

THE FOUR PARASHIOT

מסמך גאולה לגאולה

by Yitzchak Etshalom

I

INTRODUCTION

During each of four of the five (or six - see below) Shabbatot surrounding the month of Adar, a second Sefer Torah is taken out, from which a special reading is added to the regular Parashat haShavua, as follows:

- On or before Rosh Hodesh Adar, the section known as **Shekalim** (Sh'mot 30:11-16) is read;
- On the Shabbat immediately before Purim, the section known as **Zakhor** (D'varim 25:17-19) is read;
- On the Shabbat after Purim (except when Purim falls on a Friday or Thursday - see below), **Parah** (Bamidbar 19:1-22) is read; and
- On or before Rosh Hodesh Nisan, **haHodesh** (Sh'mot 12:1-20) is read.

Although some scholars maintain that these four were the earliest instance of a public Torah reading on Shabbat (see e.g. Elbogen HaTefillah b'Yisra'el p. 119; he notes that nowhere in Tannaitic literature is there mention of a "conflict" between these Parashiot and the "regular" reading, implying that there was no "regular" reading as yet; indeed, these four Shabbatot were the springboard from which the weekly readings were launched), the Rishonim, by and large, agreed that a regular Torah reading as established by Mosheh Rabbenu (see, e.g. Mishneh Torah Hilkhos Tefillah 12:1).

Resolving this issue is beyond the scope of this shiur; in any case, the questions raised by the ordinance of these readings are troubling according to either approach.

Before presenting the questions, here is the basic Mishnaic source for this ordinance:

If Rosh Hodesh Adar falls on Shabbat, the portion of **Shekalim** is read. If it falls in the middle of the week, it is read on the Shabbat before and on the next Shabbat there is a break. On the second, **Zakhor** is read, on the third, the portion of the **Parah Adumah**, on the fourth, **HaHodesh haZeh Lakhem**. (M. Megillah 3:4)

The Gemara (BT Megillah 30a) explains:

Our Rabbis taught: Which is the "third Shabbat"? The one which follows Purim. It was stated: R. Hama b. Hanina said: The Shabbat next to Rosh Hodesh Nisan. There is no conflict [between these two statements]; the one refers to where Rosh Hodesh Nisan falls on Shabbat, and the other to where it falls in the middle of the week.

This Baraita is addressing a problem alluded to in the opening paragraph of this essay: The four "special Shabbatot" are spread over five or six weeks, based on the considerations mentioned above. The scheme works out as follows:

- If Rosh Hodesh Adar falls on Shabbat, then **Shekalim** is read on that day (1 Adar), **Zakhor** is read the next week (8 Adar), the next week is skipped (15 Adar), **Parah** is read on the next Shabbat (22 Adar) and haChodesh is read on the next Shabbat (29 Adar).
- If Rosh Hodesh Adar falls on Monday (it cannot fall on Sunday, Tuesday or Thursday), **Shekalim** is read on the Shabbat beforehand (29 Sh'vat), the next Shabbat is skipped (6 Adar), and the next three weeks are all special readings (**Zakhor** - 13 Adar; **Parah** - 20 Adar; **haHodesh** - 27 Adar);
- If Rosh Hodesh Adar falls on Wednesday, **Shekalim** is read on the Shabbat beforehand (27 Sh'vat), the next Shabbat is skipped (4 Adar), and the next three weeks are all special readings (**Zakhor** - 11 Adar; **Parah** - 18 Adar; **haHodesh** - 25 Adar);
- If Rosh Hodesh Adar falls on Friday, **Shekalim** is read on the Shabbat beforehand (25 Sh'vat), the next Shabbat is skipped (2 Adar), **Zakhor** is read on the next Shabbat (9 Adar), the next Shabbat is again skipped (16 Adar), then **Parah** (23 Adar) and **haHodesh** (1 Nisan) are read on consecutive Shabbatot.

[note: this is the only scenario where the readings are stretched over six weeks].

Besides the informative value, I included this intercalating device to demonstrate that each of the readings seems to have a unique role which defines its timing.

The Gemara (BT Megillah 29) cites the Mishnah (M. Shekalim 1:1) which rules that *On Rosh Hodesh Adar the announcements regarding Kila'yim and Shekalim are made* as support for the timing of the first of these readings. Shekalim is the Torah portion which commands us to bring a half-Shekel to the Mishkan/Beit haMikdash every year. Since the communal Beit haMikdash fund, made up of these half-Shekalim, had to be renewed every year (based on Bamidbar 28:14) - and that year begins anew on Rosh Hodesh Nisan, the announcement reminding everyone to prepare their donations was made a month in advance in order to give everyone ample opportunity to bring their half-Shekalim on time. It therefore stands to reason that this Torah reading must be made on the Shabbat of or immediately before Rosh Hodesh Adar.

The Parashah of **Zakhor** includes the Mitzvah to always remember the enmity of Amalek, who attacked our rear flank (more on this later) on our way out of Egypt. The association between this event and Purim was explicate in **Vshinantam 4/20**. Whether the name *Haman ha'Agagi* means that Haman was literally a descendant of Agag, king of Amalek or that he was an ideological descendant of that evil tribe, Purim represents our miraculous salvation from the hands of Amalek. Since the Torah obligates us to "Remember...never forget" Amalek, we must not let more than 12 months go by without reminding ourselves of their hostility (Halakhically, 12 months of cognitive dissociation generates a complete lapse of awareness - witness the longest period of mourning in Halakhah). That being the case, the most reasonable time for us to fulfill this Mitzvah is in conjunction with the celebration of Purim.

The Parashah of **Parah** details the laws of the red heifer, which is to be used (under proper conditions) for the purification ritual which allows someone who has been contaminated by contact with death to return to full participation in the life of the Mikdash (including eating sancta and entering the Mikdash). Since the one offering in which every Jew is obligated to partake is the Korban Pesach, it makes sense that this Mitzvah should be publicized a few weeks before Pesach, to *remind Yisra'el that they should become purified in order to perform their Pesachim in a state of purity* (Rashi to BT Megillah 29a)

Parashat **haHodesh** looks like a concise *Shabbat haGadol D'rashah* - it includes the basic laws of the Korban Pesach, Matza and Maror, the prohibition of Hametz - as well as most of the unique features which accompanied that first Pesach (e.g. blood on the lintel and doorposts, eating with "bags packed"). Again, the timing of this reading is sensible - with a couple of weeks to go before Pesach, all of these preparations are highlighted in this special reading.

II

THE CHALLENGES (I): SHEKALIM AND ZAKHOR

Although the presentation of these four Parashiot and their timing seems reasonable, this ordinance is beset by several problems which all point to one central challenge, as follows:

- 1) The Parashah of Shekalim is temporarily theoretical; we do not presently have a Beit haMikdash and we do not donate a half-Shekel to any particular fund associated with the Beit haMikdash. Why would we then publicize this Mitzvah, which, instead of generating excitement about the upcoming new year and the opportunity for each of us to participate in the Avodah of the Mikdash, almost serves as a sad reminder of how things "should" be. One might be tempted to argue that this reading is an example of an act which is **Zekher I'Mikdash** (a commemoration of the Beit haMikdash); this, however, is an untenable position. Those acts which we fulfill as a **Zekher I'Mikdash** (e.g. shaking Lulav during Hol haMo'ed Sukkot, the two cooked items on the Seder plate) are all imitations of acts done in the Mikdash itself - not of preparatory acts or those which were used to remind everyone of their obligations towards the Mikdash.
- 2) The Parashah of Zakhor, in spite of its obvious associations to Purim, is still "out of place" here - indeed, it is unnecessary. Since the reading stems from the obligation to *remember...never forget* and, as pointed out above, a period of 12 months is considered enough time for memory to lapse, we must read about Amalek at least once every twelve months. The ordinance of reading Parashat Amalek would make sense if there were no other occasion when that reading took place - and we would be

in danger of going twelve months without hearing about Amalek. That is, of course, not nearly the case. We read Parashat Zakhor every year at the end of the summer, at the end of Parashat Ki Tetze (we even read it twice, since it also functions as the Maftir of that Parashah. As an aside, the Hatam Sofer suggested that during a leap year, when there is longer than 12 months between one Shabbat Zakhor and the next, everyone must make sure to hear the reading of Zakhor on Shabbat Ki Tetze and to intend to fulfill the Mitzvah of remembering Amalek at that time in order to avoid forgetting - we will revisit this approach below.) Unless we accept the approach of Elbogen et al., that the regular Torah reading was instituted after these four readings (such that there was no other opportunity to hear Zakhor), we need to find a clearer reason for the additional reading of Zakhor at this time of year. In other words, if there were no other opportunity to read Zakhor, ordaining it to be read just before Purim makes sense; but once we accept the notion of a regular weekly Torah reading on Shabbat, through which the entire Torah is read on an annual basis, there seems to be no reason to add another reading of Zakhor in Adar.

Two answers immediately spring to mind - neither of which is very satisfying.

A) We could argue that the ordinance of reading Zakhor was instituted in order to solve the “leap-year” problem - i.e. the inversion of the Hatam Sofer’s approach. This suffers from the two challenges raised to the Hatam Sofer’s formula:

A1) When it comes to yearly celebrations and commemoration, we do not distinguish between a leap year and a regular year. We do not have a second Seder in the fall in order to fulfill **Zakhor et haYom haZeh** etc. - unlike the case with personal memory (e.g. a lost item, mourning), where 12 months is an actual **shiur**, fixed yearly commemorations have their set time, whether or not it is a leap year.

A2) The Mitzvah of remembering Amalek can also be fulfilled through the reading of the account of their actual attack and our war against them (Sh’mot 17:8-16) - which is not only read on Shabbat B’Shalah, it is also read on Purim day itself.

B) Alternatively, we could argue that the ordinance was established in Eretz Yisra’el where the custom was to complete the regular Torah reading over the course of three years. While it is very plausible to posit that it was ordained in Eretz Yisra’el, why would the Babylonian community have accepted it if the only reason for this special reading was to ensure a yearly reminder of Amalek - if the Babylonian custom was to complete the Torah every year? Conversely, this ordinance could have served as strong support for the custom of Eretz Yisra’el over that of Bavel.

In sum, the “extra” reading of Parashat Zakhor seems inexplicable.

III

THE CHALLENGES (II):

PARAH AND HAHODESH

3) The Parashah of Parah may be challenged in the same manner: Why notify the public of their obligation to purify themselves via a method which is not presently operative for an offering which we cannot bring at this point in time?

4) In a sense, the Parashah of haHodesh is the oddest member of this group. We find no other holiday which is preceded by a special Torah reading designed to inform/remind everyone of the Halakhot related to that holiday - indeed, the Mishnah at the end of the third chapter of Megillah records that famous D’rashah:

And Mosheh related the appointed times of Hashem to the B’nei Yisra’el

the Mitzvah is to read each one in its proper time

which, as Rashi notes, is the obligation to publicly read from a section in the Torah relating to each holiday ON that day (not in advance of it). Why then is the Parashah of haHodesh read at this time?

5) The “granddaddy” question is, therefore: These are the only Shabbatot which are otherwise “mundane” (i.e. not overlapping with another holy day, such as Yom Tov or Rosh Hodesh) when a second Sefer Torah is taken out for an independent and disassociated reading. What so distinguishes these four selections? Do we need to explain each ordinance independently, or can we find a common thread which binds them to each other - and to this season?

IV

THE FOUR PARASHIOT AND THE FOUR CUPS

Before attempting a response, I'd like to raise two more brief questions. In the Yerushalmi, R. Levi proposes an easy signal for remembering which Shabbatot may be interrupted (as per above, between Shekalim and Zakhor and/or between Zakhor and Parah) and which must always be consecutive (Parah and haHodesh).

R. Levi said in the name of R. Hiyya b. Hanina: We do not break between **Parah** and **haHodesh**. R. Levi said: the indicator of these Parashiot is: Between these cups, one may drink, but between the third and fourth one may not drink. (JT Megillah 3:5)

R. Levi is borrowing a Mishnaic dictum from the description of the Seder (M. Pesachim 10:7), wherein the Mishnah rules that you may drink wine between the first and second cups (i.e. during Maggid) and between the second and third cups (during the meal) but not between the third and fourth (during Hallel). The reason for this prohibition is clear - we are afraid that imbibing additional wine at this point will cause the celebrant to fall asleep without completing the Seder.

The Halakhah of the Seder seems to link up well with the Arba Parashiot: There may be an interruption between the first and second (cups/Shabbatot) or between the second and third (cups/Shabbatot) but not between the third and fourth.

There is, however, a “disconnect” in the analogy. Whereas at the Seder the issue under discussion is adding wine (continuity), in our case, the issue at hand is a break (discontinuity). Since the analogy doesn't fully obtain, we must investigate R. Levi's motives for using the Seder as a model for the Four Parashiot.

V

בכל שנה ושנה

Our final question:

As we all know, the miracle of Purim was only fully realized on 13 Adar (and 14 Adar in Shushan) - so we celebrate on the 14th (15th) of Adar. Unlike any other month, however, celebrations and commemorations related to Adar are beset by confusion on a regular basis. Whenever the lunar year, which is 11 days short of a solar year, threatens to calendar Pesach in the winter, we add an extra month of Adar - the leap month - thus ensuring that Pesach will come out during the spring (see Ramban, Devarim 16:1). In our present fixed-calendar system (dating back to Hillel II), we have a leap year every two or three years (7 every 19 years). Every year that there are two months of Adar, the questions abound - when does a boy, born in Adar, become Bar Mitzvah? When is a Yahrzeit commemorated? etc.

The question of which Adar should host the celebration of Purim was debated by Tannaim of the second century: Rabban Shimon b. Gamliel maintaining that we should celebrate Purim in the second Adar and R. Eliezer b. R. Yossi holding that Purim should be celebrated in the first Adar. Here is a reconstruction of their dispute:

[both utilize the last three words: בכל שנה ושנה, of this verse: enjoining them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same month, year by year] R. Yohanan said: Both of them [*R. Shimon b. Gamliel and R. Eliezer b. R. Yossi*] based their opinions on the same text, בכל שנה ושנה. R. Eliezer b. R. Yossi reasoned: “year by year”; just as in most years Adar is the month which adjoins Sh'vat, so here [*we keep the precepts*] in the Adar which adjoins Sh'vat. R. Shimon b. Gamliel again reasoned: Just as in most years Adar is adjoining Nisan, so here [*we keep the precepts*] in the Adar which adjoins Nisan. Now we understand R. Eliezer b. R. Yossi taking the view he did, because it is inherently probable, it being a rule that we do not postpone the performance of religious precepts. But what is the reason of R. Shimon b. Gamliel? R. Tabi said: The reason of R. Shimon b. Gamliel is that more weight is to be attached to bringing one period of redemption close to another. (BT Megillah 6b)

To reiterate the question of the Gemara, R. Eliezer's position is more fitting with general Halakhic protocol; we do not put off the performance of a Mitzvah. Why would we elect to delay the celebration of Purim and the Mitzvot associated with that day by a month - when we could perform them in the first available Adar?

R. Shim'on b. Gamliel's answer seems a bit weak - what possible advantage is there to adjoining the two redemptions? Even if we want to claim that there is something to be gained by this temporal juxtaposition, is it enough of a consideration to overrule the principle of *אין מעבירין על המצוות* (we do not postpone the performance of religious precepts)?

VI

S'MIKHUT: FOR WHOSE BENEFIT?

In order to understand the purpose of the institution of the Arba Parashiot, we must first analyze the ruling regarding the "delay" of Purim during a leap year. The reason given for this delay is that we wish to keep Purim and Pesach as close to each other as possible - always four weeks apart. What is the meaning of this consideration?

Before examining this, we might propose a question of a more general nature, the resolution of which will certainly impact on our understanding of this "juxtaposition".

There are a number of "ordered juxtapositions" within the Halakhic corpus: **Tekeph liS'mikhah Sh'chitah** for instance, is a rule which states that immediately after "laying the hands" on an offering, that animal must be slaughtered. The question could certainly be asked - which act is being enhanced by this juxtaposition? Is the S'mikhah made more impactful and connected to the offering by immediately beginning the physical process which will lead to Kapparah? Or, conversely, could we posit that it is the Sh'chitah which "benefits" by having a direct relationship with the "owner" of the animal?

In some cases of S'mikhut, the "latter" member is the focus; e.g., when we wash immediately (without a break) before Birkat haMazon that is surely to ensure that the act of saying Birkat haMazon is done with both clean hands and the sense of Kedushah which accompanies them. On the other hand, it seems - both from the relevant Sugyot and the Rambam's rulings - that the main "beneficiary" of **S'mikhat Ge'ulah liT'fillah** is the **Birkat Ge'ulah** (which is why no such obligation obtains at T'fillat Minchah).

We may even think of this question in "mundane" terms - sometimes we will "attach" ourselves to another person for our own benefit (such as a mentor); other times it may be for the express benefit of the other person (such as a parent keeping a close eye on their toddler).

Regarding the **S'mikhut** of Purim and Pesach - *qui bono*? Which celebration is enhanced by this juxtaposition?

It would seem reasonable that the beneficiary is Pesach. First of all, Pesach is, clearly, immobile within the calendar - it is only the date of Purim which is being negotiated here. That would seem to posit Pesach as the hinge around which this issue revolves. Second, if delaying Purim were motivated by a desire to enhance Purim itself, the opposite consideration (**Ein Ma'avirin al haMitzvot**) would seem to carry more weight; it is only with the introduction of an outside factor (the enhancement of Pesach) that the delay carries the day. Furthermore, when we look at the nature of the celebration of each of Purim and Pesach, we will see that this "adjoining" of holidays could only serve to intensify our Pesach experience. In order to appreciate this, we have to take a step back and ask a larger question: What possible value can there be in juxtaposing two celebrations within 30 days of each other? Wouldn't each one gain - if such a term could be used - by leaving as much "space" as possible, such that we needn't be in the midst of our Pesach preparations (mentally, financially as well as academically and spiritually) when we are celebrating Purim?

VII

PESACH: CREATING A FUTURE FROM OUR PAST

In two weeks, our discussion will focus on the Seder and the teleology of the many Mitzvot and Minhagim associated with that night. Unlike other celebrations, commemorations and holidays, Pesach (most specifically, the Seder) is not an experience of remembering - or even reliving - the past. During the Seder, we do much more than relate the Exodus to our children. We endeavor, fully and completely, to immerse ourselves in the environment of the Exodus, so that we actually experience the full range of spiritual and emotional peaks (and valleys) of that turning point in Jewish history and, through this experience, to connect with all of Jewish history. This includes the long-awaited and promised future of Y'mot haMashiach, envisioned by our prophets and sages.

We do not merely act out the steps of the Seder in order to recall or even just to reexperience - those are necessary steps that we take in order to accomplish the ultimate goal: To create the proper conditions for a completion of the Ge'ulah. When our Rabbis state

In Nissan they were redeemed and in Nissan they are destined to be redeemed (BT Rosh haShanah 11) they are expressing this notion: It is not only a propitious time of year for redemption, but it is only by turning the past into our present that we can ensure our future. In other words, by reliving the various steps of redemption experience by our ancestors and internalizing this experience and shaping it into our own reality, we can hope to create the necessary conditions for future redemption.

As such, it is clear that the calendar juxtaposition of Purim to Pesach is designed to further enhance the Pesach experience - unlike Purim, which is a celebration of the past (and, certainly, repeated pasts), Pesach is enhanced by those weeks which precede it and how our behavior during that time helps us build towards this meta-historic experience of the Seder.

Our thesis is, then, that the Rabbis preferred to keep Purim as close as possible to Pesach in order to allow whatever instructive lesson we can gain from the celebration of Purim to inform and enhance our Pesach redemption as we turn past into present with an eye towards the future.

VIII

“A PEOPLE DISPERSED”

No one knew how to speak Lashon haRa as well as Haman. (BT Megillah 13b).

Keep in mind that **Lashon haRa** is defined as true but degrading statements (slander is know by a different ignominious title: **Motzi Shem Ra**). What did Haman say about the B'nei Yisra'el? He claimed that we are a *dispersed and disconnected people*. This is, both from a perspective of Hazal's history and what we can approximate from Biblical narrative, an accurate description of the B'nei Yisra'el during this time. There are many indications - in the Megillah, in Sefer Ezra and in Rabbinic literature - of the lack of unity and mutual concern to be found among the Judean exiles in Persia during the reign of Ahashverosh (and his predecessors). They had assimilated to the point where Jewish concerns, specifically of the welfare of the nascent and beleaguered community “back home” who had returned and rebuilt the Beit haMikdash, were apparently not at the forefront of the Jewish community's conscience. Besides their assimilation into Persian culture (to the point where they were willing participants in Ahashverosh's idolatrous orgy - see R. Shim'on b. Yohai's comments in BT Megillah 12a) and the high rate of intermarriage prevalent in that community (see Ezra 9), the fact that it took the queen's order to assemble the Jews together in Shushan may be an indication of how *dispersed and disconnected* they really were.

What is the antidote for this lack of mutual and communal concern? Note Esther's response to Mordechai: *Assemble all of the Jews together...* (4:16). Esther understood that the first step needed in order to effect national salvation (or, in other words, to create the necessary conditions for national redemption) is to ensure that there is a nation to save. We can not be an **Am Nosha** (redeemed nation - Devarim 33:29) if we are not a nation to begin with.

IX

PARASHAT SHEKALIM

And so, we begin the process of nation-building by publicly reading the Parashah of Shekalim:

And Hashem spoke to Moses, saying, When you take the census of the people of Yisra'el according to their number, then shall they give every man a ransom for his soul to Hashem, when you count them; that there should be no plague among them, when you count them. This they shall give, every one who passes among those who are counted, half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary; a shekel is twenty gerahs; a half shekel shall be the offering of Hashem. Every one who passes among those who are counted, from twenty years old and above, shall give an offering to Hashem. The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less than half a shekel, when they give an offering to Hashem, to make an atonement for your souls. And you shall take the atonement money of the people of Yisra'el, and shall appoint it for the service of the Tent of Meeting; that it may be a memorial to the people of Yisra'el before Hashem, to make an atonement for your souls.

The first lesson we are taught in this Parashah is not the obligation to donate to the building of the Mishkan - we've already learned about that (Sh'mot 25:2). Rather, we learn that everyone must participate in this donation - and that everyone has an equal amount of responsibility towards this project. In other words, no individual can exempt himself from his responsibility towards the community - and no one should think that his part is either more or less significant than his fellow's. It is often this sense of exaggerated self-importance on the one hand and (its equally dangerous opposite number) self-negation on the other which causes individuals to lose a sense of perspective regarding their role and responsibility within the body politic.

Note that the Torah obligates each person to give the same amount: The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less. Besides this common standard, the Torah teaches us another valuable lesson regarding the role of the individual within the community: This they shall give, every one who passes among those who are counted, half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary;

The Torah clearly prescribes the gift of half of a shekel; why doesn't the Torah just obligate a full shekel; or, that particular amount is inherently significant, obligate a gift of 10 gera of silver. Why phrase it as half a shekel (thus leading to the Halakhic obligation to change money in order to give an actual half-shekel piece)?

The answer which suggests itself is that the Torah is teaching us about the power of the individual - and his limitations. Everyone is needed for the public welfare to be secure - but no individual, no matter how rich, intelligent or powerful, is capable of succeeding on his own. Any nation-building enterprise demands, first and foremost, a partnership. When each individual recognizes his own strengths, not negating his own value (the poor shall not give less) nor overestimate his indispensability (The rich shall not give more), he can also understand that he needs his fellow as much as his fellow needs him (half a shekel).

X

PARASHAT ZAKHOR

On the Shabbat immediately before Purim, we take out a second Sefer Torah and read Parashat Zakhor: Remember what Amalek did to you by the way, when you came forth out of Egypt; How he met you by the way, and struck at your rear, all who were feeble behind you, when you were faint and weary; and he did not fear G-d. Therefore it shall be, when Hashem your G-d has given you rest from all your enemies around, in the land which Hashem your G-d gives you for an inheritance to possess, that you shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; you shall not forget it.

What is the connection between this Parashah and Purim? Keep in mind that if we are only concerned with having this section read once a year, we have already done so in the late summer - and the related Parashah (Sh'mot 17:8-16) was read a month ago. Although Haman's Amalek-association (genealogical, ideological or both) is strongly alluded to in the Megillah, this still doesn't explain this extra reading at this time; after all, we don't take out a second Sefer Torah on the Shabbat of Hol haMo'ed Pesach in

order to read about the prohibitions of allowing an Egyptian convert into the community for two generations - or how we must treat Egyptians in general - even though these laws are clearly associated with the events celebrated on Pesach.

A careful look at the nature of Amalek's attack reveals an intricate connection to the Purim story beyond the ancestry of Haman. How did Amalek attack us? How he met you by the way, and struck at your rear, all who were feeble behind you...In other words, the infirm, old and weak who were walking at the back of the Israelite camp were the targets of these tribal warriors (see Ibn Ezra ad loc.) The question must be asked: Why were these people walking at the back of the camp? Why weren't they placed safely in the middle, with strong, young and healthy men on the outskirts of this nomadic community?

The only conclusion which may be drawn is that the community itself did not demonstrate sufficient and appropriate concern for the weak and less capable within the group. To wit, Amalek was only able to successfully attack us when our own sense of common and mutual concern was lax. (See **V'shinantam 4/20**).

The sequence of Shekalim-Zachor is one which seems to produce a dialectic tension. Shekalim teaches the equal responsibility of each person - no more, no less - towards the communal enterprise. From Parashat Zachor, conversely, we learn that those who are stronger have a greater share of the responsibility towards their weaker fellows. Which is it? Do we have equal responsibilities or not?

This tension is immediately ameliorated when we consider which attitude each Parashah is coming to correct. At its foundation, a community must recognize the equal worth of each member and no one's worth should either be negated nor should it be overemphasized to the point of feeling like a "whole shekel". Once that sense of common obligation and equal responsibility is internalized, we do a "reality check" and note that some people, due to circumstances of birth and other Divine blessings, are more gifted than others at different things. There are brilliant theoreticians, military strategists, composers of beautiful music, and so on. Some of them, due to their engagement and involvement with their own art, are not as strong as others in other disciplines. As a result, each person needs to channel his talents towards the good of the community; strength, wisdom, wealth etc. do not breed rights; rather, they are cause for responsibility.

Both of these lessons are brought to the fore within the context of the Purim story. As noted above, Esther directed Mordechai to "assemble all of the people together", implying the commonality expressed by Parashat Shekalim. Within the celebration of Purim, however, we see an emphasis on our responsibilities towards those less fortunate: that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor. (Esther 9:22).

Note the words of Rambam in codifying the Purim budget in MT Hilkhhot Megillah 2:17: It is preferable for a person to spend more on his gifts to the poor than on his feast and sending portions to his friends. For there is no greater or more glorious happiness than to gladden the hearts of the poor, orphan, widow and stranger. One who gladdens the heart of these destitute people is similar to the Shekhinah, as it says: To bring life to the spirit of the lowly and to restore the heart of the downtrodden.

In sum, the two lessons which we need to learn in order to build a nation (which can then become a "nation which is redeemed") are the [limited] value of each member and the responsibility of each member towards each other, particularly those less "privileged". These lessons bring us to the first level of redemption- the redemption of Purim, a redemption born of Jewish unity.

XI

PARASHAT PARAH

Once we have forged the unity necessary to create and maintain a healthy nation, there is yet one significant step we must take to be worthy of Ge'ulah. Any group which has achieved cohesion must also have a goal towards which that cooperative spirit is focused. If communal concern and mutual respect become ends in and of themselves, there is little reason to think that they will endure. It is the engine of common purpose and direction which ultimately drives the community (and, writ large, the nation).

What is our goal? Towards what do we aim our national resources? The answer is provided in the introductory chapter to the Stand at Sinai: *but you shall be for Me a kingdom of Kohanim and a holy nation...* (Sh'mot 19:6)

Our national charter is not just to be a unified people, an ethical beacon whose communal and national behavior exemplify sensitivity to others and respect for each member of the K'lal. We are called to be much more than that - we are charged to be a holy nation, a nation which strives to infuse its national life - and the personal lives of its members - with sanctity. We aim to bring G-d's Name into this world and to bring this world to a greater realization of His Presence.

After we have achieved the long-desired unity on Purim, balancing the demands of Shekalim and Zakhor, we then move this unified nation towards the national agenda of purity and holiness.

The selection known as Parashat Parah details the laws of the red heifer, used to purify anyone who has come into contact with the dead and has, as a result, become **Tamei** (ritually impure). His **Tum'ah** prevents him from entering the Mikdash/Mishkan and from partaking in any of the sancta. This ritual is, as Rashi (BT Megillah 29a) points out, **Taharatan shel Yisra'el** - the purification of the B'nei Yisra'el.

After we have gelled as a nation, we must move, together, towards the purity which allows us to reenter the Mikdash - so that we can continue on our national mission of bringing this world to G-d - and revealing G-d to this world.

XII

PARASHAT HAHODESH

Which brings us to the last of the four Parashiot, the one which, as we noted in last week's issue, seems the most problematic.

The opening line of this Parashah, **haHodesh haZeh Lakhem**, is itself somewhat difficult to understand. Although it has been Halakhically rendered as a command (either the command to declare the New Moon or to maintain a calendar with the month of Aviv at its head - see Rashi and Ramban ad loc.), the wording seems to be lacking a verb. We would expect it to read: **haHodesh haZeh Yihyeh Lakhem**.

S'forno notes that this opening line is, indeed, not phrased as a command; rather, it is a declarative statement: This month is yours. Here is his comment: From here on the months shall be yours, to do with them as you wish. During the days of the slavery your days were not your own, rather they were committed to other people's work and contingent upon their will. Therefore it is the first one for you of the months of the year - because now you began your life of free-will.

Our liberation, giving us the opportunity to create the conditions necessary for redemption, can only come when, as a united nation, we have become purified and moved our national agenda towards our mission of becoming a holy nation. As soon as we achieve that lofty goal, the time is ours - to act as we choose. If we choose wisely, the celebration of the past Exodus can become the promised future redemption.

XIII

THE ARBA PARASHIOT AND THE FOUR CUPS

We can now appreciate the analogy presented by R. Levi in the selection from the Yerushalmi cited above: Just as we don't drink between the third and fourth cup (but we may between the others), similarly, we don't skip a Shabbat between **Parah** and **haHodesh**.

Since the goal of the entire sequence of these Parashiot is to engender the necessary environment for turning Pesach from past into present - ensuring a brighter future - the analogy of the four cups, which are a vehicle for celebrating that freedom are, indeed, an apt analogy.