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PINHAS

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THE BAPTISM

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The Baltic Coast, Soviet Union, Summer of 1987.

We walked with my father, on a dry road, strewn with rocks. It was the late afternoon. A teenager rode his bicycle past us and in a kind of quantum moment, as he propelled ahead of us, his cry accosted us from the back. "Kike." And having no knowledge of that word, its weight and limitless power, I knew instinctually that my life had now changed. He sped ahead although he faced little danger from a frail Ashkenazi engineer and a four-year-old boy. My father let go of my hand while continuing to hold it. He picked up a rock and hurled it at the coward, missing his target.

The sand in Jurmala is soft and endless. It is easier to grasp the concept of infinity if you have walked from Dzintari to Meluzhi. With pine trees to your left and the immanent expanse of sea on your right. Reaching your destination, happily exhausted you look at the coast continuing ahead and realize you had not arrived anywhere. There used to be so many Jews visiting during the summer that, instead of Latvian or Russian, you would hear Yiddish spread like fairy dust along the warm commercial avenue.

We rented a room with three beds, in one of the furthest villages. Jurmala is very long and thin, like Chile. It is a series of hamlets, each one centering its existence on a railway stop. It is married to the sea and endowed with an innate vacation quality, a bit like Cape Cod. The house we stayed in for two or three summers was built by Vigor. It was solid and taciturn like the person who erected it. I would climb with his son on the water tower and we would talk and survey the dachas let by entrepreneurial Latvians to Jewish families who were about to jump into the Atlantic.

My grandfather kindly alerted his Ukrainian cousin to our whereabouts and she brought her family who rented an adjacent room. We would walk to the sea, stopping in a café near the train station to eat ice cream from metal, slightly elevated serving trays. The cousin doted on her grandson, pushing the boundaries set and perpetually moved further toward idol worship by Jewish grandparents. She would immerse the spoon into the fragrant, vanilla mass, put it into her mouth to warm it and then feed it to her six-year-old cherub.

The other room was rented to my father's friend. He was a dentist, with a large, confident belly and a lot of money. In Riga, they had a private house, an unheard-of extravagance. Their son Pasha taught me to breakdance. He would place a [Modern Talking](#) record on the player, and move his light body on the floor to the beguiling sounds of the West.

Vigor had a wife —who would sometimes disappear with other men into the badly illuminated Latvian night after countryside dances. There were two dogs. The first dog, Rambo, was a boisterous and not very smart German shepherd, tied up on a long leash. And the second, Bestia, a cacophony of matted fur, depressed after she accidentally laid on her puppies in her sleep, ending their short lives. Vigor was always working, in contrast to the people around him who hastened to do that as little as possible.

The water was always cold. When my father's friend would throw myself and his son into the waves, we would feign incredulity and scream, "We will complain to Gorbachev!" But Gorbachev was too busy then, desperately trying to save something irredeemable. It would get deep pretty quickly but then you would reach the first sandbar and stand, with only your heels immersed, like Jesus. Then you would swim ahead and land on the second sandbar. You would stand once again, and look back at the beach, more distant and impressionistic. You could swim forward but few of us ever did, because from there the sea would continue on unabated toward eternity or Sweden, whichever came first.

The Kafkaesque rhythm of Eastern European antisemitism could be felt through the sticky little utterances sprinkled in playgrounds and school hallways. "If there is no water in the house, then the kike drank it. If there is, the kike peed there." Even armed with a degree in philosophy and buoyed by Kierkegaard and Levinas, that circular logic was hard to refute.

"Pa-pam, pa-pam, pa-pam, pa-pam." There was jazz every half hour, and during rush hour every fifteen minutes, when the long electric trains would bring vacationers from Riga and sound out a familiar cadence. The cars' inverted wheels rolling along solid, silver-tinged rails, set upon wooden beams and brownish rocks. The fleeting, sweet sound of summer and the inevitable reunion with real life.

We would often walk along the main street lined with cafes and impoverished Vietnamese students selling electronic watches. There was music in the newer, privatized restaurants and empty shelves

everywhere else, save for the gargantuan jars of canned tomatoes adding insult to injury.

Vigor's son sold bunches of dill, which he grew himself, at the little farmer's market. We would say hello to him and sometimes buy one.

The forests teemed with blueberries and their fairy tale scent. "Yes, you will go!" my father sternly commanded when I resisted the boring sojourns to pick them, which could last hours. So much effort for a fruit that could never compete with the ethereal taste of the strawberry.

But always, the sea was given its due and we paid homage multiple times a day. Walking along the dry road, strewn with rocks, past the train station, built during a more prosperous time. Until the pines, thin and radiant, with light among them.

INCENSED BY CORONAVIRUS: PRAYER AND KETORET IN TIMES OF EPIDEMIC

EDWARD REICHMAN is a Professor of Emergency Medicine at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine and received his semikhah from RIETS.

The patient recently returned from Italy and complains of fever and a cough. I am called to assess the patient. As the patient is suspected of having Coronavirus, I carefully put on my gown, gloves, mask, and face shield to examine the patient. Upon completion, I exit to a special room and very carefully remove (doff) my protective gear to prevent spread of contagious material. The process of dressing in protective gear is called to don and to doff. The last time I did the "doff" was during the Ebola scare. I have now, much to my dismay, restarted the "doff" *yomi*.

We are on high alert in the ER in anticipation of the spread of Coronavirus. Suspected cases, based on travel history, exposure, history, and symptoms are immediately isolated in a containment room, examined, and tested. Tensions are high. We have been here before (Ebola, Zika, Swine Flu, Measles), yet this time things seem different. The response is severe, the percentage of fatalities, at least at this point, appears on par with the 1918 Spanish flu (2-3%). Headlines tout the potential for this to be the worst epidemic in one hundred years. We have not seen a response of this magnitude to disease in our lifetimes.

Among the first confirmed cases in the New York area, and presently constituting the largest cluster of the disease, are members of the Orthodox Jewish community. What is our response to this epidemic? To be sure, in the spirit of *ve-nishmartem me'od le-nafshoteihem* and *pikuah nefesh*, we must address the technical aspects of disease contagion and transmission based on the dictates of modern medicine and the recommendations of the Center for Disease Control. To date, some Jewish schools and universities have closed, and *shuls* have been quarantined. Jewish organizations are sending frequent detailed e-mails and arranging conference calls to provide continuous updates on the situation. As of today, one community has declared a "whole community shutdown" - no *shul*, no *shivah*, no *simhahs*, etc.

There are attendant halakhic issues, such as kissing the *mezuzah* or Torah, davening with a *minyán* for those in quarantine, missing *keriyat ha-Torah* as an individual or community, fulfilling the

obligation of reading *Parshat Zakhor*, listening to *Megillah* reading via phone or Facetime, walking the streets to deliver *mishloah manot*, travelling for Pesah, and many others. Purim was celebrated very differently this year, especially for those in quarantine, and the term "*mukaf homah*" has taken on a completely different meaning. Responses to some of these halakhic questions have already been rendered, and others will be forthcoming from contemporary *poskim*. *Barukh Hashem*, we are not so familiar with these issues. The advent of vaccinations and antibiotics has drastically reduced the impact of infectious diseases on our daily lives. Our ancestors, however, were intimately familiar with them. Plagues and epidemics were an ever-present and intimate part of their daily life.

One of our first responses to all tragedy, however, including the present Coronavirus outbreak, is prayer. First and foremost, we all fervently pray for the immediate and complete *refuah sheleimah* of all those affected. In addition to personal prayer, communal prayer and sometimes fasting are also integral parts of our response. How widespread does disease have to be in order to pass the threshold and trigger a communal response of prayer or of fasting? *Shulhan Arukh* writes:¹

Just as we fast... in times of drought, we also fast for other disasters... and so for plague. What is considered a plague? If a city of 500 inhabitants has three deaths a day (from plague) for three consecutive days, this is defined as a plague.

While this may not be the CDC's definition, and would clearly require updating today, it nonetheless reveals a sensitivity to a threshold in the definition of an epidemic. While there are a number of synonyms for epidemic in Hebrew, such as *magefah* or *dever*, there is no ancient Hebrew term for a pandemic. According to the World Health Organization, we are now in the midst of a global Coronavirus pandemic.

Prayers have been written for centuries both for general disease outbreaks, as well as for specific epidemics, such as cholera.



Some of these prayers, such as an Italian prayer during a plague from 1700, include excerpts from *Avinu Malkeinu*,² which is typically recited on fast days and during the *aseret yemei teshuvah*:

תפילה קצרה להתפלל על שמינית מכת הדבר השוטפת ועוברת במדינות אחרות
רחמנא ליצילן

¹ *Orah Hayyim*, 576.

² Jewish Theological Seminary Library B. (NS)PP380 (Italy 1700).

permitted, inasmuch as it was not previously known to be a cure, nor part of the traditional medical armamentarium.

One contemporary authority⁷ compares Esther's violation of the laws of *arayot* (illicit sexual relations) to the use of *ketoret* by Aharon. In both cases there was a situation of *pikuah nefesh*, yet the violation did not constitute a proven remedy for the problem. However, since they each involved prevention of the possible destruction of the people of Israel,⁸ even an unproven remedy would be permitted.

It is this biblically-derived notion of the curative properties of *ketoret*, specifically for the treatment of plague (however that is to be defined), that led to its virtual ubiquitous inclusion in prayers for plague throughout the centuries. This association has been forgotten in the modern post-vaccination and post-antibiotic era, when epidemics with high mortality rates are far less frequent. It behooves us to recall this tradition and its place in our medical and halakhic history.

Abraham Yagel, a sixteenth-century physician, mentions the story of Aharon and the *ketoret* and supports the recitation of *ma'aseh ketoret* in times of plague.⁹ He also cites Rabbi Judah Muscato who adds that by delving into the *ketoret*, the infestation will stop by natural means and the air will be purified.¹⁰ The Ari z"l likewise recommends the recitation of *pitum ha-ketoret* in times of plague.¹¹ Even in his primarily medical treatise published in 1631, Abraham Catalano mentions the value of the recitation of the *ketoret*. In the early twentieth century, David Macht performed experiments which identified antiseptic properties of the ingredients of the *ketoret*.¹² Indeed, he penned an entire volume dedicated to identifying the exact ingredients of the Temple incense.¹³

The *Pitum ha-Ketoret* of the Italian Rabbinate is thus simply the perpetuation of a longstanding tradition, tracing its origins back to the Torah itself, of invoking the *ketoret* as a form of protection against plague or epidemic diseases. This hopefully gives us not only an historical appreciation of this prayer, which has been part of our history for centuries, but also an appreciation of the scientific advances that have led to our collective amnesia of its significance.¹⁴

⁷ Yosef Aryeh Lawrence, *Mishnat Pikuah Nefesh* (Bnei Brak, 5763), Chapter 62.

⁸ God threatened to destroy the entire nation in the episode of Korah.

⁹ See Abraham Yagel, *Moshia Hosim* (di Gara: Venice, 1587), 63 and 66. On Yagel, see David B. Ruderman, *Kabbalah, Magic and Science: The Cultural Universe of a Sixteenth-Century Jewish Physician* (Harvard University Press, 1988). For what follows, see Andrew Berns, "Judah Moscato, Abraham Portaleone, and Biblical Incense in Late Renaissance Mantua," in *Studies in Jewish History and Culture, Volume 35, Rabbi Judah Moscato and the Jewish Intellectual World of Mantua in the 16th-17th Centuries*, eds. Giuseppe Veltri and Gianfranco Miletto (Brill, 2012), 119-133.

¹⁰ Berns, *op. cit.*

¹¹ *Sha'ar ha-Kavanot, Derush Tefillat Shaharit.*

¹² David Macht and William Kunkel, "Concerning the Antiseptic Action of Some Aromatic Fumes," *Experimental Biology Medicine* (1920): 68-70.

¹³ David Macht, *The Holy Incense* (Baltimore: 1928). For the previous attempt by Abraham Portaleone to identify the ingredients of the *ketoret*, see Berns, *op. cit.*

¹⁴ The Chief Rabbinate of Israel also issued their own brief prayer for the Coronavirus pandemic. <https://www.srugim.co.il/427406-הרבנות>

King Hizkiyahu performed a number of actions without asking prior permission from the Rabbis, though he received retrospective approbation. One of these is the burial of the *Sefer Refuot* (*The Book of Cures*).¹⁵ According to Rashi, this volume possessed the cures for all human disease. Over the course of time, people began to rely exclusively on the cures, neglecting to turn their eyes towards the heavens and pray to the ultimate Source of all healing. Hizkiyahu thus felt compelled to inter the precious book.

Despite our breathtaking medical advances, perhaps representing a metaphorical exhumation of the *Sefer Refuot* of old, we are now reminded that we are not in control; that God is capable through a mere microscopic intermediary to bring the entire world to its proverbial knees; and that there are times even today when prayer can be our most potent, if not only, weapon against disease. May this be a temporary reminder to allow us to adjust our course and return our eyes to the heavens, so that the advances against disease (a possible vaccination is already on the horizon), through the hand of God, can progress and stem the tide of this latest pandemic.

RAV YEHUDA AMITAL AND THE SECRET OF JEWISH CONTINUITY

SHLOMO ZUCKIER recently received his PhD in Ancient Judaism at Yale University and is doing his postdoc at McGill University.

Tonight is the seventh Yahrzeit of Rav Yehuda Amital, founding Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Har Etzion. He was influential in many ways on the Dati Leumi scene, both initiating religious approaches that became mainstream and diverging from the consensus at other times. Having spent several years learning at the Gush in the twilight of Rav Amital's career, I had the extraordinary fortune of counting him among those who have had a profound influence on my Judaism.

His legacies include the establishment of one of the first Yeshivot [Hesder](#), as he combined a Lithuanian yeshiva curriculum with not only army service but also a certain Hasidic and spiritual flavor; significant theological contributions on [natural ethics](#), [theology of](#)

[מפרסמת תפילה מיוחדת לעצירת הקורונה](#) (accessed March 8, 2020). While the text of the *pitum ha-ketoret* is omitted from this prayer, it does refer to the original episode of the post-Korah plague. It cites a phrase from Tehillim (rather than the original reference in the Torah) that focuses on the element of prayer as opposed to the vehicle of *ketoret*, "*Va-ya'amod Pinhas va-yefalel, va-te'atzar ha-magefah*" (Tehillim 106:30) In this version of events, it is the prayer (or actions, according to the commentaries) of Pinhas, as opposed to the *ketoret* brought by Aharon, which achieved disease remission.

¹⁵ On *Sefer Refuot*, see D. J. Halperin, "The Book of Remedies, the Canonization of the Solomonic Writings, and the Riddle of Pseudo-Eusebius," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 72:4 (April 1982): 269-292; Zev Zicherman, *Otzar Pela'ot ha-Torah: Shemot* (Brooklyn, NY, 5775), 413-415; F. Rosner, "The Illness of King Hezekiah and the 'Book of Remedies' Which He Hid," *Koroth* 9:1-2 (1985): 190-197; Yaakov Zahalon, *Otzar ha-Hayyim* (Venice, 1683), Introduction; Hazon Ish, *Emunah u-Vitachon*, Chapter 5; Shlomo Halperin, *Sefer ha-Rof'im*, in *Sefer Assia 2* (Reuven Mass: Jerusalem, 5741), 78-79; M. Hirt, *Kuntres ve-Rapo Yerapei* (Bnei Brak, 5763), 17-22; Mordechai Gumpel Schnaber, *Solet Minhah Belulah* (5557), 31b-33b.

history, and [Kiddush and Hillul Hashem](#); and the publication of several volumes of traditional [Talmudic and halakhic novella](#). Throughout his speeches and writings, he consistently focused on recognizing and appreciating the [complexity](#) of life—his favorite slogan was “*ein patentim*,” or “no shortcuts”—even in the face of countervailing trends. Over his public life, he shifted from supporting the far-right Gush Emunim to founding the left-wing religious [Meimad party](#), for which he served as a government minister following the Rabin assassination.

There are, to be sure, [several studies](#), [biographies](#), [bibliographies](#), and [tributes to](#) Rav Amital and his thought that I would [recommend](#).

In honor of this year’s Yahrzeit, I wish to honor Rav Amital’s legacy by presenting one of his favorite teachings, and to do so by means of a *Derasha*, an art form that he mastered.

Editor’s Note: The following Derasha, entitled “Transitions, Stability, and Ritual: Parshat Pinhas and the Secret to Jewish Continuity,” was originally presented on July 15, 2017, at Lincoln Square Synagogue.

Parshat Pinhas is full of transitions.

We begin with the wrap-up of the Pinhas story, where Pinhas had just killed Kozbi and Zimri. As a reward, he receives both a “Covenant of Peace” and a “Covenant of Priesthood,” which, according to the Rabbis, marks his *transition* into the priestly status.

Pinhas’ actions had served to stop a plague, which was occasioned by the Midianites and had killed many Jews. Following this epidemic, which itself came on the heels of God’s wiping out Korach’s rebellion, our Parsha features a lengthy headcount of all the Israelites.

The count fulfills three distinct purposes. First, it is a way of taking stock of the damage left in the wake of destruction. Rashi compares this to a shepherd who counts his sheep after they were ravaged by wolves. He offers another reason as well: Moshe had counted the Israelites when he first assumed the mantle of leadership, and now, as his time is winding down, he counts them again before ending his tenure.

Thirdly, as the verses make clear, the census is tied to the division of the land that the people are poised to enter. As the verses tell us, those who are counted stand to receive a portion of *Eretz Yisrael*.

We are then presented with elaborate details of the partitioning of the land, its division among the tribes, both large and small. We hear about the daughters of Tzelofhad: what if someone has only daughters—do they receive a portion?

Parshat Pinhas discusses Moshe’s request for a leader to replace him. God designates as Yehoshua, and Moshe passes the spirit of leadership on to him.

All in all, the census of the people, and the three reasons surrounding it—the plague, Moshe’s looming exit, and the impending communal entry to the land of Israel—delineate a clear transition period. Not only does Pinhas experience a change in status, but the entire People of Israel are about to undergo one as well. Israel has just endured a plague, and is now counting itself in preparation for receiving a new leader and entering the Land.

In the middle of this lengthy count, we are told, very poignantly, that no one survived the time in the desert, save for Kalev and Yehoshua, the two “good” spies. God had decided that everyone else would perish in the desert and not enter the Land of Israel, on account of the nation’s acceptance of the negative report of the other ten spies. No man who had left Egypt—but for Kalev and Yehoshua—was to experience the Holy Land.

It is thus a full transition—a complete changeover from one generation to the next, from one leader to the next, from one land to the next; in essence, a comprehensive shift in national identity. It is safe to conclude, then, that transitions are thematically central to Parshat Pinhas.

And then we get to the next part of the Parsha. It’s anything but dynamic. It delineates the sacrifices designated for various occasions: a twice daily *olah* offering, and a combination of offerings to be brought every Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh, Pesach, Shavuot, Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Sukkot, and Shemini Atzeret. As one might presume, there is a fair amount of repetition in the Torah’s description of what is required. It is a dry, monotonous account fleshing out the particulars of these sacrifices.

These are the types of passages that we often gloss over. There’s no plot line. The laws aren’t exciting or interesting; they just don’t speak to the contemporary human condition. It’s a repetitive listing of which animal offerings are required for this date and that, how much flour or oil to bring along with this type of animal.

In a sense, you could say that the text’s somewhat repetitive nature, its monotony, is representative of the bringing of sacrifices themselves. Every day, day in and day out, there is the same offering (Num. 28:4):

אֶת־הַכֹּבֵשׂ אֶחָד תַּעֲשֶׂה בַבֹּקֶר וְאֶת הַכֹּבֵשׂ הַשֵּׁנִי תַעֲשֶׂה
בֵּין הָעֶרְבָיִם:
Offer one sheep in the morning and the other
sheep in the afternoon.

Each is accompanied by a tenth of an Ephah of flour, mixed with oil, and a quarter-Hin of wine. This sacrificial combination is brought twice a day, 365 days a year, the same exact offering each time. And while some of the other offerings may take place less frequently—once a week, monthly, or annually—they too are not overly exciting. Each offering prescribes a very specific, set regimen of what is needed. There are no special ingredients to be offered. In fact, there is actually a prohibition against including a “secret sauce”—one may not include leaven or honey in any sacrifice on God’s altar!

A Midrash cited in the *Ein Yaakov* collection presents a discussion as to what the most important verse in the Torah might be. Several different opinions are offered by various rabbis. One invokes שְׁמַע אֶחָד יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֶחָד, “Hear O Israel the Lord is our God the Lord is one” (Deut. 6:4). Another offers וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֶךָ כְּמוֹךָ, “Love your fellow as yourself” (Lev. 19:18). Both are clearly important verses, ones that might score high marks on a public poll. But the other opinion is most surprising: Shimon Ben Pazi says that the most important verse in the Torah appears in our Parsha—אֶת־הַכֹּבֵשׂ אֶחָד תַּעֲשֶׂה בַבֹּקֶר וְאֶת הַכֹּבֵשׂ הַשֵּׁנִי תַעֲשֶׂה בֵּין הָעֶרְבָיִם, “Offer one sheep in the morning and the other sheep in the afternoon.” This position is perplexing—the key verse in the Torah is about sacrificing sheep?

Even more surprising is the fact that this choice of verse is singled out as the authoritative position on the matter!

What is the message here? How can the most important verse be the most monotonous one?

But, of course, that is exactly Shimon ben Pazi's point. It is precisely the most prosaic of *pesukim*, one describing the basic structure of a ritual done twice a day, day in and day out, that is the core of Torah. In a sense, it's an answer that undermines the question. There is no singular "high point" in Judaism. It is the every day, every law, every verse, that counts. It is consistency in following tradition that is to be valued, rather than a search for the high point, a pinnacle of Judaism. One often hears about new programs or initiatives that are promoted as meaningful, as exciting, that feature highlights of Judaism. And while there is certainly value in presenting the highlights and seeking meaning—and while Judaism undoubtedly offers both of those—I wonder whether something might be lost in the singular focus on these points, to the exclusion of the more prosaic.

It might be helpful to think about Shimon ben Pazi's claim in the context of a familial relationship. Of course, one is going to have certain highlights of a relationship, whether it's a special birthday party, anniversary dinner, a favorite vacation. But in order to have a relationship in the first place, in order for it to be *possible* to appreciate the high points, it is necessary to first establish a solid framework of commitment, of consistent support and love for one another. That might entail more mundane actions, such as washing dishes or taking out the garbage. Absent that foundation, that consistent connection at the base, the exciting events ring hollow. The same goes for one's relationship with God and religion.

While Judaism doesn't currently practice sacrifice, this paradigm can explain why Judaism does have set prayer three times a day, corresponding to the Temple sacrifices. The prayers have a set, unchanging, text that repeats daily, and at times weekly or monthly. Although one might experience high points in prayer from time to time, the structure doesn't exactly lend itself to ecstatic rapture; there won't always be a new revelation each time you attend synagogue. But the structure is in place in order to offer an avenue to consistently demonstrate one's fealty to God. One's religious identity is constituted by following this and other rituals, by going to synagogue and saying prayers, by putting on *tefillin*, by lighting Shabbat candles or doing any other mitzvah. When we attend Shul, whether it is *אַת־הַכֶּבֶשׂ אֶחָד תַּעֲשֶׂה בַבֶּקֶר*, for daily services, or whether it's *וּבְיוֹם הַשַּׁבָּת*, coming weekly on Shabbos, it is the consistency that is central, the fact that there is a set time in one's schedule for their relationship with God.



And this all brings me back to Rav Amital. He was very fond of this Midrash of Shimon ben Pazi, and would quote it quite frequently. Despite his personal charisma, and his spiritual nature—in many ways he resembled a Hasidic Rebbe—his message was clear: constancy and consistency, *אַת־הַכֶּבֶשׂ אֶחָד תַּעֲשֶׂה בַבֶּקֶר*, are the core tenets of being an observant Jew. There may be flashes of religious brilliance from time to time, but one cannot rely on that; one must build a religious framework from the ground up in order to advance as a religious Jew, in order to dependably keep God in our lives.

The message of *korbanot*, of the consistent offering to God day in and day out, week in and week out, is indeed a powerful one. And its message is rendered all the more powerful on account of its positioning in Parshat Pinhas. The Jewish People are situated at a

major crossroads, in a real transitional period: a new land waits ahead, to be entered by new leadership, as well as a new followership, a new population. You can imagine the people, contemplating what lies ahead, bewildered by the changing landscape, fearful of what the promised land promises *them*. Everything was changing—the leadership, the people, the land.

But one thing was going to stay the same throughout. It will always be the same God, the same Torah, the same rituals, the same offerings. *אַת־הַכֶּבֶשׂ אֶחָד תַּעֲשֶׂה בַבֶּקֶר*, the religion remains the same, day in and day out. Moshe may pass on, but God can find a replacement for him, Yehoshua. The generation of the desert may expire, but their children and children's children hold fast to that very same Torah. Yes, the Land of Israel may hold unexpected things in store. But if the Torah was able to keep the Jewish people in good stead through their desert travels, it should serve to sustain them in *Eretz Yisrael* as well, only on a higher spiritual plane.

If the first half of our Parsha depicts a people nervous about what the future holds in store, the second half, with its prosaic listing of sacrifices, subtly responds to precisely those concerns. The Torah will sustain Israel amidst all the changes—it will always be the same sacrifices, the same religion, the same God.

Rav Amital was among a number of Torah scholars who survived the scourge of the Holocaust, finding himself in a new land with a new group of people. He experienced, in his description, a world built and then destroyed. What he maintained, and what maintained *him*, was his commitment to Torah study and to Jewish tradition. He endeavored to pass on what he had learned, to teach another generation how to be true to Torah Judaism, to be deeply committed to Torah and Halacha while seeing it as inseparable from ethics, to build a holy and healthy Land of Israel out of the ashes of the Holocaust. As he put it, his world could be rebuilt once again, upon the bedrock foundation of Torah Judaism.

The message of our Parsha—and the message of Rav Amital's life—is, in a sense, what Jewish History is all about. The Jewish People has flourished at times, and suffered at others. We have been autonomous and subservient, prominent and obscure, powerful and powerless, shifting along with the vagaries of history. But one thing has remained consistent throughout—*אַת־הַכֶּבֶשׂ אֶחָד תַּעֲשֶׂה בַבֶּקֶר*, the daily commitment to religion—and it has held the Jewish People together throughout it all. There is a reason that Psalmist says *לוֹלִי לֹא־יָרַדְתִּי וְשִׁעֲשִׂי אֶזְאָב־תִּי בְעַנְיִי*, "If not for your Torah, God, my pastime, I would have been lost and forsaken." Rituals are the constant throughout Jewish history, sustaining Israel amidst whatever challenges come its way.

All told, this profound yet simple message is the extraordinary legacy of Rav Yehuda Amital: entering *Eretz Yisrael* against great adversity, and adapting to the new challenges and opportunities of the Holy Land, while persisting in the Torah and traditions he had learned in Europe in his youth. He taught, by doctrine and by example, that there are no shortcuts. The righteous live by their consistent devotion to the Torah and Halakhah, thus ensuring Jewish continuity. May Rav Amital's teachings and memory be for a blessing. *Yehi Zikhro Barukh*.

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