verse relates the fire on the altar to the spiritual fervor one experiences when doing a mitzvah. R. Tzvi Hirsch Hakohen of Rimanov (d. 1846) said:

הָתְלַהָבוּתוֹ שֶׁל אֶדֶם מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל בִּשְׁעַת עֲשִׂיַת מִצְנָה צְרִיכָה לְהְיוֹת מֵרְגָשֶׁת רַק עָמֹק עָמֹק בְּתוֹךְ לְבּוֹ, נַפְשׁוֹ תּוּקֵד בְּקְרְבּוֹ, וְלֹא שֶׁהָתְלֹהֲבוּתוֹ תִּדְיָה נָרָאֵית וֹגְלוּיָה לָעֵיִן כָּל, עד שֻׁיַּכְרִיזוּ עָלִיהָ בְּרַבִּים.

The fervor that a Jew has while doing a mitzvah should be felt only very deeply inside the heart, with the soul on fire inside, and not visible on the outside, lest everyone decries it in public.

The fire on the altar is a metaphor for the fire in the human heart. Just as the little aleph in symbolized Moses' altruism, the little mem in מַּבְּיָה stands for modesty in religious fervor. Exuberant and ostentatious displays of religious zeal are frowned upon; ecstatic outbursts are no substitute for the



sustained steadiness of the contained, unpretentious glow that ought to burn in the fervent human heart.

רַבִּי יְהוֹשֵׁע דְּסְכְנִין בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי לֵוִי אָמר: בּוֹא וּרְאֵה כַּמָּה חָס הַקֵּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא עַל מְמוֹנָם שֶׁל יִשְׁרָאֵל. אָמֵר לְהֶן: מִי שֻׁנְּתְחַיֵּב לְהָבִיא קַרְבָּן יָבִיא מִן הַבָּקר...וְאִם לֹא מְצָא מִן הַבָּקר יָבִיא כֶּבֶשׁ...וְאִם לֹא מָצָא מִן הַכְּבָשִׁים יָבִיא מִן הָעִזִּים...וְאִם לֹא מָצָא מֵן הָעִזִּים יָבִיא מִן הַעוֹפּוֹת...וִאָם לֹא מַצָא מֵהָעוֹף יָבִיא סֹלֶת... ויקרא רבה ח:ד

Rabbi Yehoshua of Sikhnin said in the name of Rabbi Levi: Come and see the extent to which the Holy One blessed be He is concerned about the financial Rabbah wellbeing of Israel. He said to them: One who is 8:4 obligated to bring an offering shall bring it from the cattle...If he was unable to find from the cattle, he shall bring a sheep...If he was unable to find from the sheep, he shall bring from the goats...If he was unable to find from the goats, he shall bring from the birds...If he was unable to find from the birds, he shall bring fine flour...

Paraphrase: God cares about our financial well-being, ie. that we may become impoverished by the cost of sacrifices. For that reason, the Torah provides a menu of options of what to sacrifice based on what we can afford. To some this may seem ridiculous, but to others this is not surprising, after all, God cares about every aspect of our lives. The questions underlying this text are: what are the financial limits when it comes to serving God? What happens if you can't afford to serve God? How do we balance the desire to serve God with the need to stay out of poverty? In contemporary Jewish life, how do we balance living a full Jewish life with the cost of such a life? Synagogues, Jewish Day Schools, Jewish summer camps have different ways of answering this question. Some will rely on objective information, like tax forms and bank statements, and others will rely on discrete conversations and the wisdom of trusted leaders. What constitutes "fairness" in these situations? Can we trust that leaders will be compassionate, and families will be honest? What constitutes a reasonable sacrifice for a family, and how does a community establish a set of expectations that is fair for everyone, no matter what their financial capabilities are? How do you enforce these principles when participation in these communities is voluntary? These are extremely difficult but necessary questions. The midrash is saying that financial hardship should not have impeded one's ability to serve God in the past; likewise, financial hardship should not impede one's ability to live a full Jewish life in the present. On the other hand, sacrifices (literal and figurative) are necessary in order for the community to survive. Sacrifice gives life meaning. Virtue, integrity, character comes with sacrifice. In the absence of self-sacrifice, life is self-gratification. But, in the end, isn't a large cow more valuable than a scoop of flour? Does God notice this? The midrash answers:

וְלֹא עוֹד אֶלָּא כָּל מִי שֶׁהוּא מֵקְרִיב אוֹתָה מֵעְלֶה עָלָיו הַכָּתוּב כְּאִלּוּ ... הוּא מַקְרִיב מְסוֹף הָעוֹלָם וְעִד סוֹפוֹ שֶׁנֶאֱמֵר: כִּי מִמִּזְרַח שְׁמֶשׁ וְעַד מְבוֹאוֹ גִדוֹל שְׁמִי בַּגוֹיִם וִבְלָל מָקוֹם מַקְטָר מַגָּשׁ לשְׁמִי וִמְנְחָה טְהוֹרָה כִּי גָדוֹל שְׁמִי בַּגוֹיִם אָמֵר יְהֹנָה צְבָאוֹת. וִיקרא רבה ח:ד

... Moreover, anyone who sacrifices [the minha offering], the text considers him as if he sacrifices from one end of the world to the other, as it is stated: For from where the sun rises to where it sets, My name is honored among the nations, and everywhere, incense and a pure minha offering are offered to My name; for My name is honored among the nations—said GOD of Hosts. (Malachi 1:11). Vayikra Rabbah 8:4

Whether it is an expensive burnt offering of cattle or an inexpensive *minha*-cereal offering of flour, Malachi wants us to know that God's name has been made great throughout the entire world. You can put a price on the cost of a sacrifice, but you can't put a price on the sincerity and devotion with which these sacrifices are given. Sacrificial size doesn't matter. Intention is what's most important before God. **Fun facts:** Sakhnin is an Arab village in the



heart of the Galilee and one can visit R. Yehoshua's grave there which is holy to locals also. R. Yehoshua was a fourth generation Amora of the land of Israel, (~350 CE). He was noted for his rich Aggadic teaching and is frequently cited with his teacher R. Levi. A cursory glance

at his teachings gives us the impression that he was a person of deep humanity and compassion. Here is another teaching of his, that might be useful for your Seder:

רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ דְּסְכְנִין בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי לֵוִי: אָמַר לָה הַקֵּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּדְ הוּא לְבִתְיָה בַּת פַּרְעֹה, משֶׁה לֹא הָיָה בְּנַדְ וּקְרָאתוֹ בְּנֵדְ, אַף אַתְּ לֹא אַתְּ בִּתִּי וַאֲנִי קוֹרֵא אוֹתָדְ בִּתִּי, שָׁנָּאֱמֵר: אֵלֶה בְּנֵי בִּתְיָה (דה״א ד:יח), בַּת יָה.

R. Yehoshua of Sikhnin said in the name of R. Levi: God said to Bitya the daughter of Pharaoh: Moses was not your son, yet you called him your son. And while you are not my daughter, I will indeed call you My daughter, as it is written, these are the sons of Bitya, (1 Chron. 4:18) Batdaughter of Yah-God. Vayikra Rabbah 1:3

Explanation: In the Book of Shmot, the daughter of Pharaoh is not named. But when we get to the Book of Chronicles at the end of the Bible, we discover a woman named *Bitya*, *daughter of Pharaoh* listed in one of the genealogies. The rabbis equate the two women giving rise to the aggadic tradition that the daughter of Pharaoh in the Moses story is named *Bitya*. Since *Bitya* is made up of the words *Bat*-daughter and *Yah*-God, Pharaoh's daughter is the daughter of God. And in order for that to have been the case, she at some point, must have repudiated idolatry and "converted" since she appears in Chronicles in one of the genealogies as having married into the tribe of Judah. Elsewhere, she is considered to be one of several devout female converts in the Bible:

וְעוֹד יֵשׁ נָשִׁים חֲסִידוֹת גִּיּוֹרוֹת כְּשֵׁרוֹת מִן הָגוֹיִם, וְאֵלוּ הֵן: אָסְנַת, צִפּוֹרָה, שִׁבָּרָה, פּוּעָה, בַּת פַּרְעֹה, רָחָב, רוֹת, וְיָעֵל.

... Furthermore, there are righteous, abiding women converts from among the nations, and they are: Osnat, Tziporah, Shifra, Puah, Bat Par'oh, Rahav, Rut and Jael. Baraita of R Pinhas ben Yair 1:36

**Senator Joseph Lieberman, z'l.** This is a sad moment for American Jewry and the Jewish People. Honored for his integrity and humility, we will forever remember Sen. Joe Lieberman as the Jew who nearly became Vice-President. This remains the high-water mark of American Jewish



political achievement. Sen. Lieberman lived his life as an observant Jew. Americans honored him because he lived by Jewish values. At the 2000 Democratic Convention he started his speech with these words, "Only in America," and the crowd erupted in thunderous applause. His final public words, published only Friday in the

WSJ, spoke to the deeper fault-lines in American politics. "We all want to see support for Israel in the U.S. remain bipartisan...We believe that Israel must be allowed to achieve its legitimate goal of disabling Hamas from keeping its promise of repeating the massacres of October 7th. More recently however we have become concerned about what appears to be a weakening of support for Israel by President Biden, Vice President Harris and some other leading Democrats. We are especially concerned about the possibility that some of this weakening may be influenced by domestic political fears of losing electoral support from anti-Israel voters who have threatened to stay home unless the Biden administration pulls away from Israel. There appears to be too little concern about losing the support of pro-Israel voters... Do not abandon Israel and its time of great need. And we will

not abandon Israel and its time of great need. And we will not abandon you." We will remember him for his political courage; his steadfast support of Israel, his unique friendships with opponents, and for his *menschlakhkeit*. May his memory be a blessing.

Shabbat Shalom!

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