

And (Moshe) he slaughtered (the ram), and Moshe took from the blood and put it on Aharon's ear. (8:23)

Moshe *Rabbeinu* was concluding his brief tenure as *Kohen Gadol*. Soon, his older brother, Aharon *HaKohen*, would be invested in the *Kehunah Gedulah*, High Priesthood, with his descendants following him as *Kohanim*. Moshe slaughtered the *ayil ha'miluim*, inauguration ram. It was a *Korban Shelamim*, Peace-Offering, with this service serving as the conclusion of the process by which the *Kohanim* were consecrated for their new role in Jewish life. In this *pasuk*, the word *vayishchat*, "and he slaughtered," has the *trop*, cantillation mark, *shalsheles*, a sign which rarely appears in the Torah and which gives great emphasis to the word upon which it appears. This mark appears in three other places in the Torah, which seem incongruous to the meaning of the *shalsheles* as it appears here. *Horav Shimon Schwab*, *zl* ("My Rebbe, Rav Schwab"), offers an inspiring explanation, first of the three other marks, and then, how *va'yishchat* does actually identify with the other three.

The common denominator for all three is a key decision-maker who wavers and seems to be unable to make up his mind. (*Shalsheles*, which is derived from *shalosh*, three, gives the image of a note that is not straight, but vacillates.) Can this possibly apply to Moshe?

Let us analyze the cases. The first *shalsheles* appears in the story of the destruction of Sodom. Lot is instructed to leave immediately. He lived at home with his wife and two single daughters. He certainly wanted to save them, but what about his two married daughters who lived in Sodom? They and their spouses had no intention of leaving their homes. His daughters would listen to him. His sons-in-law would not. Should he leave and save whom he could, or should he seek out his sons-in-law and attempt to convince them to leave? His state of ambiguity and inability to come to a decision was quickly resolved when the angel took Lot and his wife and two daughters by the hand and removed them from the city. Uncertainty number one resolved.

The second *shalsheles* is to be found in the *parsha* when Avraham *Avinu* dispatched Eliezer, his servant, in search of a wife for Yitzchak. He prayed to Hashem to provide him with a suitable match for Yitzchak. He stipulated that the first girl who would not only offer him water, but would also water his camels, would be demonstrating that Hashem had listened to his prayer. *Chazal* teach that Eliezer had made an inappropriate request. What if the first girl that offered assistance was blind or an amputee? Despite the unsuitability of such a match, Hashem listened, and acquiesced by sending Rivkah *Imeinu*. This is a case where the prayer offered by Eliezer was quite risky and clearly uncertain. The *shalsheles* certainly belonged there.

The third *shalsheles* finds its place in the midst of the near debacle between Yosef *HaTzaddik* and Potifar's wife. The shameless woman would stop at nothing in her attempt to seduce Yosef. At that point in time Egypt was a country whose culture permitted -- and even accepted -- all forms of promiscuity. Had Yosef deferred to Potifar's wife's dalliances, he would have indicated that he

was an Egyptian who was as perverted as any member of the upper echelons of Egyptian social strata. *Chazal* teach that Yosef demurred for two reasons. He saw an image of the *Choshen*, the Breastplate, worn by the *Kohen Gadol*. This Breastplate had a precious gem representing each tribe set in it. Yosef saw that the space reserved for the tribe of Yosef was blank, presumably the result of his having fallen prey to the blandishments of Potifar's wife. The second factor that saved him was the image of his father, Yaakov *Avinu*, that appeared to him. It was watching, waiting, to see how he would react to this latest challenge to his spiritual integrity. Yosef had a major decision to make. He was wavering. Thus, the *shalsheles trop* is appropriate.

The *trop* in *Parashas Tzav*, concerning Moshe's slaughtering of the ram, does not seem to fit. What uncertainty did Moshe experience? In what way was he wavering? The inauguration was "cut and dry," all decided by Hashem. One did what one was told to do. *Rav Schwab* explains that while we have no uncertainty and we do not waver with regard to the *tzivui* Hashem, Heavenly command, we do savor the spiritual moment that we create by following Hashem's command.

Originally, Moshe was to have had two functions: *Rebbe* /leader of *Am Yisrael*; and *Kohen Gadol*. When he initially refused to accept the position as the nation's redeemer, Hashem took the position of *Kohen Gadol* and transferred it to Aharon. During the seven days of *Milluim*, prior to Aharon's investiture as the *Kohen Gadol*, it was Moshe who served in this capacity. He was *Kohen Gadol* for a week. His very last action as *Kohen Gadol* was the slaughtering of the ram, after which all duties in the *Mishkan* were ceded over to Aharon and his sons. The *shalsheles* on the word *vayishchat* demonstrates that Moshe held on as long as he could, to tarry a little bit longer, to savor the *mitzvah*, to relish the final moments of acting as a *Kohen*.

If I may, I would add that while Moshe certainly had no issue with his brother assuming the High Priesthood, it was the fact that, from that moment on, the *Kehunah* would descend by inheritance from father to son. Aharon had sons to whom he could bequeath this honor and privilege. Moshe, sadly, did not. He must have experienced a tinge of longing and regret that he did not have progeny who were suitable to step into his shoes, to ascend to the leadership position that he so ably executed. Hence, the *shalsheles*.

The idea of savoring a *mitzvah*, by stretching out and thereby lengthening its performance, is our way of demonstrating our abiding love for the *mitzvah* and for Hashem Who has given us the privilege and opportunity to serve Him. This is especially meaningful concerning a timebound *mitzvah* such as *Shabbos*, when we sanctify the seventh day with our manner of dress, the meals that we eat and the way that we eat them, accompanied by *zemiros*, lighting the candles and reciting *Kiddush* – all essential elements in setting aside this holy island in time. While rest, worship and study are essential components in sanctifying this day, it is the addition of *tosfos Shabbos*, adding on to *Shabbos*, that demonstrates our special love for the *mitzvah*.

We do, however, have times in which it is important to do the *mitzvah* and carry it out as quickly as possible, with immediacy and urgency. *Rav Avraham ben Avraham*, the *ger tzedek*, righteous

convert, who, prior to his conversion, was known as Count Valentine Potocki (a Polish nobleman who, albeit raised in the Catholic church, converted to Judaism, and paid with his life), was close with the *Gaon*, *zli*, of Vilna, who was his spiritual mentor. *Rav* Avraham ben Avraham was a righteous Jew, who died *Al Kiddush Hashem*. He was a holy *neshamah*, soul, that sanctified Hashem's Name. Indeed, he went to the fires that consumed him with joy and trepidation, saying that this was his ultimate service to Hashem, one for which he had waited from the earliest moments that he yearned to convert.

A *halachic* query entered *Rav* Avraham's mind as he walked through the streets: Should he take his time in order to savor every moment of life, to live another moment for Hashem? Or should he run to perform the *mitzvah* of *Kiddush Hashem*? *Zerizim makdimim l'mitzvos*, "One must be passionate in fulfilling *mitzvos* with alacrity and excitement." This would elevate the *mitzvah* of *Kiddush Hashem*. When the spectators would see him enthusiastically running to the fire, they would realize the greatness of a Jew's love for Hashem. As he walked underneath the *Gaon's* window, the *Gaon* came out and said that it was best that he move quickly to sanctify Hashem's Name. He moved on, singing and dancing with incredible *deveikus*, clinging to Hashem, overjoyed in the privilege of performing the ultimate service to the Almighty, may his name be a blessing.