

United We Stand

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Parshas Acharei Mos

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Written By Yehuda Dov Reiss, Talmid of Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh

The Parsha's Paths

He shall provide atonement for himself, his household, and for the entire congregation of Israel (16:17).

In this week's Parsha, we learn about the Yom Kippur service in the Beis-Hamikdash, which included sacrifices that effectuated atonement for certain sins committed by the people.

I always had difficulty understanding the concept of communal sacrifices. According to the (non-Kabbalistic) explanation offered by Ramban, the rationale for the sacrificial procedures was that it ignited feelings of elevation and repentance. It was an emotional tool to help the sinner better himself. How, then, could a communal sacrifice, offered by one individual on behalf of others, possibly have that effect? If each individual in the community does not undergo the elevating sacrificial procedure, what good is it?

Rav Moshe Feinstein, zt"l, in *Darash Moshe*, offers an enlightening explanation specifically regarding the communal offering brought by the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur. However, perhaps we will be able to expand it.

He explains that the Kohen Gadol served as the spiritual leader of the Jewish people. In order to be an effective leader, you have to empathize with each member of your people. Whether one is a Rabbi, teacher, lay leader, or national figure, one's success is contingent upon the relationship they maintain with their followers. As such, the Kohen Gadol's responsibility towards the spiritual welfare of the nation enabled him to effectuate atonement for them.

In order to understand this better, there are a number of factors we must consider: 1) According to many prominent views, the atonement of Yom Kippur, as well as sacrifices in general, only work when combined with one's personal repentance. 2) We must wonder why someone who, while having a responsibility towards the spiritual welfare of others, should actually be able to effectuate atonement for them through doing a sacrificial service- it's true the service may elevate the one doing it,

but how does that have the same impact upon the person he is responsible for?

When one has a responsibility to lead, inspire, and guide others, then he must do the very best job he can. In order to do that, he must achieve his highest spiritual heights possible. The greater one is, the more one is able to pull others to greatness. On the other hand, if a leader tries his best, he cannot be blamed for a follower's failure- everyone has free will, after all.

A sacrifice does not take the place of repentance. Repentance is each individual's obligation; no one, not even one's spiritual guide, can undergo the experience of remorse, resolve, and growth for him. What sacrifices do offer, however, is an additional, highly significant level of support that helps reinforce him on his difficult journey of repentance and opens the floodgates of emotion. This element is not contingent on an individual's personal choice; it helps him once he has already made the choice to do what's right. As such, the function of a sacrifice is quite parallel to the function of a spiritual guide and leader. Anyone who turns to their leader for support and guidance is effectively getting the same type of assistance as by offering a sacrifice. Thus, a leader, by elevating himself to greatness through sacrifices, indirectly elevates his followers by virtue of serving as a greater source of inspiration.

While Rav Moshe was dealing specifically with the Kohen Gadol's sacrifice on Yom Kippur, I think the same model explains all sacrifices rendered for the community or a group. The Torah teaches us that *Kol Yisrael Areivim Zeh Bazeh*- all of the Jewish people are interconnected. We all are responsible for each other and we all influence each other. Whether we like it or not, we are all leaders. As such, we can affect others in the same way that the Korbanos do, and thus by elevating ourselves we elevate our nation.

On that note, let us all strive to merit being worthy conduits to the spiritual elevation of Korbanos by remembering that being great isn't just about ourselves, but about raising the entire Jewish nation to greatness,

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and use that as inspiration to always push the extra mile and be our very best.

Deeper Meanings

This Motzei Shabbos/Pesach, just before my father was about to buy back the Chametz on behalf of the community, I was (I confess) biting my thumbnail, when the crown of my tooth (not to mention part of the tiny tooth that was left) popped out. Until Monday afternoon, I had to go around with one of my front teeth conspicuously missing, and I was afraid to open my mouth except when absolutely necessary.

As I reflected on the situation, I realized that the last part of the last sentence wasn't such a bad thing. My self-consciousness about my tooth helped stop me from frivolous or forbidden chatter and made me mindful of my words. In next week's Parsha, we'll read about the commandment to guard one's tongue from Lashon Hara. The specific phraseology of guarding one's tongue comes from Tehillim. Perhaps an implication of the wording of that is that a key to mastering speech is to be mindful about the tangible source of speech- the mouth. If we think of how embarrassing and risky it is to simply do the act of opening our mouths, we will be more careful about speech.

I myself admit that after getting a new crown, it becomes much more difficult to remember to have that same mindfulness- though on the other hand, it's not like I've been speaking to hundreds of people during these few days that I'm staying with my Savta before going back to Israel. In any event, I think it is highly beneficial to visualize some great physical flaw in our mouths and use that as a catalyst to help us think before we speak.

Pirkei Avos Paths

Pirkei Avos is one of my favorite books- it's remarkably profound while being impossibly concise, and compiled from the most qualified ethical leaders- the nationally recognized bearers of our tradition from Moshe to the current exile. This is testified to in the first Mishna of the tractate, which makes a point of tracing the transmission of Torah and how all of the Sages cited in this book had such a mastery of what Torah was all about that they were considered to be the ones to have inherited the tradition from the previous generations and the ones with the responsibility of passing it on. It is traditional to study Pirkei Avos between Pesach and Shavuot, which is considered a special time to improve ourselves just as the Jewish people improved during the 49 day period between leaving Egypt and receiving the Torah. In this section we will only get to explore one or two Mishnayos a week, but I highly recommend perusing the entire weekly Perek (there are 6 Perakim, for the 6 Shabboses after Pesach until Shavuot).

The first Mishna states that the Men of the Great Assembly (the Sanhedrin of 120 Judges led by Ezra at the beginning of the Bayit Sheini period) said three things (they deemed critical to preserving the Torah): Be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples and make a fence for the Torah.

While it is true that this Mishna, like many others, seems primarily directed at Jewish judges, the messages also apply to all Jews. The first thing, being deliberate in judgment, is explained by the Bartenura as follows: A judge might have a case in front of him that he saw multiple times before, and the ruling was always the same. He might take it for granted that the ruling should be the same here, too, without taking the proper diligence in verifying and perusing every detail. The judge is here warned never to take anything for granted and always judge with deliberation. I think that the same message applies to each person in their daily lives. Every day, we are constantly presented with situations that allow us to judge others. We read a headline, we hear about a friend or a group or an institution, we observe something. Based on prior experience, we have a natural tendency to frame things a certain way and pass judgment. The Mishna here warns us that this can be a dangerous habit and is certainly incorrect. Every scenario deserves close examination of all the details and comprehensive deliberation. Only with due diligence can we arrive at a correct conclusion; to do otherwise may result in disastrous errors.

The second thing is raising many disciples. This is commonly interpreted as a message to teachers and leaders to not be selective about their pupils, but the same message applies to all of us. As we discussed in the Parsha section, we each must be conscientious of the fact that we influence others. The greater we are, the more people we will influence and the more profoundly we will influence them. We are here encouraged to aspire to have far-reaching influence, to ascend to heights that will inspire many "pupils." This ambition is a key to success.

Finally, we are cautioned to make a fence for the Torah, something the Rabbis fulfill through Rabbinic gezeirot, enactments that prevent us from doing things that will lead to transgressing Torah commands. However, the source for this, a Pasuk in the Torah, is on a simple level addressing the individual. Each person must know themselves and their areas of weakness, and each person is obligated to create extra stringencies for themselves to prevent them from succumbing to those tendencies. Going above and beyond to ensure we live a Torah life properly is not an extra-special thing for people on higher levels, but something the Torah mandates that each of us pursue.

Goal of the week

Think about one area in your life that is weak (especially if it involves laxity in any area of Torah) and what extra measures you can take to ensure success in that area.

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This week's bulletin is dedicated for a Refuah Sheleima for HaRav Gedalia Dov Ben Perel, Yosef Shalom Ben Shira Miriam, Yisroel Altar Ben Chava Chana, and Gavriel Margoliot Ben Malka. Please have them in mind in your Tefillos. [Have A Great Shabbos!](#)

Our Mission is to bring the third Beis- Hamikdash by facilitating the only thing that will cause it: Unity. The Beis Hamikdash was destroyed due to Sinas-Chinam, blind hatred. Thus we must stop and reverse this deed, for nothing else can save us from Galut. Unity is key.