

# CREATING A SETTING FOR A FULL REINSTATEMENT

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## Weekly Torah Commentary Series: Acharei Mos



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### **Yaakov, the True Reflection of G-d**

*Torah:* “Hashem spoke to Moshe saying – Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem your G-d.”

*Midrash:* “G-d said to the Jewish people, ‘Before I created the world, the angels would praise Me and sanctify My Name through you. They would say, ‘Blessed is Hashem, the G-d of Israel...’ When Adam was created, the angels asked G-d, ‘Is this the one to whom we refer when we give You praise?’” The angels understood that G-d created the world so that He should rule over it. They also understood that G-d created a being who would reflect His image and form and who would be His subject. Thus, since Adam was the first being who was created by G-d, the angels thought that perhaps he was the one who is “Israel”, the reflection of G-d.

*Midrash:* “G-d said to them, ‘No, he is a thief.’ As it states, ‘He ate of the tree...’ When Noach came into being, the angels asked, ‘Is this the one?’ G-d responded, ‘No, he is a drunkard.’ As it states, ‘He drank of the wine and became intoxicated...’ (Since Noach was the one who was worthy to be spared from the Great Flood, the angels thought that perhaps he was the one who was ‘Israel’.) When Avraham came into existence, the angels asked, ‘Is this the one?’ G-d replied, ‘No, he is the stranger from which Yishmael comes.’”

*Torah* regarding creation: “B’heebaram – When they were created...”

*Midrash:* The letters contained in the name Avraham are the same as those in the word “B’heebaram.”

*Maharal* of Prague: When G-d changed Avram’s name to Avraham by adding the letter “hey”, he was the equivalent of the beginning of a new creation. Thus,

the angels thought that perhaps *Avraham* was the one who was "Israel."

*Midrash*: "When *Yitzchak* came into being, the angels asked, 'Is this the one?' G-d replied, 'No, he loves My enemy.' As it states, 'Yitzchak loved Esav...' When *Yaakov* came into existence, they asked, 'Is this the one?' G-d replied, 'Yes.' As it states, 'Your name shall not always be called *Yaakov*, Israel shall be your name.' The Jewish people carry his name 'Israel' as they are called 'The children of Israel.' At that moment, G-d sanctified the Jewish people for His Name. G-d said to the Jewish people, Israel, through you I will be glorified.' 'You were sanctified by Me before the world was created, therefore you must be holy because I am holy.'"

*Torah*: *Yaakov* was given the name Israel because the name alludes to the fact that he lorded over man and G-d. Although *Yaakov* was exposed to and lived in a depraved and evil environment in the home of *Lavan*, he remained spiritually unscathed. He was resilient to the impure affects of the community and its people. He was thus able to raise the holy tribes of G-d, despite the setting in which he found himself. He lorded over man by being impervious to *Lavan* and *Esav's* influence. *Yaakov* wrestled with the archangel of *Esav* and was able to emerge victorious.

Despite the fact *Yaakov* was a physical being, he was able to transcend the physical and defeat the angel. G-d Himself transcends all existence – man and angel. Since *Yaakov* assumed and reflected this characteristic of G-d, G-d is referred to as "*Elokei Israel* (The G-d of Israel)." Because *Yaakov* dominated the physical and spiritual realms, he was a true reflection of G-d.

*Midrash* regarding the creation of *Adam*: "Just as G-d is the Master in heaven, *Adam* was meant to be the master on earth. Just as G-d knows all, *Adam* was able to see from one end of the world to the other..." G-d created *Adam* to be able to dominate all physical existence. As it states, 'He shall rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the sky...' Although the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky were outside of the physical grasp of *Adam*, he was able to rule over them. The human being, whose classification was initially "*adam*," was meant to dominate existence; however, because *Adam* failed by eating of the Tree of knowledge, he forfeited that classification. It was

not until *Yaakov* came into being that he assumed the profile of "*adam*."

*Gemara* citing *Yechezkel*: "'You (the Jewish people) are called *adam* (man).' It is inferred from the verse that the nations of the world are not called *adam*." Meaning, the Jewish people who are the offspring of *Yaakov* are the only ones who possess the innate characteristics of *Adam*, before the sin.

In the *Amidah* (Silent Prayer) on *Shabbos* morning: "You (G-d) did not give it (*Shabbos*)...to the nations of the lands – for Israel Your people have You given it with love, to the seed of *Yaakov*..." Since the Jewish people are the children of *Yaakov* they thus possess the classification of "Israel." It is only through the Jewish people that G-d can be sanctified because only they reflect His true image and form.

## The Power of Speech

*Torah*: The contamination of leprosy is similar to that of a corpse. If a leper were to enter into a house, all of its contents would become contaminated, similar to a corpse being in the house.

*Gemara*: The leper is the equivalent of a corpse. The leper becomes severed due to his behavior from the life source, which is his spirituality. This is similar to a corpse that is bereft of the soul after the person dies. How does this come about? After the *Kohen* pronounces the leprous lesion as "*tzaraas* (leprosy)," the leper is sent outside all of the camps of Israel where he will remain alone, completely cut off from the Jewish people.

Whenever the *Torah* mentions the liability of spiritual excision (*koreis*), which is a state when one is cut from G-d, the *Torah* expresses itself by saying "this soul will be cut off from Israel" or "this soul will be cut off from its people". If spiritual excision is being cut off from G-d, why does the *Torah* not express it within this context? It is because the Jew can only have a relationship with G-d within the context of being part of the Jewish people. If one is excised from the Jewish people, as the leper is separated from all the camps of Israel, then he is cut off from his source of life as if he were a corpse. Consequently, he will become spiritually contaminated.

The essence of a Jew's function is his spirituality. Thus, if he were to be detached from his spirituality, he becomes the equivalent of a corpse. This is similar to the *Gemara* in Tractate *Berachos*: "The evil ones in their lifetime are called dead." Although the evil one does not contaminate during his lifetime as the corpse or the leper, he has severed his connection to G-d due to his behavior.

*Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh*: When one enters into the category of "evil" the soul (*neshama*) departs from his body. Nevertheless, he still possesses the life source that exists within in all living creatures (*nefesh*) that allows him to continue to be an intellectual being. If one takes an oath or vow and violates it, it is considered that he had desecrated his speech. As it states, "He has desecrated his words..." If something can be desecrated it is an indication that its status is holy. Thus, the power of speech emanates from a holy source. When one speaks negatively about his fellow (*lashon hara*) one takes a spiritual characteristic and profanes it. Of all living species, the human being is the only one that was endowed with the power of speech to express his intellect.

*Torah*: At the time of Creation, "G-d blew into his nostrils a Soul of Life, and man became a living being."

*Targum Onkeles* (Aramaic translation): The words, "living being" can be interpreted as "a speaking spirit." Man's expression of speech is a direct outgrowth of his soul (spirituality). As the *Torah* tells us, it was only after man was infused with a soul that he became a "speaking being." Since speech emanates from the soul it is considered sacred. Thus, if one desecrates this spiritual endowment through *lashon hara*, he becomes a leper and is severed from the Jewish people. When he contaminated his speech, he himself assumes a degree of contamination.

*Chofetz Chaim*: Although today we no longer have leprosy, the effects of *lashon hara* nevertheless cause a negative consequence. It manifests itself in impoverishment.

*Gemara*: A needy person is also the equivalent of a corpse, although he does not contaminate.

*Chofetz Chaim*: The physical and material predicament of the Jewish people during the time of the *Chofetz Chaim* in Europe was dire. If the Jewish people were more careful with their speech, their material situation would improve. Man was endowed

with the power of speech so that he should be able to study *Torah* and express words of praise to G-d through prayer. As it states, "The voice is the voice of *Yaakov*..." If one were to vulgarize his power of speech through *lashon hara* his *Torah* study and prayer are negatively impacted. The words that he expresses during his study and prayer become putrefied and thus ineffective. If one were to have purity of speech, his *Torah* study and supplication would bring about great spiritual accomplishment and blessing.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Shabbos*: "The world exists in the merit of the vapor (the words of *Torah*) of the young Jewish children who study *Torah* from their *rabbis*." *Rav Papa* said to *Abbayei*, "What about mine and yours (Our study of *Torah*)?" He answered, "There is no comparison between vapor (words of *Torah*) that is tainted with sin and vapor that is free of sin."

Although *Abbayei* and *Rav Papa* were of the greatest elucidators of the *Mishna*, they understood that the value of a young child's *Torah* was greater than theirs – because of the purity of the child. Regardless of the spirituality and devout piety of *Abbayei* and *Rav Papa*, they were not able to compare the innate spiritual quality of their *Torah* with that of the *Torah* studied by the young children.

## One's Linkage to G-d

*Torah*: "You shall be holy..."

*Midrash* citing *Psalms*: "'May He dispatch your assistance from holiness and from Zion shall you be supported.' What is the meaning of 'May He dispatch your assistance from holiness?' As a result of the sanctity of one's actions one will merit Divine Assistance. What is the meaning of 'and from Zion shall you be supported?' Based on how meticulously and perfectly one fulfills the *mitzvos*, one will merit that degree of support. Thus, Divine Assistance is determined by the degree of sanctity of one's deed as well as the meticulousness of his action."

Just as G-d allows the animal, which is purely physical to be consecrated and thus sanctified as an offering, so too does the Jew through the performance of *mitzvos*, cause his physicality to become sanctified. If G-d can allow an unintelligible creature to assume a status of holiness through consecration, how much

more so does the Jew, who has a G-dly soul from above, become sanctified through the *mitzvos*. It is only through the performance of *mitzvos* and study of *Torah* that the Jew can become sanctified, thus spiritualizing his physicality. We see from the *Midrash* that *mitzvah* performance alone is not sufficient to merit Divine Assistance. But rather, it is the manner in which the *mitzvah* is performed that will determine its effect.

Every *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* we supplicate G-d: "Sanctify us through Your *mitzvos* and give us our portion in Your *Torah*." Although one does fulfill the *mitzvos*, which are innately holy, one does not necessarily become sanctified through them. It depends on one's mindset and intent to become sanctified. G-d, the Omnipotent Being and Creator of the Universe chose the Jewish people to fulfill His *mitzvos*. If one performs a *mitzvah* in a perfunctory manner or in a manner that is lacking in reverence, it is considered the ultimate disrespect and demonstration of a lack of gratitude to G-d. Thus, the performance of a *mitzvah* in such a state will have a minimal effect upon the individual, regarding his personal sanctification.

*Torah*: "Hashem spoke to Moshe saying – Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for holy am I, Hashem your G-d." The basis and source for the holiness of the Jew is his relevance to G-d. As we see from the verse, G-d wants the Jew to conduct himself in a context of holiness because He is holy. One's holiness is rooted in his relationship with G-d. Although one may perform a *mitzvah* in a meticulous manner, if the individual is not sufficiently worthy, the *mitzvah* will not sanctify him.

On *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*, which are days of Mercy, we supplicate G-d that despite our shortcomings and lack of worthiness, He should allow us, through His Attribute of Mercy, to become sanctified and thus be qualified to merit our portion in *Torah*. The *Torah* states, "But you who cleave to Hashem, your G-d—you are alive today." One's existence and vibrancy is determined by one's degree of being rooted in G-d, which is based upon his relationship with the Divine. During the week, we do not make this special supplication in our *Amidah* (Silent Prayer) because the weekday period is not necessarily a time of Mercy.

*Ramak* (Rabbi Moshe Cordaveiro) in *Tomer Devorah*: Just as one has a residence in this world and is attired

with garments, he can merit to have a residence and garments in the world to come. Although one may be able to get through the gates of heaven one must ponder, what level of residence will he have? What quality of garments will he wear?

*Ramak*: The every aspect of one's residence and spiritual (attire) garments that he will have in the world to come will be created through the *mitzvos* that one performed during his lifetime. The spiritual quality of one's *mitzvos* will determine one's predicament in the world to come. Based on how focused and meticulously one will perform the *mitzvah* it will be determine the degree that he will be "supported."

## Sanctity, the Bedrock of Judaism

*Torah*: There is a positive commandment for the Jew to sanctify himself. As it states, "You shall be holy..."

*Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh*: Although a non-Jew may observe meticulously the seven *Noachide* laws he cannot attain a sanctified/holy status, despite his classification as "devoutly righteous." Holiness only has relevance to the Jewish people. Why is this so?

*Torah*: At Sinai, G-d took the Jewish people to be his holy nation. As it states, "You shall be My kingly, priestly nation, and holy people..." Since the Jewish people have a linkage and attachment to G-d, Who is the source of all holiness, they are holy. The nations of the world do not have this special linkage to G-d since they did not choose to accept the *Torah*, as the Jewish people had done.

*Rashi*: Moshe related the *mitzvah* of "You shall be holy..." before the entire Jewish people as was the *mitzvah* of *Hakhel* (which was the reading of the Book of *Devarim* before the entire Jewish people). Why was it necessary of the *mitzvah* of "You shall be holy..." to be said in the presence of the entire assembly? It is because the majority of the fundamentals of *Torah* are contingent on this concept. Without the Jewish people being holy/sanctified, their performance of *mitzvos* would be deficient. Every *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* we supplicate G-d to "Sanctify us through Your *mitzvos* and give us our portion in Your *Torah*." We see that in order for one to receive his portion in *Torah* one must be sanctified.

*Gemara* in Tractate *Yomah*: The Holy Ark in the *Mishkan* was cast in pure gold both from the inside and the outside. Similarly, a true *Torah* Sage must be consistent, regarding his service of G-d, from the inside to the outside. His internal feelings must be sincere and pure to be consistent with his outward behavior. The Holy Ark, which was the location of the Divine Presence, was the vessel that contained the *Torah*. The Ark was the holiest receptacle in the *Mishkan*. Similarly, the *Torah* sage will be able to be the proper repository of *Torah* only if he is sanctified by being consistent from the inside and outside. If the *Torah* sage does not ascend to a state of holiness he will not be able to be a location of the Divine Presence and the *Torah*.

At the time of the giving of the *Torah*, G-d took the Jewish people and made them His Holy people. That state of sanctity was a prerequisite for receiving the *Torah*. If they would not have been sanctified in this manner, they would not have relevance to the *Torah*, just as the nations of the world have no relevance to it. When they agreed to accept the *Torah*, the Jewish people assumed a holy status. The fulfillment of the *Torah* was the initial objective and intent of Creation.

However, in order to have relevance to the *Torah* one must be sanctified. Thus, the *mitzvah* of "You shall be holy..." impacts on every aspect of the *Torah* and the observance of *mitzvos*. Therefore, it was said in the presence of the entire assembly of the Jewish people. Since sanctity is the qualifying characteristic that gives the Jew relevance to *Torah*, if one advances is personal level of sanctity, he will have a greater capacity to ascend as a *Torah* sage.

## **Distortion of Truth Caused by Conflict of Interest**

*Torah*: "Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of Aaron's two sons..."

*Rashi* citing the *Midrash*: "Reb Elazar Ben Azarya asked 'Why is it important for the *Torah* to juxtapose the death of the sons of Aaron with the law which states that the High Priest (*Kohen Gadol*) is not permitted to enter the Holy of Holies throughout the year other than on *Yom Kippur*? It is comparable to one who is ill and is instructed by his doctor not to eat foods that are cold nor to sleep in a damp location so as not to die. The patient did not heed his instructions and thus died.

A second individual with the same illness came to the doctor and he prescribed to him the same manner of behavior; however he added that he should heed his words so as not to die as the first patient who died due to not listening to his instructions. The second patient because he was able to appreciate the gravity of not heeding the words of the doctor listened to him. It was because of the real life example of the death of the first patient. Therefore, when G-d instructed Aaron not to enter the Holy of Holies, with the exception of *Yom Kippur*, that warning was predicated on the death of his children. He had witnessed the consequence of entering the Holy of Holies without permission."

The analogy of *Reb Elazar Ben Azarya* is difficult to understand. Seemingly it is not applicable to Aaron, who was the brother of Moshe. Many times in the *Torah*, Aaron is presented to be the equivalent of his brother Moshe (in certain contexts). How is it possible that a man of this dimension and capacity of spirituality to need a real life example to fully appreciate the consequences of not heeding the word of G-d? According to Jewish Law, if a judge (or witness) has a conflict of interest regarding a certain matter, he is disqualified from presiding of the matter.

*Gemara*: Even if Moshe and Aaron were to have a conflict of interest they too would be disqualified as witnesses. How is it possible that such spiritual giants would not be able to somehow rise above their personal conflict of interest and be objective regarding their responsibility? Factually, they are disqualified. The *Torah* is telling us that it is an incontestable fact that if a person has a conflict of interest, regardless of his dimension of spirituality or understanding, he will be affected as a result of his. It will cause one's clarity to become occluded and thus he will not be able to render a proper judgment.

Aaron wanted to be the servant of G-d and to be close to Him to the greatest extent possible. This was the source of his conflict of interest. Similarly, his sons Nadav and Avihu had such a desire to cleave to G-d, regardless of the risk of death, they came before the Divine presence, which was forbidden. They believed that their death would be a sanctification of G-d's Name. To attach oneself to the source of everything was well worth forfeiting one's life.

Aaron, being uniquely qualified to be the High Priest, was the only one who could be exposed to the Divine

Presence in the Holy of Holies on *Yom Kippur*. Unlike his sons who were not qualified to do so. Thus, it was possible that *Aaron* could justify that since he had relevance to the Divine Presence, he would be able to enter the Holy of Holies throughout the year and not only on *Yom Kippur*. Because he had this degree of conflict, G-d needed to give him a real life example of the death of his own sons.

*Mishna in Ethics of Our Fathers*: "...Be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples and make a fence

around the *Torah*." The *Rabbis* understood that one may have many conflicts of interest that will cause him to diminish his level of clarity. They thus established fences in order to protect the *Torah*. In addition to protecting the *Torah*, these fences also allow the individual to be cognizant of his own conflicts of interest and to overcome them. *Chazal* suggest that in order for one to be able to address all of his conflicts of interest, he should establish for himself fences so as not to violate the *Torah* or the *rabbinic fences*.



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