

Standing in God's Court

In weeks reading from Parashat Shemini (*Vayikra / Leviticus 9:1-11:47*). The most notable event that occurs in Parashat Shemini is the story of how Nadav and Avihu went before the Lord with fire in their fire-pans offering strange fire which resulted in their deaths (*10:1-5*). While reading through the book of Hebrews, and thinking upon Parshiot Shemini and Korach, it might be that the author of the book of Hebrews wrote *Hebrews 12:29*, καὶ γὰρ ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν πῦρ καταναλίσκων, *12:29 for our God is a consuming fire. (NASB)* thinking about these Torah based stories. With this perspective of the Lord being a consuming fire, have you ever considered who it is before whom we stand? David said in *Tehillim / Psalms 65*, according to the Aramaic Targum, “*Blessed is the man whom You (God) choose and bring near; that he may dwell in Your courts (Tehillim / Psalms 65:5).*” In Midrash Tehillim 65, Part 3, “*Rabbi Hoshaiia taught in the name of rabbi Samuel son of Shila who taught in the name of Rab, When David said, Master of the universe, Blessed is the man whom You bring near to court, he referred not to the court of the Temple, but to the court on high.*” The rabbis say that the one who prays is as the one who abides in God's courts, not in the earthly Tabernacle or Temple, but in the heavenly court. While reading through this week's Torah portion, a general overview reveals to us the importance of sanctifying the Lord in our lives.

The Scriptures say that in the eighth day, Moshe called to Aaron, his sons, and to the elders of Israel. (וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי קָרָא מֹשֶׁה לְאַהֲרֹן וּלְבָנָיו) א וַיִּזְקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: ב וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-אַהֲרֹן קַח-לֶךָ עֵגֶל בֶּן-בְּקָר לְחֻטָּאת וְאֵיל לְעֹלָה תְּמִימִם וְהִקְרִב לְפָנַי יְהוָה: (וְהִקְרִב לְפָנַי יְהוָה: Moshe tells Aaron and his sons to offering an ox and a ram for peace offerings and a grain offering mixed with oil because today the Lord will appear to them. Then Aaron and his sons proceed to make the offering before the Lord according to the instruction of Moshe (*9:7-23*). After doing as Moshe had instructed, the Scripture say in *Vayikra / Leviticus 9:24*, - כַּד וַתֵּצֵא אֵשׁ מִלְּפָנַי יְהוָה וַתֹּאכַל עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ אֶת-הָעֹלָה וְאֶת-: 9:24 *Then fire came out from before the Lord and consumed the burnt offering and the portions of fat on the altar; and when all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their*

faces. (NASB) The Torah narrative continues saying, Nadav and Avihu went before the Lord with fire in their firepans and offered strange fire and they died (10:1-5). The Lord spoke to Aaron saying “Do not drink strong drink when you come into the Ohel Moed” (אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד, Tent of Meeting) so that he and his sons will not die. The Scriptures say “u’le’havdil” (וְלִהְיוֹת), that one is to make a distinction between the holy and the profane (בְּדִיל), (בֵּין הַקֹּדֶשׁ וּבֵין הַחֹל וּבֵין הַטְּמֵא וּבֵין הַטְּהוֹר). Notice how Moshe reverses the word order in the Hebrew text. This should make us take note, because one cannot draw a one-to-one correspondence of holy to unclean, and profane to clean.

holy (קֹדֶשׁ) ↔ profane (חֹל)
 unclean (טְמֵא) ↔ clean (טְהוֹר)

The reader must pay careful attention to the way the text is written, one must make a distinction and not be confused on what is holy and clean, as opposed to what is unclean and profane. This appears to be the point that Moshe is making in the Torah portion. In a similar manner, we should pay attention to how we approach the Lord our Father in heaven in prayer.

ספר ויקרא פרק יא *Vayikra / Leviticus 11:44-47*

מד כי אני יהוה אלהיכם והתקדש
 דשמתם והייתם קדושים כי קדוש
 אני ולא תטמאו את-נפשתיכם
 בכל-השרץ הרמש על-הארץ:
 [מפטיר] מה פי | אני יהוה
 המעלה אתכם מארץ מצרים
 להיות לכם לאלהים והייתם קדושים
 כי קדוש אני: מו זאת
 תורת הבהמה והעוף וכל נפש
 החיה הרמשות במים ולכל-נפש
 השרצת על-הארץ: מז להבדיל
 בין הטמא ובין הטהור ובין
 החיה הנאכלת ובין החיה אשר
 לא תאכל:

11:44 ‘For I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth. 11:45 ‘For I am the Lord who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy.’ 11:46 This is the law regarding the animal and the bird, and every living thing that moves in the waters and everything that swarms on the earth, 11:47 to make a distinction between the unclean and the clean, and between the edible creature and the creature which is not to be eaten. (NASB)

These Scriptures speak of the sanctity of drawing near to the Lord. Nadav and Avihu are a testimony to that. How important do you think these Scriptures are for us today? These Scriptures are very important, in light of what we do in our bodies and what we think in our hearts which are coupled to our drawing near to the Lord in prayer. The rabbinic commentary Midrash Tehillim 65, Part 3 and 4 has a lot to say concerning these things.

The rabbis in Midrash Tehillim 65, Part 3 begin (דיבור המתחיל) with a discussion on the Scripture from the Aramaic Targum from *Tehillim / Psalms 65:5* “*Blessed is the man whom You choose and bring near, that he may dwell in Your courts.*” The homiletic introduction to the midrash states, “*Rabbi Hoshaiia taught in the name of rabbi Samuel son of Shila who taught in the name of Rab, When David said, Master of the universe, Blessed is the man whom You bring near to court, he referred not to the court of the Temple, but to the court on high.*” The entire midrash states the following:

Midrash Tehillim 65, Part 3

3. Blessed is the man whom You choose and bring near, that he may dwell in Your courts (Tehillim / Psalms 65:5). Rabbi Hoshaiia taught in the name of rabbi Samuel son of Shila who taught in the name of Rab, When David said, Master of the universe, Blessed is the man whom You bring near to court, he referred not to the court of the Temple, but to the court on high. This court he also referred to in the words How precious is Your loving kindness, O God. Therefore the children of men take refuge in the shadow of Your wings. They will be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Your house (Tehillim / Psalms 36:9). To this the sons of Korah also referred in saying, For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere (Tehillim / Psalms 84:11). And this is also referred to in the verse Blessed are they that dwell in Your house (Tehillim / Psalms 84:5).

ג. אשרי תבחר ותקרב ישכון חצריך. אמר רב הושעיא בשם רב שמואל בר שילא משמיה דרב, אמר דוד רבונו של עולם אשרי למי שאתה מקרבו לחצר, ולא בחצר אלא במרום, מה יקר חסדך אלהים ובני אדם בצל כנפיך יחסיון ירויון מדשן ביתך (תהלים לו ח ט), גם בני קרה אמרו כי טוב יום בחצריך (שם תהלים פד יא), וכן הוא אומר אשרי יושבי ביתך (שם שם תהלים פ"ד ה).

The rabbis say that when David says, *65:5 How happy is the one You will choose and bring near; he will abide in Your courts. The righteous will say, "We will be satisfied in the goodness of your house, the holiness of your temple."* (EMC) the abiding in Your courts is a reference not to the earthly Tabernacle or Temple, but to the heavenly court. How does one enter into the heavenly court? One does so through prayer. According to the Tanach, there are a number of descriptions of the courts of God. The Tanach mentions God's throne in the *1 Kings 22:19, Isaiah 6:1-4, Ezekiel 1:24-28, Daniel 7:2-10, and Zechariah 3:1-7.*

1 Kings 22:19

22:19 Micaiah said, "Therefore, hear the word of the LORD. I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by Him on His right and on His left. (NASB)

Isaiah 6:1-4

6:1 In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. 6:2 Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 6:3 And one called out to another and said, 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory.' 6:4 And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke. (NASB)

Ezekiel 1:24-28

1:24 I also heard the sound of their wings like the sound of abundant waters as they went, like the voice of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of an army camp; whenever they stood still, they dropped their wings. 1:25 And there came a voice from above the expanse that was over their heads; whenever they stood still, they dropped their wings. 1:26 Now above the expanse that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, like lapis lazuli in appearance; and on that which resembled a throne, high up, was a figure with the appearance of a man. 1:27 Then I noticed from the appearance of His loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something like fire; and there was a radiance around Him. 1:28 As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking. (NASB)

Daniel 7:2-10

7:2 Daniel said, 'I was looking in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. 7:3 'And four great beasts were coming up from the sea, different from one another. 7:4 'The first was like a lion and had the wings of an eagle. I kept looking until its wings were plucked, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man; a human mind also was given to it. 7:5 'And behold, another beast, a second one, resembling a bear. And it was raised up on one side, and three ribs were in its mouth between its teeth; and thus they said to it, 'Arise, devour much meat!' 7:6 'After this I kept looking, and behold, another one, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird; the beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it. 7:7 'After this I kept looking in the night visions, and be-

hold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns. 7:8 'While I was contemplating the horns, behold, another horn, a little one, came up among them, and three of the first horns were pulled out by the roots before it; and behold, this horn possessed eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth uttering great boasts. 7:9 'I kept looking Until thrones were set up, And the Ancient of Days took His seat; His vesture was like white snow And the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne was ablaze with flames, Its wheels were a burning fire. 7:10 'A river of fire was flowing And coming out from before Him; Thousands upon thousands were attending Him, And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; The court sat, And the books were opened. (NASB)

Zechariah 3:1-7

3:1 Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. 3:2 The Lord said to Satan, 'The Lord rebuke you, Satan! Indeed, the Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is this not a brand plucked from the fire?' 3:3 Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments and standing before the angel. 3:4 He spoke and said to those who were standing before him, saying, 'Remove the filthy garments from him.' Again he said to him, 'See, I have taken your iniquity away from you and will clothe you with festal robes.' 3:5 Then I said, 'Let them put a clean turban on his head.' So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments, while the angel of the Lord was standing by. 3:6 And the angel of the Lord admonished Joshua, saying, 3:7 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, 'If you will walk in My ways and if you will perform My service, then you will also govern My house and also have charge of My courts, and I will grant you free access

among these who are standing here. (NASB)

In each of these descriptions, we see the Lord sitting upon His throne. In Judaism, it is important to note that some philosophers such as Sa'adiah Gaon and Maimonides, interpret the mention of a "throne" as allegory, however, for the most part this is not generally understood to be true. The heavenly throne room in the Scriptures is a description of the location of the heavenly court. For example, this is the location where Satan debated with the Lord over Job in *Job 1*. Micaiah's extended prophecy (*1 Kings 22:19*) is the first detailed depiction of a heavenly throne room in Judaism. *Zechariah 3* describes a vision of the heavenly throne room, though the "throne" of God is not mentioned. In this vision, Satan and the Angel of the Lord contend over Joshua the High Priest in the time of his grandson Eliashib the High Priest. The Dead Sea Scrolls also have the concept of the heavenly throne. In the Apostolic Writings, the throne of God is discussed in several places. Matthew has Yeshua discussing the topic of the throne of God with regard to making an oath, *Matthew 23:20* 'Therefore, whoever swears by the altar, swears both by the altar and by everything on it. 23:21 'And whoever swears by the temple, swears both by the temple and by Him who dwells within it. 23:22 'And whoever swears by heaven, swears both by the throne of God and by Him who sits upon it. (NASB) The book of Revelation describes the Seven Spirits of God which surround the throne, and John states before the throne there appears to be a sea of glass clear as crystal. In addition, he says, the throne is surrounded by a lion, an ox, a man, and a flying eagle; each with six wings and covered with eyes, who constantly repeat "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." It is also said that "out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices." (*Revelation 4*) The Apostolic Writings continues the Jewish identification of heaven as the place of the throne of God. Based upon these Scriptures, the heavenly court is the place for decisions of a spiritual nature, that also pertains to the physical created realm (e.g. men on Earth).

The Lord has also given the power or right of deciding Law to man. For example, in a broad sense, the halakhah comprises the practical application of the mitzvot in the Torah, as developed in the Mishnah and subsequent rabbinic literature. Issues with decisions on dubious cases, the interpretation of Scripture, its application, etc, is vested in the Rabbis

as its teachers and expositors. In ancient Israel, the Torah and decision making regarding the Torah was chiefly in the hands of the priests and the Levites. Later the king was to make his own copy and to lead the people in God's ways (e.g. *to help facilitate keeping the people on the straight and narrow path*). The high court of justice in Jerusalem was formed for the purpose of decision making (Sanhedrin) and for ruling on difficult questions. This court was also composed of priests and Levites (*Devarim / Deuteronomy 17:9-18, 31:9, 33:10, Jeremiah 18:18, Malachi 2:7; 2 Chronicles. 19:8-11 and 31:4*). In the Talmudic times the Scribes ("*Soferim*"), also called "*The Wise*" ("*Hakhamim*"), claimed to have received the true interpretation of the Law as "*the tradition of the Elders or Fathers*" in direct line from Moshe, the Prophets, and the men of the Great Synagogue (*Talmud Bavli Avot 1:1, Josephus, "Ant." xiii. 10, § 6; 16, § 2; x. 4, § 1, "Contra Ap." i. 8, and Matthew 15:2*). In addition, Yeshua also suggested this to be true in *Matthew 23* when he said to do all that the Pharisees tell you to do, but do not do as they do because they lived hypocritical lives. The Sanhedrin, in Jerusalem, included men to whom was applied the verse, *Devarim / Deuteronomy "17:8 'If any case is too difficult for you to decide, between one kind of homicide or another, between one kind of lawsuit or another, and between one kind of assault or another, being cases of dispute in your courts, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the Lord your God chooses. 17:9 'So you shall come to the Levitical priest or the judge who is in office in those days, and you shall inquire of them and they will declare to you the verdict in the case. 17:10 'You shall do according to the terms of the verdict which they declare to you from that place which the Lord chooses; and you shall be careful to observe according to all that they teach you. 17:11 'According to the terms of the law which they teach you, and according to the verdict which they tell you, you shall do; you shall not turn aside from the word which they declare to you, to the right or the left. 17:12 'The man who acts presumptuously by not listening to the priest who stands there to serve the Lord your God, nor to the judge, that man shall die; thus you shall purge the evil from Israel."* (NASB)

The authority of the Rabbis in Judaism is threefold: (i) to amplify the Torah either by prohibitory statutes for the prevention of transgressions ("*gezerot*") or by mandatory statutes for the improvement of the moral or religious life of the people ("*takkanot*"). They also have introduced new

rites and customs (“*minhagim*”, מנהג). (ii) to explain the Law according to certain rules of hermeneutics, and thereby evolve new statutes as implied in the letter of the Law; and, (iii) to impart additional instruction based upon tradition.

The midrash states that David was speaking of drawing near to the Lord, to the heavenly court. Midrash Tehillim 65, Part 3 concludes saying, “*To this the sons of Korah also referred in saying, For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere (Tehillim / Psalms 84:11). And this is also referred to in the verse Blessed are they that dwell in Your house (Tehillim / Psalms 84:5).*” Blessed indeed is the man to whom the Lord hears his prayers. The conclusion of this midrash is that when we pray, the Lord draws us near, even into His throne room to allow us to make a petition by reason of His mercy and grace.

Midrash Tehillim 65, Part 4 continues speaking (דיבור המתחיל) on David’s words saying, “*With wondrous works do You answer us in righteousness, O God of our salvation; You the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of the sea, afar off (Tehillim / Psalms 65:6).*” The homiletic introduction to the midrash states, “*With regard to this verse, rabbi Hani-na son of Papa asked rabbi Samuel son of Nahmani, What is meant by the words You have covered Yourself with a cloud, so that no prayer can pass through (Lamentations 3:44)?*” What is meant by the words You have covered Yourself with a cloud so that no prayer can pass through? The rabbis reference *Lamentations 3:44*.

Lamentations 3:40-50

3:40 Let us examine and probe our ways, And let us return to the Lord. 3:41 We lift up our heart and hands Toward God in heaven; 3:42 We have transgressed and rebelled, You have not pardoned. 3:43 You have covered Yourself with anger And pursued us; You have slain and have not spared. 3:44 You have covered Yourself with a cloud So that no prayer can pass through. 3:45 You have made us mere offscouring and refuse In the midst of the peoples. 3:46 All our enemies have opened their mouths against us. 3:47 Panic and pitfall have befallen us, Devastation and destruction; 3:48 My eyes run down with streams of water Because of the destruction of the daughter of my people.

*3:49 My eyes pour down unceasingly, Without stopping,
3:50 Until the Lord looks down And sees from heaven.
(NASB)*

Solomon is speaking of the people seeking the Lord, and because of their sins it appears the Lord does not hear their prayer which is described as the Lord covering Himself with a cloud so that no prayer can pass through. He describes the situation by drawing a parallel to Israel as a dung heap and the cloud as a covering so the Lord does not see or smell the stench of dung. These words of Solomon appear to paint a picture of what David says in *Tehillim / Psalms 141:2 May my prayer be counted as incense before You; The lifting up of my hands as the evening offering. (NASB)* and *Revelation 8:4 And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand. (NASB)* We do not want our prayers to be considered stinky and smelly. Our prayers are supposed to go before the Lord as a fragrant and sweet smell. If we hold things in our heart, darkness, sin, hatred, etc, these things are considered as dung and produce an awful stench in our prayer life. The reason is we take these things and pray selfishly for the detriment of others rather than for the help and peace between brothers, enemies, man and God. *Lamentations 3:44* states, *מִדַּם סָכַוְתָהּ בְּעָנָן לֹא יִמְעָבוֹר תְּפִלָּהּ: 3:44 You have covered Yourself with a cloud So that no prayer can pass through. (NASB)* Breaking down the sentence, the idea here is *סָכַוְתָהּ* meaning “to entwine as a screen; by implication, to fence in, cover over, (figuratively) protect or cover, defense, defend, hedge in, join together, set, shut up,” *בְּעָנָן* meaning “a cloud (as covering the sky), e.g. the nimbus or thunder-cloud or cloud,” *יִמְעָבוֹר* meaning “to cross over; used very widely of any transition (literal or figurative; transitive, intransitive, intensive, causative),” and *תְּפִלָּהּ* meaning “intercession, supplication; by implication, a hymn, prayer.” Here, the Lord covers Himself because of our sins. If our prayers proceed from the heart, we should ask the Lord first according to *Tehillim / Psalms 51:10 Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me. (NASB)* and then bring our petition before Him. Take for example, we would not drink alcohol and then expect to go before the Lord in prayer (*Vayikra / Leviticus 10*).

The rabbis continue in the midrash saying the following:

Rabbi Samuel son of Nahmani answered, There are times when the gates of prayer are open, and times when the gates of prayer are shut, but the gates of repentance are never barred. The words, You the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of the sea, afar off, mean that repentance is like the sea which is never barred, so that whoever desires to bathe in it, bathes in it whenever he desires; whenever a man desires to repent, the Holy One blessed be He, receives him. For prayer, however, there are set times. Rabbi Jose son of Halaftha taught, in the words But as for me, let my prayer be unto You, O Lord, in an acceptable time (Tehillim / Psalms 69:14), an acceptable time shows that there are set times for prayer. Rabbi Berechiah, rabbi Helbo, and rabbi Anan son of Azzai and rabbi Akiva differed in their comments. One of them maintained, He who practices lovingkindness may feel assured that his prayer will be heard, for it is said, Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in lovingkindness (Hosea 10:12). And what does the verse go on to say? That is the time to seek the Lord, meaning that when such a man prays to the Holy One blessed be He, he is heard. (Midrash Tehillim 65, Part 4)

The rabbis believe there are times when the gates of prayer are open and other times when the gates of prayer are shut. This is like the cloud that covers the Lord so He does not hear us, by reason of our sin, or the that He does not answer our prayers for some other reason. The midrash states that the gates of repentance however are never closed. The gate analogy offers us an interesting way of viewing repentance. Take for example, the gate is something that would bar entrance to a house or a court. We read of the gates of heaven in *Revelation 21:12*.

Revelation 21:21-27

21:21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass. 21:22 I saw no temple

in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. 21:23 And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb. 21:24 The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. 21:25 In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; 21:26 and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; 21:27 and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. (NASB)

The book of Revelation speaks of the gates of heaven and the nations, peoples, and kings walking through the gates, and these gates never closing. When the rabbis speak of the gates of repentance never closing, this includes both that of prayer, and of walking through these gates, righteous deeds, those deeds meet for repentance. The deeds that are done to show a repentant heart, is what John said in *Matthew 3:7-12*.

Matthew 3:7-12

3:7 But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, 'You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 3:8 'Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; 3:9 and do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father'; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. 3:10 'The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 3:11 'As for me, I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, and I am not fit to remove His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 3:12 'His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.' (NASB)

This is the same reasoning Yeshua used when he said in *Matthew 5:22* 'But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, 'You good-for-nothing,' shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell. 5:23 'Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, 5:24 leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. 5:25 'Make friends quickly with your opponent at law while you are with him on the way, so that your opponent may not hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and you be thrown into prison. (NASB) The man who was repentant brought a sacrifice in fulfillment of the command to do so according to the covenant. Repentance included both a heart felt sorrow, followed by prayer seeking forgiveness, and then the action to make right the wrong, and to turn from sin towards God's ways. Notice how the rabbis say these same things in the midrash, the words, *You the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of the sea, afar off, mean that repentance is like the sea which is never barred, so that whoever desires to bathe in it, bathes in it whenever he desires; whenever a man desires to repent, the Holy One blessed be He, receives him. For prayer, however, there are set times.* They are making a distinction between repentance and prayer suggesting that repentance, which includes all of these things, a man is never barred from doing. Prayer on the other hand has set times. This concept is expounded upon by *Rabbi Jose son of Halafta saying, in the words But as for me, let my prayer be unto You, O Lord, in an acceptable time (Tehillim / Psalms 69:14), an acceptable time shows that there are set times for prayer.* The question is what is the acceptable time that David is speaking of? The midrash states, *חד מנהגו אמר מי שהוא גומל חסדים יהא מבושר שתהא תפלתו נשמעת, שנאמר זרעו לכם לצדקה (הושע י ב) [וגוי] One of them maintained, He who practices lovingkindness may feel assured that his prayer will be heard, for it is said, Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in lovingkindness (Hosea 10:12).* They say, the one who practices chasidim (חסדים), mercies, graces, lovingkindness, may be assured that his prayer will be heard. This follows with John's statements in *Matthew 3*, and Yeshua's statements in *Matthew 5*.

The rabbis continue saying *And what does the verse go on to say? That is the time to seek the Lord, meaning that when such a man prays to the Holy One blessed be He, he is heard*, suggesting that a man should seek the Lord in prayer from a repentant heart. This is the way David acted throughout his life, humble, repentant, and making right to those he wronged, and stands as an example for us as well to live humble and repentant lives before the Lord which includes both thought and action.

Midrash Tehillim 65, Part 4 concludes saying, “*And the other said, I do not set aside the words of my Master, but from Scripture I merely add another proof to his comment, for directly after the verse, O God, because of the abundance of Your lovingkindness (Tehillim / Psalms 69:14), there follows, Hear me in the truth of Your salvation (Tehillim / Psalms 69:14).*”

The rabbis conclude saying that the Lord is abundant (בְּרַב) in grace (ד' :וְאֲנִי תִפְלְתִי-לְךָ | יְהוָה עַתָּה רְצוֹן אֱלֹהִים בְּרַב-חַסְדֶּךָ עֲנֵנִי בְּאֱמֶת יִשְׁעֶךָ :בְּאֱמֶת) of His salvation (יִשְׁעֶךָ). Taking all of these things we have been learning regarding what the rabbis are saying about prayer. Notice what Yeshua says regarding prayer in *John 14:11-18*.

John 14:11-18

14:11 'Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves.

14:12 'Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father. 14:13 'Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14:14 'If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it. 14:15 'If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. 14:16 'I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper; that He may be with you forever; 14:17 that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not see Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you and will be in you. 14:18 'I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. (NASB)

Yeshua speaks of being one with the father, of doing the works that he did, of believing in him and in our Father in heaven, of praying in His name

(Yeshua), of praying in the name of God's Salvation, and that doing all of these things the Lord will hear our prayers. Yeshua promises to never leave us, that he will come to us, he will send a helper, the Holy Spirit of God, to dwell inside of us, etc. Yeshua provides a great hope and expectation that the Lord will move in our lives. Note also that his statement in *John 14:15* to keep the commandments, corresponds to living a repentant life, and bringing our lives humbly in line with God's Word.

What now can we say concerning the Torah portion? The general flow of this week's reading, (i) Moshe instructs on the sacrifices and the Lord's presence in Israel's midst, (ii) Nadav and Avihu draw near to the Lord and die because they do not sanctify the Lord, (iii) the priestly instruction on the role and involvement in making atonement for the people (God's plan of Salvation), and (iv) the mitzvot on kashrut (living and walking in God's ways) for the purpose of consecrating yourself as holy before God so that one can make a distinction between the unclean and the clean. What more joy could we have than to talk in the manner in which our Savior Yeshua walked? The Joy of Torah is to walk in God's ways by the power of Christ in our lives. By doing so, we can rest assured that He will hear our prayer when we stand in His court! Halelluia!



