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Just as we are commanded to remove all of the chometz-leavening—from our possession and sight by the 15th of Nissan, there is also an aspect of 'chometz' in ourselves that we have to try to eradicate. This is the pride and false perspectives of self that block our ability to serve G-d properly, and often disrupt our relationships.

In a classic discussion about this week's Torah Reading, Vayikra, the Lubavitcher Rebbe writes that it is often read just before Pesach. In the very first word, "Vayikra"—"And He called (to Moshe)"—is a hint to how we can effectively begin this cleansing. We are required to write the letter alef in the word 'vayikra' smaller than the other letters in the Torah. The Midrash tells us that this is a hint to Moshe's special quality of being more humble than any other person. This is not the only off-sized alef in the Torah. In Divrei Hayomim is an 'oversized' alef in the word 'Adam'. This is a reference to Adam who, as the direct handiwork of G-d, was conscious of his greatness.

The great majority of the letters in the Torah are not large or small, rather intermediate. This is appropriate seeing that the Torah is our guide to living. We are generally not supposed to be one extreme or the other, but rather take the middle path. Yet, the Torah is our guide, and we must also learn lessons from the larger or smaller letters.

The Midrash (B'raishis 17/4) says that G-d testified that Adam was wiser even than the angels. The big alef of Adam, represents the greatness of Adam, and teaches us that a person should not only recognize his or her faults. We should also recognize our own qualities and talents that G-d has given us. However, Adam reminds us of failure, because of his sin of the Tree of Knowledge. The lesson from this is that a person who only acknowledges his or her superior qualities is in serious danger of sinning. To balance this we also have to be cognizant of our lackings, bringing out our sense of limitation and humility. This is the lesson from the small alef of Vayikra.

This does not mean that Moshe did not recognize his qualities as the greatest prophet of all time. Moshe knew what qualities he had. He also understood that these qualities were given as a gift from Above, and therefore not something in which to take pride. Moshe genuinely believed that someone else given the same chances could have reached an even higher level than himself. This attitude is what made Moshe the most humble of men.

Every Jew has both a portion of the soul of Adam and a spark of the soul of Moshe. Therefore, each of us must take a personal lesson from them, just as we would learn from our parent's and grandparent's experiences and attributes. As a Jew who is not only descended from Adam, but also from the patriarchs and matriarchs, each of us is absolutely capable of learning Torah and doing its commandments—of being holy. We innately have that potential. We can be great, both in physical and spiritual challenges. On the other hand, we also have to remember that we did not work to acquire these qualities; they are a gift from G-d. Therefore, we have to see ourselves as being lowly and not fall into false pride. This is the way to merit a closer relationship to G-d, like Moshe, and the true path to physical and spiritual completion. [Rabbi Shaul Yosef, Adapted from the book Shulchan Shabbat, Leiter, www.ascent.org.il]

A man who shall bring near of you an offering to G-d (1:2) The verse does not say, "a man of you who shall bring near an offering," but, "a man who shall bring near of you an offering"—the offering must come from within the person. It is the animal within man that must be "brought near" and elevated by the divine fire upon the Altar. (The Chassidic Masters)

A man (adam) who shall bring near of you an offering to G-d (1:2) Why does G-d use the word adam for "man" (instead of the more common synonym ish)? To teach us that a person cannot offer to G-d what has not been honestly obtained by him. G-d is saying: "When you bring an offering to Me, be like Adam the first man, who could not have stolen from anyone, since he was alone in the world." (Midrash Tanchuma; Rashi)

When we speak of Adam as one who "was alone in the world," we are speaking of the very first hours of his life. Thus we are speaking of Adam before he partook of the Tree of Knowledge—of man still unsullied by sin.

This is the deeper significance of the Torah's reference to the bearer of a korban—which has the power to obtain atonement for a transgression—as an "Adam." Every man, the Torah is saying, harbors in the pith of his soul a pristine "Adam," a primordial man untouched by sin. Even at the very moment his external self was transgressing the divine will, his inner essence remained loyal to G-d; it was only silenced and suppressed by his baser instincts. It is by accessing this core of purity, by unearthing that part of himself that did not sin in the first place and restoring it to its rightful place as the sovereign of his life, that man attains the state of teshuvah—return to his original state of perfection. (The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

And the priest shall burn them upon the altar... all the fat is to G-d (3:16) Everything that is for the sake of G-d should be of the best and most beautiful. When one builds a house of prayer, it should be more beautiful than his own dwelling. When one feeds the hungry, he should feed him of the best and sweetest of his table. When one clothes the naked, he should clothe him with the finest of his clothes. Whenever one designates something for a holy purpose, he should sanctify the finest of his possessions; as it is written, "All the fat is to G-d." (Maimonides) (chabadonline.com)

HOW TO GIVE

The story is told of a rabbi who comes home after his annual maot chittim speech. (In the weeks before Passover, it is the custom in all Jewish communities to raise maot chittim—"wheat money"—with which to provide the poor with matzah, wine and other needs of the festival.)

"Nu? So how did it go?" asks the rebbetzin.

"Well," says the rabbi, "we're halfway there. The poor agree to receive. Now I just have to convince the rich to give."

The rabbi had it all wrong. Giving is the easy part.

It's the receiving part that's so difficult. How many people do you know who have mastered the art of graciously receiving a gift or a compliment? Why, many of us find it hard to bring ourselves to ask for directions!

There is a reason why this is so. Man, we are told, was created in the image of his Creator. Giving comes naturally to the Source of All. But how can One who lacks for nothing receive? Only by an act of self-contraction, by the great mystery of a divine will that proclaims: "I desire thus from you."

Created in the Divine Image, man is a natural giver. But it requires a supreme effort on our part in order to genuinely receive, to hollow the self into a receptive vessel for a bestowal of love.

An even greater challenge is the endeavor to be a true recipient in the very act of giving. To convey to the recipient of our gift—as G-d conveys to us—how deeply we desire to give, and how grateful we are for having been granted the opportunity to do so.

—By Yanki Tauber; based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe

WITH REGARD TO SELLING THE CHAMETZ IT IS THE CUSTOM IN THE REBBE'S FAMILY NOT TO DESIGNATE THE RABBI AS AN AGENT (EMPOWERED TO SELL THE CHAMETZ TO THE NON-JEW) BUT TO SELL THE CHAMETZ OUTRIGHT TO THE RABBI WITH AN AREIV KABLAN, A THIRD PARTY GUARANTOR.
MY FATHER WOULD PERSONALLY SUPERVISE THE BAKING OF THE SH'MURA MATZA ON EREV PESACH AFTERNOON. HE, TOO, WOULD RECITE THE HALLEL, BUT HE WOULD INTERRUPT - EVEN IN THE MIDDLE OF A CHAPTER - TO GIVE INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING THE KNEADING, BAKING AND SO FORTH.
(FROM REBBE'S HAYOM YOM NISAN 14)

Chometz symbolizes arrogance (just as dough rises); so too, the yetzer hora is referred to in the Gemara as "Chometz." Matzah, on the other hand, negates the whole idea of arrogance, symbolizing humility and bittul.

This is the first lesson to be derived: a Jew must be like Matzah, completely humble and without arrogance. When the yetzer hora comes to tempt him into arrogance, the person rejects the advance completely just as the dough of Matzah is protected from becoming Chometz. -The Rebbe