

The Narrow Bridge

גשר צר מאוד

PARSHA PERSPECTIVES

Short Divrei Torah on Parshas Vayikra

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רפואה שלמה פעסל בת גאלדא / לזכות חילינו

HEARING THE CALL

Rabbi Moshe Schochet

"And He called to Moshe, and Hashem spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying..." (1:1)

Rav Yisrael Meir Druck (Aish Tamid) asks why the Torah omits Hashem's name when it states that He called out to Moshe but mentions Hashem's name in the second half of the pasuk, when it states that Hashem spoke to Moshe?

Rav Druck explains that when Hashem called out to Moshe, it was not clear from the outset that Hashem was calling Moshe. Instead, Moshe, who was in tune with Hashem's communication, paid attention and was able to notice that Hashem was calling him. When Moshe recognized that Hashem was calling out to him, the pasuk then specifies that it was in fact Hashem who was the One speaking to him.

Rav Druck is teaching us a very powerful lesson. As we progress through life, we must pay more careful attention to when Hashem reaches out to us. Unfortunately, we are often too distracted to hear Hashem's communication. Hashem yearns to connect with us, but it is up to us to have our antennas raised so that we can hear when He is speaking to us. Let us work to ensure that we feel Hashem's tangible presence throughout our lives. This way, when we hear His call to us, we can act upon it.

HUMBLE GREATNESS

Riziner Rebbe

"And He called to Moshe..." (1:1)

The reason there is a small aleph at the end of the word Vayikra is to teach us humility. Hashem called to Moshe because he was humble even though he was on a high spiritual level.

This teaches us that while we are in the midst of prayer or the performance of a mitzvah, though we may be on a high spiritual level, we must still show humility.

SEEING THE GOOD

Reb Noson of Breslov

"And He called to Moshe..." (1:1)

The small Aleph (א) in the word Vayikra (ויקרא, And He called) hints at Eleph (אלף, one thousand). When the Torah was given, Moshe received 1,000 spiritual lights. When the Jews sinned, these lights were taken away from him and he was left with only one light.

The small aleph in the word Vayikra has a numerical value of 1, corresponding to the one spiritual light that remained with Moshe. (Sha'ar HaPesukim, p. 158; Sefer HaLikutim, Ki Sisa, p. 170)

Moshe lost his 1,000 lights when the Jews made the golden calf. They rectified that sin by building the Tabernacle. After the Tabernacle was erected, G-d "called to Moshe" to tell him that even though the people might sin terribly, Moshe could rectify their sin.

How? By steadfastly seeking out and finding the good - even the most minute measure of good - in each sinner. As long as Moshe could find a single light of good within a sinner, he could arouse the Jews to G-d's "call" and restore those spiritual lights. (Likutey Halakhot III, p. 148)

HUMBLING KNOWLEDGE

Degel Machaneh Ephraim

"And He called to Moshe, and Hashem spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying..." (1:1)

The small aleph in the word Vayikra should teach us that as one learns Torah, he should acquire more humility.

There are those who learn and therefore consider themselves greater than others because they think that they know all that is to be known. However, the Chassid understands that the more he learns, the more he is humbled.

(Similarly, Rebbe Nachman teaches: The greatest knowledge is knowing how little we know.)

YOUTHFUL PURITY

Rebbe Nachman

“And He called to Moshe...” (1:1)

It is customary to begin a child's Torah education with Sefer Vayikra.

The reason is that children are pure and Vayikra speaks about sacrifices offered in a state of ritual purity. “Let the pure come and engage themselves with the study of the pure.” (Vayikra Rabbah 7:3)

In a Torah scroll, the final letter aleph (א) in the word Vayikra (ויקרא, He called) is written smaller than the other letters. This is referred to as an aleph ze'ira (small aleph).

In Aramaic, the word aleph means “teach,” and ze'ira also connotes “young” or “small.” Thus, aleph ze'ira may be read as “teach the young children” - indicating that we must begin teaching Torah to our children from the Vayikra.

Vayikra follows directly after the description of the building of the Tabernacle which concludes the Exodus, because the purity of young children emanates from this Sanctuary. Each tzaddik also builds a sanctuary, from which the children who relate to him receive their purity. (See Likutey Moharan I, 282)

STRONG FOUNDATION

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“And He called to Moshe...” (1:1)

The name of something is not merely a title by which it is known; rather, a name represents its true essence and defines its qualities.

The Medrash tells us that Moshe had ten names, each one defining his character and achievements. (For instance, one of his names was Yered which comes from the word “lowering” to express that he was the one who brought the Torah down to This world. Another name was Avigdor because he was the “avi gador - father of fences” referring to the decrees that he enacted in order to protect Torah laws. See Bereishis Rabbah 17:4 for the entire list.)

Since each of Moshe's names represented his noble acts and his role in saving the entire Jewish People, it is perplexing that Hashem only called him by the name Moshe, the name he received from Basya, which simply recalls that he was pulled out of the Nile (the name Moshe is derived from the word which means to be taken out; see Rashi on Shemos 2:10). Why is this name a better reference to Moshe's character than the other names he was known by? And perhaps a stronger question is: Why choose this name to describe Moshe's essence at all; if anything, it refers to Basya's courageous act of saving baby Moshe - it is therefore a representation of Basya's character, not Moshe's?!

Perhaps we can answer that whereas Moshe's other names described *what* he did and *what* he achieved, the

name “Moshe” describes *how* he became so great. Moshe received his name from Basya when she saved his life through an unbelievable act of personal risk and self-sacrifice after her father had ordered that all the Hebrew baby boys be thrown into the Nile (Shemos 1:22; in addition, by raising a Jewish boy in the palace, she also took a significant risk).

Therefore, although the other names tell us what Moshe achieved, the name Moshe tells us from where - and from whom - he developed the ability to achieve so much. (Rav Chaim Shmuelevits takes this concept further and explains that Moshe's nature and personality were inherently changed through Basya's act of self-sacrifice, implanting within him with the character trait of self-sacrifice.) Accordingly, Hashem chose this name by which to refer to Moshe, the name that described the foundation of his tremendous success.

From this idea we see the incredible effect on a child when he is raised through great effort and sacrifice. This lesson was aptly demonstrated in the following story told by Rav Yehudah Tzadikah, Rosh Yeshivah of Purat Yosef and Rebbe to many of the Sefardi Gedolei Yisrael of the last generation.

When the Imrei Emes visited Yerushalayim, a nine-year-old boy was one of many Jews who availed themselves to meet the tzaddik and seek his blessing. Upon telling the Rebbe that he was learning the Mishnayos of Maseches Shabbos, the Rebbe then asked him, “Why are there twenty-four chapters in Maseches Shabbos?” But the child had no answer.

The boy then went to the shul where Rav Yaakov Chaim Sofer learned and asked him the Rebbe's question. Rav Yaakov Chaim told him that Shabbos is likened to the Jewish People's bride; and Chazal tell us that a bride is adorned with twenty-four different types of ornaments, corresponding to the twenty-four books of Tanach. Maseches Shabbos, which represents Shabbos - which is likened to a bride - thus has twenty-four chapters.

The child ran back to the Rebbe's lodgings and told him the answer. The Imrei Emes was very pleased, took out a coin from his pocket, and gave it as a gift to the boy.

This young boy lived in dire poverty and the money he received would provide his family food for the week. Elated, he ran home, showed his mother the coin, and told her that she could take a week off her grueling work and live off this money instead.

With great excitement his mother took the coin, but to her son's surprise, she took out a piece of string and threaded it through the coin (which had a hole in its center). She then hung it around his neck and said with pride, “This should be a reminder that you gave the Rebbe a good answer. May you cherish Torah all your life.”

At the end of the story, Rav Tzadikah admitted that he himself was that child, and that the joy he saw in his mother's eyes over his Torah knowledge gave him the desire for learning that started him off on his future path.

PROPER BALANCE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“And He called to Moshe...” (1:1)

The first word of the Sefer Divrei HaYamim is the name of the first human being, Adam. The alef in Adam's name is written larger than usual, alluding to Adam's exaggerated sense of self-esteem over being the pinnacle of G-d's creation. Adam allowed what should have been healthy self-esteem to degenerate into conceit, and this caused his downfall.

Moshe rectified Adam's mistake. Despite being aware of his own greatness - and of the fact that G-d Himself selected him for his exalted role in human history - Moshe remained humble. Thus, the alef of the first word in the Book of Vayikra, “[And He] called” (ויקרא), is written smaller than usual, alluding to Moshe's humility.

Moshe remained humble by reasoning as follows: “I cannot take credit for any of my gifts or accomplishments, since they are all G-d-given. Indeed, were another person to have been given my potential, he would have accomplished much more.”

We are all the spiritual heirs of both Adam and Moshe. When we feel inadequate, we must remember that we are Adam, formed by G-d's own hands and fully capable of caring for His garden. But if we start to feel vain, we must recall that we are also Moshe, thereby ensuring that our self-assurance does not develop into conceit. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 17, pp. 7-8) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniefsky

EDUCATED SACRIFICE

Avnei Ezel

“And He called to Moshe, and Hashem spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying...” (1:1)

Why is it customary to start a Jewish child's training in the Torah with this parsha, which deals with sacrifices?

This teaches us that parents must be prepared to make enormous sacrifices in order to educate their children in the Torah. Tuition must be paid even if it means skimping on other necessities.

SINCERE SACRIFICES

Sanzer Rebbe

“When a man from among you brings an animal as a sacrifice to G-d...” (1:2)

The word mikem (from among you) can be translated as “from within you.” When a person sacrifices himself for something, it should be from “within” - that is, with sincerity and devotion of purpose.

(Similarly, the Sassover Rebbe teaches: When a person does something from the depths of their heart, it is more meaningful than any sacrifice.)

ASCENDING ASPIRATIONS

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

“And He called to Moshe...” (1:1)

The word for “and He called” (ויקרא) is written with a small alef. This can be explained along the lines of my interpretation of the verse (Shemos 24:1), “He said to Moshe, ‘Go up to G-d,’” as follows:

When a person performs a mitzvah, the mitzvah makes an impression Above, and this impression in turn prompts the person to carry out G-d's will continually by observing this same mitzvah.

Now, Moshe wanted to fulfill G-d's commands always, and to ascend spiritually, as the Zohar (2:79b) comments on the verse (Shemos 19:3), “Moshe ascended to G-d.” Since Moshe continually aspired to ascend closer to G-d, this desire itself stirred him to constantly ascend even closer to G-d.

This is the deeper meaning of the verse, “He said to Moshe, ‘Go up to G-d.’” Moshe's longing to ascend ever closer to G-d was what prompted him - told him - to rise even higher.

[In Hebrew, the subject of the verb “said” is not stated, allowing the allegorical interpretation that the impression made above by Moshe's own desire to ascend is what prompted him (“said”) to ascend further.]

This is what is alluded to by the small alef. Since Moshe was known for being “exceedingly humble,” more so than any other person (see Bamidbar 12:3), the alef in the word for “and He called” (ויקרא) is written in smaller script, in order to allude to his special quality of humility.

[Moshe's humility is alluded to by one of the letters of the term for “and He called” rather than by one of the letters of Moshe's own name because it was Moshe's humility - his aspiration to ascend to G-d rather than to any other form of fame or achievement - that “called” (i.e., prompted) him to ascend even further to G-d.]

SACRIFICING ANIMALISTIC TRAITS

Reb Noson of Breslov

“When a man from among you brings an animal as a sacrifice to G-d...” (1:2)

A person sins due to a lack of da'at, as our Sages teach: “A person sins only because a spirit of foolishness overcame him” (Sotah 3a). To rectify this constricted da'at, the offender must bring an animal sacrifice, reflecting the fact that animals lack da'at. In this way, he shows that he is ready to sacrifice his animalistic tendencies. (Likutey Halakhot I, pp. 39a)

The Torah reiterates “mikem... min ha'beheimah - from you... from the animal” because the sacrifice must be from the animal within, from one's base characteristics (ibid., V, p. 48a). If you bring a sacrifice “from the animal,” you merit to be classified as “man.” (ibid., I, p. 174)

BREAKING AVARICE

Rebbe Nachman

“When a man from among you brings an animal as a sacrifice to G-d...” (1:2)

The sacrifices are considered the “food of the King.” This “food” counters evil desires, especially avarice (see Likutey Halakhot I, p. 352).

The sacrifices are also a form of charity, mirroring the concept of “sacrificing” one's wealth to G-d. Giving charity breaks the trait of avarice, since it helps a person recognize that all of his earnings are provided by G-d. (See Likutey Moharan I, 13)

CHANGE BEGINS FROM WITHIN

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

“When a man [singular] from among you brings an offering to Hashem - from animals, from the cattle or from the flock shall you [plural] bring your offering.” (1:2)

Why is there a sudden change from singular to plural in this verse?

Rav Moshe Shternbuch learns from here that when a person sins, it not only affects himself, but also the public as a whole. Consequently, when he brings a sacrificial offering and amends his actions, the blemish which afflicted the nation is also healed - and the entire nation becomes elevated as a result. Therefore, the beginning of the verse is referring to the individual sinner wishing to repent and the end of the verse shows that his sacrifice will have an effect on the whole world, causing it to receive an abundance of blessings through its new heightened state of holiness.

Rav Zev Leff is fond of telling the following analogy which expresses Rav Shternbuch's point.

A father was sitting comfortably in his chair, trying to read his magazine when his five year old daughter comes tugging on his jacket; she was bored. So, the father ripped out one of the pages from his magazine which happened to be a map of the world and tore it into 25 pieces. He gave it to his daughter and told her to come back to him when she had completed the “jigsaw.” Assuming that it would take her at least an hour to match the contours of each rip of the paper, he was amazed to see his daughter had returned after a few minutes with a perfect map of the world.

“You've never even seen the map of the world! How could you have finished it so quickly?”

“It was easy” answered his daughter, “I did not know how to piece the world together, but on the other side of the page was a picture of a person. Once I put the person together, the whole world fell into place!”

From this example, and indeed from the verse above, if you want to change the world, all you need to do is to change yourself.

JOINT SACRIFICE

Alexander Rebbe

“...from animals, from the cattle or from the flock shall you [plural] bring your offering.” (1:2)

The words of this pasuk are written in second person plural. Rashi therefore states, “This teaches that two may donate an Olah-offering in partnership.”

A complete sacrifice can only be offered with a sincere feeling of brotherhood and friendship. One must make an effort to participate in all communal activities.

EARNED AND UNEARNED BENEVOLENCE

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berditchev

“When a man from among you brings an animal as a sacrifice to G-d...” (1:2)

It is a general principle that animal offerings correspond to the bounty that G-d gives us out of His bountiful kindness, i.e., not having been earned by our deeds. This is why offerings come from animals, since animal life comes from G-d, meaning that animals can live and reproduce without human assistance.

Wine libations, by contrast, are from grapes, part of the plant kingdom, which possesses restricted vitality and whose cultivation is therefore dependent upon man, who must plant or seed the grapes used to make the wine libations. The libations thus correspond to the bounty G-d gives us as a result of our deeds. Because of our good deeds, planting and sowing, we earn the benevolence that G-d confers upon us.

When the Jewish people journeyed in the desert, G-d provided for them out of His bountiful kindness. Consequently, what He gave them reflected this gratuitous and boundless kindness. That is, the manna and the well of water that G-d provided for the Jewish people were given in a way that required no work by them. In the Land of Israel, however, the bounty came by virtue of their efforts; whatever they sowed and planted provided them with their sustenance. This corresponds to the Divine flow of goodness channeled through man's deeds.

The Torah alludes to this dynamic when it says (Bamidbar 15:2-3), “When you arrive in the land of your dwelling place... and you make an animal offering, such as... an ascent offering... to G-d... you must also offer up... a libation.” In the desert, however, libations were not offered up (see Kiddushin 37b). The Torah links the libations to the Land of Israel in order to allude to the above idea: The libations correspond to the bounty provided to those who work the land, as explained above.

This is why Rashi in the name of R' Yonasan (Berachos 35a) remarks that the Leviim only sang their prescribed songs in the Beis HaMikdash when the wine was being poured on the Mizbe'ach. For it is only when a person receives G-d's benevolence as a result of his own work that he truly rejoices.

GETTING CLOSE

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“When a man from among you brings an animal as a sacrifice to G-d...” (1:2)

The notion of sacrifices seems to run counter to the Jewish conception of G-d: G-d has no need to “consume” or be “bribed” by our sacrifices. Yet we see in this section of the Torah that G-d not only accepts sacrifices but explicitly sets down the procedures for them, giving every indication that He actually wants them!

In fact, the Hebrew word translated as “sacrifice” or “offering” - korban - means “getting close.” Although we generally associate sacrifices with atonement for sin, the first sacrifices mentioned in this section are voluntary offerings, which an individual brings to G-d not to atone for sin but out of the desire to draw closer to Him. Of course, some of the sacrifices are indeed sin-offerings. This simply indicates that G-d calls out to all of us to draw close to Him - not only to the guiltless among us - at all times.

Nowadays, in the absence of the Tabernacle (or its permanent successor, the holy Temple in Jerusalem), there are three ways that we draw close to G-d: through studying the Torah - particularly its teachings about sacrifices; through prayer, the liturgy of which is modeled after the sacrifices; and through acts of charity and kindness. (Based on Likutei Sichot, vol. 7, pp. 24-26; *ibid.*, vol. 32, pp. 1-5) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

THEIR TRUE WILL

Rambam

“...he shall bring it voluntarily before Hashem.” (1:3)

They press him until he says, “I wish to do it.” (Rashi)

How can it be a free-will offering if the person making it must be pressed until he says, “I wish to do it”?

The concept of “pressing” applies only in cases where someone is pressed to perform an act other than a Divine commandment, for instance, to give a gift or sell some object. But if someone whose evil thought compels him or her to violate a commandment or commit a sin is constrained by another person to perform the commandment or to refrain from committing the sin, this person cannot be said to be “pressed.”

On the contrary, this person is regarded as someone who has overcome the evil thought that “pressed” him or her to do wrong. For indeed, every Jew has a desire to observe all the commandments and keep away from sin. It is only the evil inclination that “presses” him or her to do evil.

Hence, if they are “pressed” not to allow the evil inclination to dominate them, if they are belabored until the appetites of their bodies grow weaker and their bodies, too, cry out: “I wish to do it,” that is not “pressure” at all but only an improvement of their inner will so that they willingly do as they are commanded.

QUICK THINKING

Rabbeinu Bechaye

“If one's offering is a burnt-offering of the herd...” (1:3)

The thought always precedes the deed. For this reason, the burnt-offering, which serves as an atonement for evil thoughts, is discussed before all the other offerings.

WILLFUL SACRIFICE

Maggid of Mezeritch

“...he shall bring it voluntarily before Hashem.” (1:3)

The pasuk teaches that a person who brings a Korban Olah must do so “lirtzono lifnei Hashem - of his own [voluntary] will before Hashem.” The word Olah denotes “height” or “elevation,” teaching us that if a person truly desires to lift himself up to higher heights and draw near to HaKadosh Baruch Hu, he must sacrifice “his own voluntary will” before the will of Hashem, like Chazal tell us: Nullify your will before His will (Avos 2:4).

TRANSFER OF SINS

Rebbe Nachman

“He should lean his hands onto the head of the Olah-offering; and it will be considered pleasing on his behalf, to atone for him.” (1:4)

One who brings a sacrifice must lean upon the animal and, as he does so, confess his sins. (Yoma 36a)

With that, one transfers his sins, which were caused by his animalistic tendencies, to the animal itself. The animal is then sacrificed, indicating that the person has sacrificed his base, animalistic desires. (See Likutey Moharan I, 25)

DAILY SACRIFICES

Reb Noson of Breslov

“And the calf shall be slaughtered before G-d...” (1:5)

Today, even without the Temple, we can still bring sacrifices. These are a person's unending desire and longing to serve G-d.

So powerful are these positive expressions of will that they subdue the forces of evil. (Likutey Halakhos II, p. 81a)

Jewish law stipulates that we recite the Parashat HaTamid (the passage of the daily sacrifice) every day (Orach Chaim 48).

Each day has its unique birur (process of clarification and rectification); in other words, each day is a new day, a new creation with its own unique qualities. A person, too, is a renewed creation each day. Therefore, man's responsibilities can change each day, as G-d places him in new circumstances so he can improve himself in different ways.

Furthermore, the new challenges that a person confronts accord with the rectifications he must make on that particular day. For on each day, there exist possibilities to rectify sparks of holiness that hitherto were unable to be rectified.

We bring a daily sacrifice to separate the animalistic level from the human level and elevate the sparks of holiness embedded in the lower levels. During the day, sins cause a person to descend from the human level to the animalistic level, as our Sages state: "She committed an animalistic act; let her sacrifice be that of an animal's feed" (Sotah 14a). By offering a daily animal sacrifice, even symbolically, we sacrifice our animalistic behavior and tendencies and return to the human level.

PROPER PRIORITIES

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"And the calf shall be slaughtered before G-d..." (1:5)

In today's "civilized" society, many pundits cite the practice of shechitah (ritual slaughtering) as barbaric and inhumane. They seek to alter our time-honored ways because they do not understand its inherent value.

In fact, shechitah is one of the most humane forms of slaughtering, and Hashem, in His infinite mercy, prescribed this method with a very specific intent: to highlight the concept that "the Jewish People are merciful ones." For this reason, an animal and its offspring are not to be slaughtered on the same day, nor may one slaughter an animal until it is eight days old.

R' Yisrael Salanter zt'l once lodged at an inn. Recognizing the guest as a Torah scholar, the innkeeper asked, "Are you perhaps a shochet? I have a cow to be slaughtered and it would save me a trip into the city if you could do it."

R' Yisrael responded, "I'm sorry, I am not a shochet. But perhaps you could do me a favor and lend me five rubles which I will repay in a week."

The innkeeper was shocked. "I don't even know you. How can I lend money to a total stranger?"

R' Yisrael responded, "Just listen to your own words. You were willing to trust a total stranger as being a competent shochet, although you might have thereby subjected many people to eat non-kosher meat were the person not proficient. Yet you would not trust that same individual for a few rubles. Your priorities seem to be out of order."

We would be wise to follow R' Yisrael's observation and re-evaluate our own priorities.

VALUING INTENTIONS

Reb Noson of Breslov

"...a burnt-offering, a fire-offering, an appeasing fragrance to G-d." (1:9)

The phrase "an appeasing fragrance" is written in reference to an ox, a sheep, and a meal-offering. This teaches us that whether an offering is large or small, G-d accepts it as long as the person's intentions are directed towards Him (Menachos 110a).

Each person's perception of truth is different. This one has a broader outlook, this one a narrow outlook. But the sincerity of each one's devotions is all that counts. (Likutey Halakhos VII, p. 318)

PLEASING FRAGRANCE

Chiddushei HaRim

"He shall wash the innards and the feet in water; the Kohen shall bring it all and cause it to go up in smoke on the Mizbe'ach - it is an Olah-offering, a pleasing fragrance to Hashem." (1:13)

A pleasing fragrance can be detected from afar. The person bringing the sacrifice must develop good deeds, which is the fragrance of a sacrifice.

That is what Hashem meant by "Why do I need your sacrifices?" (Yeshayahu 1:11) - Your good deeds should come before you bring the sacrifice. That will bring "a pleasing fragrance to Hashem."

PLEASING TO HASHEM

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"The kohen must then burn it up on the Altar, on top of the wood on the fire. It is an ascent-offering, a fire-offering, pleasing to G-d." (1:17)

When offering up a voluntary animal ascent-offering, the offeror had the choice of bringing a bull, a sheep, a goat, a turtledove, or a pigeon.

It obviously cost more to offer up a bull than a pigeon, so it was usually the richer people who offered up bulls and the poorer people who offered up sheep, goats, or fowl.

Rashi tells us that the reason the Torah says that cattle, sheep, goat, and fowl offerings are all "pleasing to G-d" is because "It is the same whether one brings a lot or a little [for his offering], as long as he directs his heart to heaven."

One indication that this is so is the fact that the whole bull is not placed on the Altar to be consumed - the hide is given to the kohanim. In the case of fowl, however, the entire bird is consumed on the Altar. Thus, the fowl "compensates" for being less valuable by being wholly burned, as opposed to the bull, which is mostly but not completely burned.

This reminds us that whenever we do something for G-d, what matters most is the heart that we put into what we do. (Hitva'aduyot 5747, vol. 2, pp. 464-465) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

CHERISHED OFFERING

Chasam Sofer

“And when any person [lit. a soul] brings a meal offering to Hashem...” (2:1)

Who usually brings a meal offering? A poor man. The Holy One, blessed be He, says, as it were, “I will regard it from him as though he had brought his very soul as an offering.” (Rashi)

At first glance, it is difficult to understand why the word “soul” is used to refer to a person's bringing of a meal offering but not to describe individuals making burnt-offerings of fowl. Wouldn't it be logical to assume that the flour, oil and frankincense needed for a meal offering cost much more than a turtle-dove or a young pigeon and that, therefore, an individual offering fowl would be poorer than one who brings a meal offering?

However, if someone brings a meal offering it is obvious that he does not even have the pennies to buy a pigeon. Therefore, he takes a little flour and a little oil from the produce he has gathered as the “poor man's leavings” or “forgotten sheaves” from the fields and offers this as a sacrifice, depriving himself of the little food he managed to scrape together. This is a sacrifice that may be said to be considered as though “he had brought his very soul as an offering.”

HUMBLE SINCERITY

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“If your sacrifice is a grain-offering...” (2:7)

When someone brought a beautiful animal as an offering to G-d, he was liable to take pride in his generosity and in the fact that he fulfilled G-d's will in the best and most beautiful manner. In contrast, when all a person could afford to bring G-d was a grain-offering, such feelings of pride were most likely absent. As such, the sole reason he was bringing his sacrifice was to subjugate himself to G-d. It was therefore specifically the grain-offering that most eloquently expressed the essence of the sacrifices - the offering up of ourselves to G-d.

When we truly negate our sense of self, serving G-d with simple faith devoid of any ulterior motives or personal ambitions, we are assured that G-d will accept our efforts, atoning for our past misbehavior and drawing us closer to Him. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 27, p. 15) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

JOYFUL REPENTANCE

Koznitzer Maggid

“It shall be of fine flour mixed with oil.” (2:7)

If a person wishes to be like “fine flour,” he must divest himself of all wrongdoing. Then he should mix his repentance “with oil,” repenting with free will and joy. Repentance with joy is the honest return to a spiritual life.

ACTIVE EMOTIONS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“No grain-offering that you sacrifice to G-d may be made leavened, for you must not burn up any leavening agents or any sweet fruits as a fire-offering to G-d.” (2:11)

The latter half of this verse can be read literally as, “for you must not burn up anything that is wholly leavened or wholly sweet as a fire-offering to G-d.”

Based on this reading, Rabbi Shmuel of Lubavitch interpreted this verse homiletically: “One who is always sour (like leavening) or always sweet (like sweet fruits), without ever changing and showing signs of life, cannot be a fire-offering to G-d.”

We are not meant to be static; being alive means experiencing the full gamut of emotions in the process of spiritual growth. (Sefer HaSichot 5704, p. 151; Hitva'aduyot 5710, p. 115) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

SACRIFICIAL EATING

Lubavitcher Rebbe

“[G-d told Moshe,] ‘You must offer up salt on all your sacrifices.’” (2:13)

All four kingdoms of creation are incorporated in the sacrifices: Salt is the mineral element; the oil, wine, and flour that accompany sacrifices are the vegetative element; the animal itself is the animal element; the person offering the sacrifice and the kohen officiating at the sacrifice are the human element. Through these representatives, the sacrifice elevates all four kingdoms of creation into holiness.

Similarly, the animal and vegetable food that we eat is our own personal “sacrifice,” since by eating it, we transform it into the fuel that enables us to fulfill G-d's commandments, thereby elevating it into holiness. In this context, our tables are our own personal “altars.” Traditionally, the bread that we eat is first dipped in salt. In this way, we elevate all four kingdoms of creation at our table, just as they were in the sacrifices. (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5745, pp. 3, 129)

DECLARATION OF FAITH

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

“And if his offering is a peace-offering - if he offers of the herd, whether a male or female, he shall bring it unblemished before Hashem.” (3:1)

The Rambam writes the following: All korbanos fall under the category of chukim. The Sages have said that the world exists because of the service of korbanos (Megillah 31b). It is through the observance of chukim and mishpatim that the upright merit the World to Come (Hilchos Me'ilah 8:8).

The Manchester Rosh Yeshivah, Rav Yehudah Zev Segal zt'l, writes that various reasons for the korbanos are given by many of the classic commentators. However, even with all that has been written and explained, it is still beyond us to grasp just why the slaughter of a sanctified animal, the placing and sprinkling of its blood and the burning of its flesh upon the Altar, should bring Hashem's Shechinah down to this earth. It is impossible to fathom the ramifications of each particular service, be it an animal-offering, meal-offering, wine libation, or any of the other aspects of the sacrificial service that was performed in the Mishkan and Beis HaMikdash. Therefore, the Rambam places korbanos in the category of chukim - commandments whose reasons are not known to us.

When a Jew offers a korban, he is demonstrating his unquestioning submission to Hashem's will. It is as if he is saying, "I do not understand why this offering will accomplish great things for myself and for the world, but I do know that it will accomplish great things, for that is what Hashem has taught us by way of His Torah." The sacrificing of a korban is a great declaration of faith on the part of the one who brings it. It is through this approach to Torah and mitzvos that a Jew earns himself a portion in the World to Come. This is what Chazal mean when they say that the entire world exists because of the service of korbanos.

LEANING ON HASHEM

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"And he shall lay his hand on the head of his offering and slaughter it at the entrance of the Ohel Moed..." (3:2)

Mashal: One of the devoted followers of the Chortkover Rebbe, Rav Duvid Moshe Friedman zt'l, was the great Maharsham of Brezhan, Rav Shalom Mordechai Schwadron zt'l. Although he was one of the leading poskim of the generation, a halachic arbiter to whom thousands sent their queries, the Maharsham went out of his way to show his loyalty to the Chortkover tzaddik and his followers.

The epitome of unpretentiousness, he often became lost in the crowd at the rebbe's tish, as he squeezed in among the devoted chassidim straining to obtain a taste of their rebbe's shirayim or to find a good spot from which to hear him speak divrei Torah.

Once, at a Friday night tish, a chassid used the Maharsham's shoulders to climb up higher in order to see the rebbe. Humbly, the Maharsham let himself be utilized as the chassid's support. R' Duvid Moshe noticed this and, smiling, he pointed to the great posek and said, tongue in cheek, "Kedai hu R' Shalom Mordechai lismoch alav b'sha'as hadchak (R' Shalom Mordechai is worthy enough to be relied upon)" - a pun, since the literal meaning of lismoch is "to lean upon."

Nimshal: If a person can be relied upon, both in a literal and spiritual sense, how much more so can we rely on

Hashem. The mitzvah of semichah - when a person would lean his hands upon the head of an animal to be sacrificed, is a reflection of our need to rely upon the goodness of the Almighty every day.

We think that we are the ones who control our destinies, when in fact, Hashem is pulling the strings. A korban is a means to offer ourselves up to Hashem in atonement and appeasement, and it defines our total reliance on the Holy One above.

TRANSFORMING PLEASURES

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"He must bring a fire-offering to G-d from the peace-offering: the fat covering the innards and all the fat that is on the innards." (3:3)

Offering up the blood and fats of the peace-offering on the Altar elevated the consciousness of our animal soul to its source in the spiritual realm. Therefore, when we ate the meat of the peace-offering, our animal soul shared the Divine soul's spiritual experience rather than simply experiencing the sensual pleasure of eating meat.

Similarly, whenever we engage in a physical pleasure for a holy purpose - such as eating delicacies on the Sabbath or holidays - we transform simple sensual pleasure into a G-dly means for spiritual growth and development. (Ohr HaTorah, Vayikra, vol. 4, p. 998) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

"FEEDING" HASHEM

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"[G-d told Moshe,] 'The kohen must burn [the sacrifice] on the Altar, as food for the fire, to G-d.'" (3:11)

Throughout the Torah, G-d refers to the sacrifices repeatedly and figuratively as His "bread." Just as consuming bread - and food in general - keeps our souls connected to our bodies, the "bread" of G-d - the sacrificial service - keeps G-d, the soul and life-force of the world, bound together with the world. In this way, through the sacrificial rituals, Divine energy is drawn into the world.

The same is true of our personal "sacrificial services": Our study of the Torah, our prayers, our charitable deeds, and our ongoing refinement and elevation of the physical world in general, are G-d's "bread," connecting the world with G-d. (Sefer HaMa'amarim 5643, p. 104) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

JOINED TO HASHEM

Reb Noson of Breslov

"Speak to the Jewish people, saying, 'If someone sins unwittingly, violating any of G-d's commandments that one must not do.'" (4:2)

Mitzvah (מצוה, commandment) has the same root as tzevet (צות, join). Aveirah (עברה, sin) has the same root as Avar (עבר, pass through or pass over).

A mitzvah joins a person to G-d. A sin causes the light of G-d to pass through or pass over the person, restricting him from experiencing the light of G-d. (Likutey Halakhot I, p. 29)

HEIGHTENED CAUTION

Reb Yaakov of Lissa

"If the anointed kohen shall sin, bringing guilt on the people..." (4:3)

One who has been acknowledged as a great man or leader must be more careful than an ordinary person not to fall into the trap of sin or even of error. For the masses are only too eager to point to a leader as their example when they sin, so that any sin of the leader - even one that is committed in error - may lead them to do evil on purpose.

HEAVENLY FORGIVENESS

Reb Noson of Breslov

"He should lean his hands onto the head of the bull..." (4:4)

Before the animal was slaughtered and its blood sprinkled on the Altar, the penitent placed his hands upon the animal and confessed his sins before G-d. The main repentance, however, occurs on Rosh HaShanah, which is the first day of the Ten Days of Repentance. On that day, one can appeal directly to G-d for forgiveness.

Why is repentance accepted more easily on Rosh HaShanah? When a person's transgressions are presented before an earthly court, he cannot reverse the verdict after it is decreed. But when one repents before the Heavenly Court, recognizing that G-d created the world out of His goodness and created us to receive His gifts, his remorse has the power to overturn the verdict. (Likutey Halakhot I, 478)

EMULATING HASHEM

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"He must do to the bull just as he would do to the sin-offering bull [of the Kohen Godel]. He must do this to it to atone for them so they may be forgiven." (4:20)

The Torah does not completely describe the details of how the sin-offering brought by the community is handled, preferring instead to simply say that it should be treated the same way as the previously discussed offering. Rashi tells us that this is because G-d does not wish to dwell on the wrongdoings of His people.

The Torah enjoins us to learn from G-d's example. Our love for our fellow should permeate us so thoroughly that when we do him or her a favor, we feel that we are doing it for ourselves rather than for someone else.

Similarly, anything that happens to another person, good or bad, should affect us personally. And, following the example in this verse, we should recoil at the very prospect of saying something depreciative about someone else. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

ANTIDOTES TO SIN

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"If a person unintentionally transgresses..." (4:27)

The soul is intrinsically connected with G-d, and any deviation from this connection is unnatural. In the words of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, "A Jew is by nature neither capable of sinning, nor does he desire to do so." (HaYom Yom, 25 Tamuz; Igrot Kodesh Admor Mehorayatz, vol. 4, p. 384).

How, then, do we sin? The Talmud (Sotah 3a) states: "A person does not commit a sin unless he has been overcome by a spirit of folly," meaning that the person convinces himself that sinning will not disconnect him from G-d. This misconception allows the individual to stray.

This being the case, there are two antidotes to sin: First, thinking carefully and rationally about what we are doing, exposing the foolishness of our rationalizations. Second - if the first strategy fails - calling upon our intrinsic connection to G-d, which will empower us to resist our rationalizations no matter what. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

TAKING ACTION

Sefer HaChinuch

"If his sin that he committed is made known to him, he must bring his sacrifice..." (4:28)

The main tendency of the heart is determined by actions. Therefore, when an individual sins, his heart will not be properly purified through words alone, through his saying between himself and the wall, "I have sinned, and I will never do it again."

However, by undertaking a significant action on account of his sin, [for example] by taking animals from his pen and going through the trouble of bringing them to the kohen in the sacred Temple and performing all the rituals outlined regarding the sacrifices of sinners, as a result of all this immense activity, the evil of the sin will be recognized clearly in his heart, and he will avoid it on later occasions. (Mitzvah 95)

CONSTANT RENEWAL

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"If his sin that he committed is made known to him, he must bring his sacrifice, an unblemished female goat, for his sin that he committed." (4:28)

If a person committed the same sin on multiple occasions, the rule is that he should offer up a sin-offering for each instance of transgression. (Mishnah Torah, Shegagot 3:3)

This demonstrates how we are constantly evolving; in a sense, we become a different person from moment to moment. Thus, the person who committed the sin the first time is not the same person who committed the sin the second time, and therefore a different process of return and atonement is required for each.

The positive side of this perspective on life is that we should never think that we have exhausted our potential for spiritual growth. Each day and each moment we become a new person, different from who we were before by virtue of the experiences that have added their lessons and imprints on us. Thus, as we are constantly re-created, a constantly new and different storehouse of spiritual power is available to us, helping us fulfill our Divine mission in life. (Likutei Sichot, vol. 32, pp. 7-12) - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisniewsky

ALWAYS WILLING TO FORGIVE

Reb Noson of Breslov

"He should bring his guilt-offering to G-d for the sin that he has committed..." (5:6)

The adjustable-offering displays G-d's compassion. Even if someone is very distant from G-d and impoverished in his recognition of G-dliness, G-d still gives him the opportunity to return to Him (Likutei Halachot II, p. 212a). This is because the "adjustable"-offering allows for repentance even when a person's circumstances keep changing.

When G-d appeared to Avraham at the Covenant Between the Pieces (see Bereishis 15:9-21), He revealed to him all the sacrifices except the meal-offering (which is also part of the adjustable-offering). G-d did not elaborate on it because the meal-offering is unfathomable: at all times, in all cases, G-d will accept the person who turns to Him. (Likutei Halachot II, p. 424)

FORGIVING THE DESTITUTE

Rabbi Moshe Kormornick

"And if his means are insufficient for a sheep or a goat, then he shall bring as his guilt offering for that which he sinned - two turtledoves or two young doves to Hashem, one for a sin offering and one for an elevation offering." (5:7)

Why does the rich man bring one offering whereas the poor person must bring two? The Ibn Ezra (Vayikra 5:11) answers that the poor person must bring an additional offering due to the likelihood that, in his poverty-stricken state, he would have questioned Hashem's fairness and would likely bear a grudge against Him because of his poverty. Therefore, the second offering comes to atone for these feelings.

However, a separate halacha states that someone who is "destitute" - an even greater level of abject poverty than a "regular" poor person, need only bring one offering. In light of the above, we can ask that surely such a person will feel an even greater degree of frustration against Hashem, so where is his second offering to atone for these doubts?

The Chida answers that someone who is destitute lives in such a dire state of poverty and suffering that Hashem automatically forgives him for his criticisms and feelings of unfairness.

These were the words of the Satmar Rebbe on the first Hoshana Rabba following the Holocaust. He spoke of how there had never been a generation more "destitute" than that which emerged, broken, from the gas chambers. "Therefore," said the Satmar Rebbe, "in our generation, in regards to those who complain against Hashem, I think that He only hears their pain. He does not listen to their accusations."

THE POOR MAN'S PENITENCE

Baal HaTanya

"If his means are not sufficient for the acquisition of two turtledoves or two young pigeons..." (5:11)

We are taught that a korban that is brought without sincere repentance does not atone. However, this injunction does not apply to the Korban Mincha - Meal Offering, since this is unique from all other sacrifices. The Mincha (gift) of the poor, in contrast to all other offerings, atones even without teshuvah. All the days of his life, the poor man is the epitome of one long, never-ending teshuvah.

ACCORDING TO OUR ABILITIES

Rabbi Dovid Hoffman

"If his means are not sufficient for the acquisition of two turtledoves or two young pigeons, he shall bring as his offering - [he] who has sinned..." (5:11)

Mashal: A rabbi once came to visit one of his community members to discuss an important matter. He arrived to find the family in the midst of a meal. The man welcomed the rabbi and invited him to join the family in the meal.

One glance at the sparse amount of food on the table, however, indicated to the rabbi that there was hardly enough for the family, and that his partaking of any dish would impinge upon their rations. Yet, he did not wish to refuse in a manner that would betray the reason for his reluctance and possibly embarrass the host.

"I'm sorry I cannot join you," the rabbi said, "but I am under strict orders from a physician not to eat."

The shamash who had accompanied the rabbi was surprised at this since the rabbi was not known to say an untruth. After they left, he asked the rabbi why he had lied.

"I did not lie at all," the rabbi said. "It is well known that Rabbeinu Moshe ben Maimon zt'l, the great Rambam, was an accomplished physician. The Rambam rules that one should not partake of a meal that is inadequate for the host. Hence I was under physician's orders not to eat."

Nimshal: The Torah takes pity on less fortunate Jews who cannot afford to put food on their table. Hence, the korban that they are required to bring for atonement is of much lesser value than that of a wealthy person's sacrifice. Likewise, a rich man cannot fulfill his obligation with the value of a poor man's sacrifice.

Today, this lesson applies to the mitzvah of tzedakah; each person must give according to his station in life!

ACKNOWLEDGING OUR WRONGS

Rabbeinu Yonah of Geronda

"If a person will sin... but was unaware and became guilty, and bears his iniquity, he shall bring an unblemished ram..." (5:17)

The Torah demands a costlier sacrifice from an individual who is not sure if he has sinned than one who is certain. For if a person knows clearly that he has done something wrong, he will regret it. However, if he is not sure, he may still convince himself that he really did not sin and will not repent. Thus, he must bring a costlier sacrifice that will cause him to be more introspective.

(Similarly, the Kotzker Rebbe teaches: When a person knows that he has transgressed, it is already half of repentance.)

KEEPING WITHIN LIMITS

Reb Noson of Breslov

"...or he found a lost object and denied it and swore falsely." (5:22)

The sin of stealing or denying ownership of someone else's property is akin to heresy. Just as we are forbidden to take another's property, we are also forbidden to delve into thoughts which are beyond our capacity to understand, for those questions and delving are heretical in nature. Thus, stealing is akin to heresy. (Likutey Halakhot VII, p. 132a)

RETURNING SPIRITUAL GOODS

Lubavitcher Rebbe

"When he [the robber] sins and becomes guilty, he must return the object that he stole..." (5:23)

Spiritually, "robbed articles" are anything that we, by sinning, have "robbed" from G-d and given over to the forces of evil, whether a physical object, a moment in time, or human potential.

Our task in life is to return the world's robbed entities to their rightful owner, i.e., to reorient everything that has been given over to the cause of evil toward Divinity, beginning with whatever we ourselves have "robbed" from G-d through our misdeeds.

This is the essence of repentance: restoring the world to its natural, Divine state. Through repentance, it is further possible for us to reach even greater heights than we had attained before sinning. - Rabbi Moshe Yaakov Wisnefsky

FORGIVENESS AND FORBEARANCE

Reb Noson of Breslov

"When he [the robber] sins and becomes guilty, he must return the object that he stole..." (5:23)

Before a person can repent, he must return what he stole. In essence, a sinner has stolen from G-d and from his fellow Jews, since sin diverts bounty from the Community of Israel to the Other Side. G-d intends His bounty to be directed towards His nation, but sin changes its destination. Therefore, repentance is difficult - first a person must regain what he has caused to be lost, and then he must return it to its Rightful Owner.

If we think about it, repentance shouldn't help at all. According to the law, the sinner deserves punishment; shouldn't G-d be concerned with the letter of the law and issue judgment against him? But G-d also has infinite compassion. Through His Treasury of Unearned Gifts, He grants forgiveness and issues compassionate decrees rather than exacting punishment right away. His forbearance allows the sinner to repent and strive for full forgiveness. When a person truly seeks to return to G-d, he regains what he has caused to be lost, and returns it to its Rightful Owner. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 218a)

When a person sins against G-d, his repentance is accepted with his sacrifice. But when he sins against man, he must first return the stolen object before he can bring his sacrifice.

Sacrifices can be offered only at the Temple, which rests upon the Even Shesiyah (Foundation Stone) from which the entire world was drawn forth. The Foundation Stone represents unity, for everything was included in it prior to the formation of the world.

When someone blemishes against another person, he creates separation. Therefore, he must first join together with the one he has harmed and strive for unity with him before he can bring his sacrifice to the Temple. (Likutey Halakhot VIII, p. 216a)

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