

Achrei Mos Kedoshim 2023

The Heart of Worship

3 minute read | Straightforward

Prayer is a central aspect of Judaism, if not all religious beliefs. It is an invocation or act that deliberately seeks out and interfaces with the divine.

Although prayer does appear obliquely or sporadically in the Torah, it is not the predominant mode of worship in the Torah or the ancient world the Torah appeared in, an era where animal sacrifice was a near cultural universal. Our sages went out of their way to teach that prayer doesn't just appear in the Torah; prayer stands in as a direct replacement or substitute for the lapsed sacrifices of long ago.

Our prayers are replete with requests to restore Jerusalem and rebuild the Beis HaMikdash. However, authorities are divided on whether the future we yearn for heralds a restoration or replacement of animal sacrifice. While that remains speculative until we find out, it is probably fair to say that it is hard for people in the modern world to wrap their heads around animal sacrifice.

Today's near cultural universal is that animal sacrifice is alien and weird, perhaps even disgusting and nasty. Most people don't want to watch an animal get slaughtered; any arcane mysticism is hard to imagine over the blood and gore.

That leaves prayer in a bit of a void; prayer is a stand-in or substitute for animal sacrifice, and yet an animal sacrifice is hard to relate to in almost every conceivable way, so far removed as it is from our primary experience. Moreover, the Torah has long sections devoted to the different categories and kinds of sacrifice and their details and nuances; sacrifice is clearly the primary mode of worship in the Torah's conception, so prayer seems second-rate.

Either way, prayer is hard to understand. If prayer and sacrifice aren't connected, why bother with something the Torah doesn't validate as having much significance? And if prayer is connected to sacrifice, what element of sacrifice do we even relate to?

The Torah opens the section on sacrifices by outlining a scenario where someone wants to bring an offering:

אָדָם כִּי־יִקְרִיב מִמֶּם קֹרְבָן לַיהוָה – When one of you presents an offering for God... (1:2)

Although not readily obvious in translation, the Torah utilizes highly unusual language here. Rather than present the sensible scenario where one of you wants to bring an offering, it literally translates to



when someone offers an offering of you, which is to say, literally of yourselves – אָדָם מִמֶּנּוּ / אָדָם / אָדָם
בְּיִקְרִיב מִמֶּנּוּ.

The Baal HaTanya notes that this reading suggests that at the earliest juncture, the Torah already indicates that as much it's going to talk about animal offerings, it's not about the animal at all; it's about the part of yourself you're willing to offer, and prayer would operate in much the same way – בְּיִקְרִיב מִמֶּנּוּ.

R' Jonathan Sacks teaches that the conventional notion of sacrifice isn't really reflected in the Hebrew term – קָרְבָן. We think of sacrifice as giving something up when the Hebrew word actually means something more like drawing closer – קָרַב. You interact with the divine not with what you give up but by drawing close with what you have; in offering the material to God, you transform the material into the sacred.

God doesn't need our stuff and can't receive it in any tangible way; the Malbim teaches that all a person can ever offer is themselves, which mirrors precisely what the Torah calls for here – בְּיִקְרִיב מִמֶּנּוּ. The Sfas Emes explains that the notion articulated here is that sacrifice and prayer are about aligning ourselves and resources to God's broader plan; prayer isn't secondary to sacrifice; it is the same.

While the form of seeking out the divine may have changed over time depending on the zeitgeist, the substance has remained constant. At the root of all mysticism is a desire to connect with the divine transcendence, and our sages have long identified the inner world of the heart as the battlefield of spirituality – עבודת שבלב. So we can read the Yom Kippur atonement ritual that seems odd to modern sensibilities, yet it maintains relevance to our prayers because the substance transcends the form of the performative aspect; that God forgives humans who want to make amends, goats and string or not.

It's not the form of how it appears so much as it's about the substance of how it is – אחד המרבה ואחד ואחד – הממעט ובלבד שיכוין לבו לשמים.

As Moshe said to his audience, our Creator is always close, quite different from other gods they might have heard of who can only be invoked with specific rituals – כִּי מִי־גוֹי גָדוֹל אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ אֱלֹהִים קְרִיבִים אֵלָיו כֹּה אֱלֹהֵינוּ – בְּכִלְי־קְרָאָנוּ אֵלָיו.

The Izhbitzer suggests that our subconscious hearts and minds hope and pray all the time. When you whisper “Please, God,” hope for the best, or wish that things turn out okay, those unspoken but very real thoughts are prayers that bring tangible wisps of warmth into the world that affirm and sustain, from which things can and will eventually grow – קָרוֹב ה' לְכָל קְרָאָיו לְכֹל אֲשֶׁר יִקְרָאָהוּ בְּאֵמֶת.

As the Kotzker said, where can we find God? Wherever we let Him in.



Sacrifice, like prayer, was always about the inner world of the spirit, about opening your heart and yourself to the universe.

And prayer, like sacrifice, can't change God; but it can change you.

Regulations Redux

4 minute read | Intermediate

Speed limits, traffic lights, parking meters, building codes, dress codes... it's easy to see rules as restrictive forces in our lives, reducing individual freedom and personal choice.

The Torah is brimming with laws and rules, so it's a critique one can aim at Judaism with some merit and one that has long been raised by seekers.

There are so many rules, and they stack up fast! Eat now, fast then, do this, don't do that, and it goes on.

Why can't we just do what we want?

The opening story of Creation about the dawn of humanity centers around the imposition of a rule – don't eat from this tree, and humanity's unwillingness to follow the rule – they did it anyway.

There's a plausible reading here where God is cruel and tantalizing, teasing His creatures by pointing at the beautiful tree they are forbidden to enjoy; the language of prohibition and denial is right there, and it identifies God as the maker and enforcer of a system with arbitrary rules that humans are destined to fail.

But the story that follows about Noah and the Flood is a story about what happens in a world with no rules – total anarchy and chaos, and ultimately, the collapse of civilization. When everyone pillages and plunders, you have barbaric savages. Noah and the Flood, we see a world without rules, which leads to chaos and the collapse of civilization.

No serious person believes that radical anarchy would be sustainable, a total free for all where Darwinist principles of survival of the fittest govern the day. Doing anything you want isn't a utopian dream; it's a dystopian nightmare. Every human society at all times in all places has understood that humans need rules and norms; ancient and primitive societies had rules and norms we might object to, but they had rules and norms just the same. The existence of rules and norms is a foundation of human society – no one gets to do whatever they want.



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Rules form boundaries that enable and facilitate safe human relations by asserting how to interact, preventing infringement on others or abuse or depletion of a thing. Rules are a basic civic requirement.

Beyond the philosophical, this extends to the essential nature of reality; our universe is a universe of rules, built and run according to rules, the laws of physics that govern energy and matter.

The religious aspect of doing whatever we want is based on the notion that observant Jews are missing out. Sure, there are many things observant Jews can't do or enjoy – bacon, cheeseburgers, lobster, and pepperoni are allegedly some of the big ones.

Yet the Midrash teaches that it is wrong to believe that the Creator denies or prohibits us from the joys of life in any way. Rather, the Torah asks us just to regulate our instincts and stop them from running wild in order to maintain balance in our lives, from greed, hunger, and revenge, to tribal loyalty and sexuality.

Humans break when overindulged – people everywhere abuse and hurt, cheat and steal, get obese and sick, and tirelessly waste years of life on sexual pursuits. These negative impacts aren't the product of liberty; they're different forms of addiction and brokenness.

Like all cultures and societies, the Torah has lots of rules. And like all cultures and societies, some make more sense than others.

But like all rules and laws, they keep us safe and stop us from getting out of control. They help regulate our enjoyment of life; they enable everything else.

The laws of sexuality regulate that family relationships are inappropriate if combined with sexuality.

The laws of Shabbos are endless; you learn something new every time you learn the laws of Shabbos. But the existence of Shabbos changes and elevates how we experience time – it's not Saturday, a day off work, it's Shabbos! Moreover, Shabbos has kept generations of families and Jewish communities eating, singing, and praying together for life.

The Torah permits a carnivorous diet, which could reasonably be construed as unethical; it asks us to limit our diet to animals with certain features that must be slaughtered humanely. If the Creator is the gatekeeper of Creation, it's not obvious that we should be able to eat living creatures at all! But otherwise, the Torah allows us to enjoy the vast majority of human cuisine prepared in accordance with our culture.

What's more, when taken together, the rules of kosher keep the Jewish People distinct and separate from the world. They elevate the most basic instinct to consume into a religious act, saturated with



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meaning and purpose. As the Chasam Sofer notes, the kosher laws open with what Jews can eat, the permission, not the prohibition.

As the Meshech Chochma notes, the Creation story isn't about a negative restriction on a tree; it's about a positive command to eat literally everything else in Creation and fill the world with people, broad and permissive, perhaps even indulgent and hedonistic, with one caveat.

The Creator sanctifies human desire with the very first command – the directive to eat and procreate suggests that even our most basic instincts serve God's purposes. Although there's a caveat, even several, the Torah's claim is that God is the gatekeeper of that permission; that's what "Creator" means. If we accept the premise of a Creator, why would we feel entitled to the entire universe?

Beyond the aspect of a legal obligation, the fact that Jews observe a rule or practice makes it a cultural norm, unspoken but socially agreed on, and therefore sanctified by the collective consciousness of all Jewish People.

The Torah has lots of rules and laws. But those laws come from the Creator of Genesis; the God who creates life, loves life, commands life to thrive, and wants that life to love and enjoy.

We do this thing, we don't do that thing. No one gets to do whatever they want, that's not how the world works. We live in societies built on the rule of law, in a rule-based universe.

Rules aren't so terrible.

Sacred Space

6 minute read | Intermediate

If you ask people what the defining traits of religion are, holiness will be on most people's lists.

Holiness is a shorthand code word everyone recognizes, and we sagely and solemnly nod our heads. Yes, yes, holiness, of course!

But what is holiness?

We sometimes think of holiness as something we do on our own. Withdrawing from the world, from the joys and vices of life, fasting, going into the woods, or perhaps profound meditations on lofty metaphysics, retreating deep into the recesses of the mind.



There may be substance to some or even all of those things, but that's not how the Torah talks about holiness.

The Torah talks about withdrawing in part and designating times and spaces; the Hebrew word for holiness means to designate or separate – קדושה.

But a critical element is missing from the word's everyday use. Most appearances of holiness throughout the Torah describe it as a function of plurality, something we do with others together.

When the Torah asks us to be holy, Rashi notes that the instruction is given to everyone together – דָּבָר אֶל-כָּל-עַדַת בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם קְדוּשִׁים תִּהְיוּ. Moreover, it follows this instruction with commands to be charitable, fair, and honest in dealing with others. As the Chasam Sofer notes, the Torah's conception of holiness is one of connection and interdependence, not disconnection and asceticism.

When the time comes to build the Mishkan, everyone must come together for God to be found in their work:

וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְתוֹכָם – And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. (25:8)

Standing at the hallowed Mount Sinai, on the cusp of receiving the Torah, God tells the gathered people their overarching mission:

וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ-לִי מְמַלְכֵת פְּהַנִּים וְגוֹי קְדוֹשׁ – You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation... (19:6)

Beyond the Torah explicitly speaking about holiness as a function of togetherness – וְעָשׂוּ / תִּהְיוּ – our Sages emphasize the central importance of the Jewish People coming together at Har Sinai – וַיִּתְחַוֶּשׂוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל נֶגֶד הָהָר / כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד בְּלִב אֶחָד.

Almost all sacred gatherings require a group, from prayers and sacrifices to reading the Torah and weddings – כָּל דְּבַר שֶׁבְקָדוּשָׁה לֹא יֵהָא פְחוּת מֵעֲשָׂרָה –

So why is holiness so tightly linked to togetherness?

In the Torah's formative story of the emergency of humanity, it describes the first man's existential aloneness as bad – לֹא-טוֹב הֵיטָב הָאָדָם לְבָדוֹ. Being alone and doing things alone is terrible; being together and doing things together is good.

Our prophets and sages talk about the soul as the thing that animates our consciousness, the part of you that makes you uniquely you, and they speak of soul fragments directly connected to God – חֵלֶק אֵלֹהִים מִמֶּעַל.



But when we come together, we become whole, which is why holiness is linked with connection – כנסת – ישראל.

R' Jonathan Sacks suggests that if the Creation story is about the space God makes for us, the Mishkan narrative is about the space we make for God. Noting that the Torah spends a lot more time discussing the Mishkan than Creation, R' Sacks teaches that the Torah is far more interested in what we do for God than what God does for us.

Far more esoterically, Chassidus speaks of tzimtzum, the space or vacuum God separates from God's fullness so that existence can have an independent existence and reality. But maybe when we build a Mishkan, a separate return space, we form our own inverse or parallel tzimtzum, which we can only do in our enhanced state of togetherness.

In the external world, it starts with individuals, human to human. The Torah has its fair share of lofty arcane things, but a full half of the Ten Commandments are grounded in interpersonal regulations – בין אדם לחברו. It's not enough to love humanity in the abstract; you have to love people in particular – your annoying neighbor and the guy who never stops talking.

Among the most misunderstood laws are the mitzvos about sanctifying and profaning God's name – ולא תחללו את-שם קדשי ונקדושותי בתוך בני ישראל. But in the context of holiness as something we do together, they make perfect sense – בתוך בני ישראל. If holiness is related to togetherness, our public actions either draw people in or alienate them.

The Chemdas Dovid explains that while an individual is like a string, a group is more like a rope, far stronger than the individual components alone, which is to say that togetherness generates something greater than the sum of its parts.

While the Mishkan project had an open call for donations of all kinds of things that were wonderful and welcome, the core donation to the Mishkan project was a simple half-shekel and was required of everyone – העשיר לא-גובה ויהיה לא גמעיט ממחצית השקל לתת את-תרומת ה' לכפר על-נפשתיכם –

While the Torah predates the notion of corporations or public companies, it seems thematically similar. Every person was invested in the Mishkan, or perhaps better; everyone was a contributor and owner of that holiness, which could be precisely what made it holy in the first place.

There is undoubtedly an aspect of generosity that we need to welcome and celebrate – כל המרבה הרי זה – משובח. But it can often feel like we miss the everyman who can't quite swing a high roller donation.

The unit of the mandatory universal contribution to the Mishkan was a half shekel, not a whole shekel, and most or all of the measurements in the Mishkan ended in half cubits, reflecting the same core theme that your contribution can only ever take you halfway. The Mishna in Pirkei Avos teaches

that it is not for us to complete the work, but neither are we free to desist, with the obvious conclusion that we count on others by necessity – ולא אתה בן חורין ליבטל ממנה

We ought to remember the Mishkan project that indicates smaller nominal contributions are just as valuable as everyone else's. Everyone gives the whole of what they should, rich or poor. You give a fraction, and not only does it count, but it's enough, and that's all we need. More than how much you give, it matters that you participate.

This isn't cutesy moralizing – the half-shekel contributions were melted down to form the sockets that connected the base of each wall segment. The part everyone gave together formed no less than the foundation of the entire Mishkan.

We're better off through what we do together, for, and with others. The Gemara says that collecting the half shekel from everyone elevated and uplifted them – ונתנו איש כפר לַפְּקֻדֵיהֶם, וְיִשְׂרָאֵל, כִּי תִשָּׂא אֶת-רֹאשׁ בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְנִתְּנָהוּ אִישׁ כֶּפֶר. Avos d'Rabi Nosson notes how valuable human contribution is; God is everywhere, but we can manifest the divine presence a little more palpably by coming together to make something for God. The Midrash goes so far as to suggest that God is most pleased by what we do down here, as exhibited by God leaving Heaven behind to be a little closer to us – דירה בתחתונים

It is almost natural that the thing we build when everyone comes together is the holiest thing there is. As R' Shamshon Raphael Hirsch notes, it follows that it is the physical and spiritual center of our lives, which the entire camp is built around, the site we aim our prayers, and the place we come closest to the divine.

Moreover, it follows why our sages attribute the destruction of the Beis HaMikdash to animosity and hatred; disputes and internal strife led to division, and without togetherness, it only followed that sanctity would disappear as well. The Ohr Pnei Moshe notes that the inverse is true as well; for Moshe to inaugurate the Mishkan, he must bring all the people together – וַיִּקְהַל מֹשֶׁה אֶת-כָּל-עֵדֻת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

The Torah commands the commission of each utensil in the Mishkan in the second person singular, but not the Aron, which it commands in the plural – ועשית / ועשו. The Alshich notes that the Torah is not like monarchy or priesthood, which fall to specific individuals; the call to Torah is open-ended and universally accessible – it beckons to all of us, to you.

R' Menachem Mendel of Vorki notes that if holiness is something that everyone has to do, it has to be according to the capabilities and circumstances of every individual. There can be no one-size-fits-all; as the Kotzker famously put it, God doesn't need more angels.

The Chafetz Chaim teaches that the Torah is everyone's to take up, even if our stakes look different; a bit more of this, a bit less of that. You might be a scholar, maybe you offer financial support, or perhaps you help tidy up your shul a little. Everybody counts, and everybody's contribution is counted.



Rashi explains the proclamation to mean that they didn't know there was a traveler and therefore were not complicit in the murder by letting them travel in a dangerous area alone. The Sforno similarly explains that they must affirm that they didn't knowingly permit a murderer to roam free.

The Chasam Sofer takes a very different approach, observing that it is straightforward to say the murder was not their fault, but they don't get to say that. In this reading, the ceremony is not a declaration of innocence; but a public statement of collective responsibility and guilt, a confession and acknowledgment that the crime happened on their watch.

Or in other words, there is no question of why the Torah summons the elders and sages and leaders to answer for the quiet mystery death of an innocent; it's the answer.

“Our hands didn't kill this person; we didn't hold the knife, or the gun, or give them the pills. But that's as far as we can go in disclaiming responsibility. Because we weren't looking, we weren't paying the close attention this person deserved and needed, so the criminal – and the victim – slipped right through our fingers.”

When the Torah describes the Mishkan construction process, it presents an exhaustive account of each donation because the leaders were publicly accountable for each contribution; and that's just for finances! As the Lubavitcher Rebbe said, people are not dollars.

If you are surprised the Torah requires leaders to account for human life, then, like the sages who perform the ritual, you haven't been paying attention.

In the section detailing the rituals for sacrificial atonement, the Torah talks about leaders who make mistakes:

אֲשֶׁר נָשִׂיא יִחַטָּא וְעָשָׂה אֶחַת מִכָּל־מִצְוֹת הַ אֲלֹקִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא־תַעֲשֶׂינָהּ בְּשִׁגְגָה וְאִשָּׁם – When a leader incurs guilt by doing unwittingly any of the things which God commanded not to do, and he realizes his guilt... (4:22)

The Torah plainly and unambiguously talks about when, and not if, leaders make mistakes because avoiding mistakes in power is impossible; we need to stop pretending otherwise because denying errors compounds them and makes things worse. Very few people expect a society without any wrongdoing, but corruption and impotence in dealing with misconduct are highly destructive; the cover-up is always worse than the crime.

When politics demands a lie, but people demand the truth, you get corruption. Leaders that face painful truths are not just morally preferable; they save lives. Wilfully blind leaders playing make-believe about real problems in our community alienate and disillusion people who care, weakening their ties to a community that won't show care and concern to the people who need it! We can't afford to tolerate leaders who fixate on maintaining the illusion of infallible perfection and divine knowledge. We will never correct our community's mistakes so long as we deny them and don't



confront them. While we can't reasonably expect perfect leaders, we can reasonably expect perfectly compassionate and honest leaders who will do what is right and proper.

On Yom Kippur, the great Day of Atonement, the Kohen Gadol's first atonement ritual is a personal confession for himself and his family, publicly owning his mistakes.

Every year before Tisha b'Av, we publicly read Isaiah's explicit rage against corrupt leadership and broken institutions that don't protect the vulnerable – רָחֲצוּ הַזְכוּ הַסִּירוּ רֵעַ מֵעֲלֵיכֶם מִנְגִיד עֵינַי חֲדָלוּ הֲרַע: לְמַדּוּ הֵיטֵב – דְּרֹשׁוּ מִשְׁפָּט אֲשֶׁרוֹ תְמוֹז שְׁפָטוּ יְתוֹם רִיבוֹ אֶלְמָנָה ... שְׁרִידוֹ סוֹרְרִים וְחֲבָרֵי גִבְעִים כְּלוֹ אֶהָב שְׂחָד וְרֹדֵף שְׁלֹמֹנִים יְתוֹם לֹא יִשְׁפָטוּ וְרִיב אֶלְמָנָה לֹא-יָבוֹא אֲלֵיהֶם.

The Ibn Ezra explains that the Torah is suggesting that when something terrible happens in a community, that community has some introspection and soul searching to do. In fact, this is the Rambam's universal guidance on how to respond to tragedy; bad things happen in a climate and environment, and we can identify the factors that make them more likely to occur in a given context and change them.

We don't often have to deal with murders in our community, but the Torah doesn't explicitly talk about murder at all – כִּי-יִמָּצָא הָלֵל בְּאֶדְמָה... נִפְלַ בְּשׂוּדָה לֹא נוֹדַע מִי הִכָּהוּ –

R' Aaron Lopiansky teaches that we must not mistakenly classify sexual abuse as a sin or misdemeanor. It is no exaggeration to say that sexual abuse is a matter of life and death, among the most severe crimes a human can commit, right alongside murder, which ties back into the severity of the sage's confession over an unidentified body.

If a survivor of abuse commits suicide, who really killed them?

R' Aharon Lichtenstein warns against resorting to the no-true-Scotsman fallacy – “he wasn't really one of us!” We don't get to disclaim wrongdoers after the fact when they fit in seamlessly alongside the best and brightest our community has to offer until being found out. We have to be willing to ask the difficult question of what allowed them to hurt vulnerable people yet blend right in with us.

There are good reasons why victims are scared to report crimes in our community, and if you want to sleep well at night, make sure you're not one of them. People who have experienced abuse and trauma are not damaged goods, not pitiful, stained misfits who deserve your deepest sympathies. It's not their fault. You need to believe them, and you need to believe in them. The abuser's best friend is the Sefer Chofetz Chaim; they rely on and exploit the fact that their victim will remain silent.

You can be very sure there are victimized and vulnerable people in your circles. If you don't know of any offhand, you ought to wonder why no one trusts you enough to share that with you. It starts with not turning away or keeping silent when people misguidedly or maliciously defend abusers; victims must know in their bones that you are with them all the way, otherwise you are complicit.



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The Torah uses emotion extremely sparingly, so we ought to sit up and notice when it does. The way the Torah uses the imagery of spilled innocent blood to demand the sages publicly beg forgiveness is particularly powerful; the Torah has no tolerance for unanswered crimes, where the victim dies alone and invisible – וְאֵל-תִּמְנוּ דָם נָקִי, בְּקִרְבַּי עִמָּדָה יִשְׂרָאֵל; וְנִפְסַר לָהֶם, הַדָּם. וְאִתָּהּ, תִּבְעַר הַדָּם. הַנָּקִי-מִקְרָבָהּ –

Every time one of our institutions acts to protect a victimizer instead of the victim, we fail that test.

On Shabbos, Jewish communities worldwide for generations have said a prayer for the victims with a particularly stirring line:

כִּי-יִדְרֹשׁ דָּמִים אוֹתָם זָכָר לֹא-שָׁכַח צַעֲקַת עֲנָוִים – For He does not ignore the cry of the distressed; He who requites bloodshed is mindful of them.

The Torah plainly and unambiguously demands that leaders take extreme ownership and recognize the systemic failures that lead to an innocent person’s untimely death, with a ritual of collective responsibility for contributory negligence, that they did not meet their duties of care to the standards the victim required.

Today, purging ourselves from the guilt of innocent blood and doing what is right and proper in the eyes of God means allegations should be taken seriously and thoroughly, and impartially investigated. We do what is right and proper by upholding the rule of law, applying the law evenly, without fear or favor, even if the accused is someone we care about and look up to. Call the police, and report the abuse. Make sure the authorities know and make sure competent mental health professionals are involved. If there’s the slightest hint of impropriety or wrongdoing, the institution must reorganize.

The Torah’s consistent vision of our society is that we stand up for each other, and most especially for those who cannot stand up for themselves. Systemic failures in our entire communal framework allow such things to happen, and the Torah calls on the leaders of that framework to account for bad things that happen on their watch.

“We didn’t see! We didn’t know!” These excuses don’t cut it when your head is in the sand and you didn’t do anything last time around. The errors and omissions for things we weren’t paying attention to are still sins that require rectification on Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur – שׁוּגַג / עַל חַטָּא שְׁחָטְאֵנוּ בִּיּוֹדְעִים – וּבִלֹּא יוֹדְעִים.

If good people don’t enforce what is right and proper against abusers and criminals because we’re afraid of backlash or negative attention, then the abusers and criminals win by default because no one bothered to stop them.

It’s not the mayor, Rosh Yeshiva, or local rabbi who must perform the ritual; it’s all of them, which is to say that no one gets to say it’s not their fault. We are responsible for both our actions and inactions.



Who watches the watchers? All of us – שִׁפְטִים וְשֹׁטְרִים תִּתְּנוּ לָהֶם בְּכָל־שְׁעָרָיִךְ.

The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing. We deserve leaders who protect the people who need it most, and we ought to demand that; if we can't disempower bad leaders, we need new institutions and leadership.

Leaders are responsible for their communities, but communities are responsible for who they will follow.

I present TorahRedux l'ilui nishmas my late grandfather, HaGaon HaRav Yehuda Leib Gertner ben HaRav HaChassid Menachem Mendel.

I hope you enjoyed this week's thoughts. If you have questions or comments, or just want to say hello, it's a point of pride for me to hear from you, and I'll always respond. And if you saw, heard, read, or watched anything that spoke to you, please send it my way - Neli@TorahRedux.com.

If you liked this week's edition of TorahRedux, why not share it with friends and family who would appreciate it?

Neli

PS - *TorahRedux is my pride and joy, the product of thousands of hours of learning, research, writing, editing, and formatting. I have been blessed to operate a business that allows me to dedicate a substantial amount of time to TorahRedux, and I welcome your assistance in furthering my goal to keep publishing high-quality Parsha content that makes a difference. I broker healthcare businesses for sale; I kindly ask for your blessings and prayers, and introductions to anyone who might want to buy or sell a healthcare business!*

Redux: *adjective* – resurgence; refers to being brought back, restored, or revived; something familiar presented in a new way. Not to see what no one else has seen, but to say what nobody has yet said about something which everybody sees.