

# THE SINNER IS THE REAL SACRIFICE

*by Shlomo Katz*

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Today's Learning:

Demai 3:2-3

Orach Chaim 66:6-8

Daf Yomi: Yoma 75

Yerushalmi Sukkah 26

With this week's parashah, we begin the laws of the korbanot/sacrifices. Our sages struggled to understand the purpose of animal sacrifices. On the one hand, does Hashem need our gifts? On the other hand, if man has sinned against G-d, should it be sufficient that he offer a sacrifice in order to be forgiven?

Ramban (13th century) and others explain that a sinner brings a sacrifice to help him visualize what should happen to one who dares transgress the word of the Creator. Hopefully, the fear that he will thus experience, combined with his gratitude for the fact that Hashem, in His kindness, has spared the sinner, will cause the sinner to repent.

This idea, that the sinner must visualize that by rights he should be the sacrifice, can be carried

further. R' Moshe Alshich z"l (16th century) observes: There is a sacrifice (i.e., a chatat) to bring when one commits a sinful act, albeit without premeditation. There also is a sacrifice (i.e., an olah) to bring when one thinks sinful thoughts. Why then is there no sacrifice to bring for a premeditated sin, when both thought and deed are present?

For such a sin, R' Alshich explains, a sacrifice is too small a gesture to be an atonement. Atonement for such sins can be attained only on Yom Kippur. Not coincidentally, the midrash teaches that Yom Kippur is the day that our Patriarch Yitzchak was bound on the altar as a sacrifice. Perhaps that which one cannot accomplish by seeing an animal on the altar, he can accomplish by "seeing" Yitzchak on the altar. (Torat Moshe)

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*"When a man/adam among you brings an offering to Hashem . . ." (1:2)*

Commenting on this verse, Midrash Rabbah states: "Adam' is an expression of love, an expression of brotherhood, an expression of friendship." What is this midrash teaching?

R' Aharon Lewin z"l (the "Reisha Rav"; died 1941) explains: There is a dispute among the Rishonim/early commentaries as to the purpose of animal sacrifices. Rambam z"l writes that when Hashem gave the Torah, He did not attempt to wean His people entirely from the idolatrous ways with which they were familiar. Rather, He instructed Bnei Yisrael to direct to Him the service that they otherwise would have performed to idols. Many other commentaries disagree vociferously and offer other interpretations.

In particular, R' Yitzchak Arama z"l (the "Ba'al Ha'akeidah") explains that Hashem recognized man's emotional need to repay his debts. Therefore, Hashem instructed us regarding an order of sacrifices, and He acts as if man is thereby giving Him a gift.

There is a wide gulf between the explanations of Rambam and the Ba'al Ha'akeidah. According to the former, the inclusion in the Torah of a sacrificial service indicates the lowliness of man; according to the latter, it indicates G-d's love for man.

R' Lewin continues: In light of this dispute, we can understand the above midrash. Do not think, says the midrash, that the inclusion in the Torah of a sacrificial service indicates the lowliness of man. No! "It is an expression of love, an expression of brotherhood, an expression of friendship." (Ha'drash Ve'ha'iyun: Vaykira, No. 1)

The Midrash Tanchuma states: "In the future, there will be no sacrifices." R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; first Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Palestine) explains:

The Arizal taught that Hashem will bring about a change in nature in the future such that animals will be capable of attaining spiritual levels equivalent to what man can attain today. That being the case, R' Kook writes, it is plain to see why man will no longer bring animal sacrifices in the future.

For the present, however, writes R' Kook, man should not be concerned about animals' rights. Man himself is on too low a spiritual level to concern himself with that. Indeed, it is disgraceful and is destructive of man's own stature when he acts hastily and rashly in pressing these issues! So long as man needs meat, he not only should eat it, but should sanctify it [e.g., through sacrifices, when the Bet Hamikdash was standing, and by using it at Shabbat and Yom Tov meals]. The sacrifices were a means for man to express his gratitude to Hashem, and having the ability to express gratitude is itself a lofty spiritual level. (Afikim Ba'Negev, reprinted in Otzrot Ha'Rayah p.754)

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## **Pesach Thoughts**

"The more that one tells about the story of the Exodus, the more praiseworthy he is." (From the Haggadah)

Why is it necessary for the Haggadah to tell us this? Would we have thought otherwise? R' Avraham Shmuel Binyamin Sofer z"l (the "Ketav Sofer"; 19th century Hungary) explains as follows:

The gemara (Shabbat 118b) teaches: "One who recites Hallel every day is a blasphemer." Why? R' Sofer explains that Hallel praises Hashem for the supernatural miracles of the Exodus. However, one who focuses too much on G-d's supernatural miracles doesn't notice His everyday wonders. Man is obligated to see Hashem as much in his daily life and in nature as in His supernatural acts, and therefore man is forbidden to recite Hallel every day.

R' Sofer adds: This is the meaning of the verse (Mishlei 3:6), "In all your ways know Him and He will smooth your paths." In all of your ways, in whatever you do on a day-to-day basis, know Him. Know that He is the source of your day-to-day success, and then He will indeed smooth the path before you.

In light of the above, one might think that he should downplay the story of the Exodus. No, the Haggadah tells us, on the Seder night one should elaborate as much as possible on the Exodus. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Ketav Sofer-Shir Ma'on, p.10b)

Exactly what is the extent of one's obligation to retell the story of the Exodus? R' Shimon Sofer z"l (1850-1944; son of the Ketav Sofer) answers:

The Haggadah relates that Rabbi Eliezer, Rabbi Yehoshua, Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah, Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Tarfon (all sages of the Mishnah) sat together during the entire night and discussed the Exodus. In apparent contrast to this, the Shulchan Aruch (481:2) states: "One is obligated to busy himself with the laws of Pesach and [the story of] the Exodus and to relate the miracles and the wonders that G-d did for our ancestors until he is overpowered by sleep."

In reality, there is no contradiction, R' Sofer explains. One is, in fact, obligated to discuss the Exodus (and/or the laws of Pesach) all night. However, the Shulchan Aruch recognizes that most people

cannot accomplish this, and it therefore states that one's obligation continues until he falls asleep. This means, however, R' Sofer writes, that one may not do things that will cause him to fall asleep sooner. For example, one may not drink any wine after the fourth cup and one should not overeat at the Seder meal. In addition, if one does fall asleep and he happens to awaken before dawn, he is obligated to resume his discussion of the Exodus until morning. (Ibid p.2b)

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This coming week marks the shloshim of R' David Povarsky z"l, one of the Roshei Yeshiva of the Ponovezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak. R' Povarsky passed away on the 6th of Adar at the age of 97 after almost 55 years of teaching at Ponovezh. R' Povarsky was born in White Russia and was a leading student of R' Yerucham Levovitz z"l, the famed Mashgiach of Mir. [A yeshiva's mashgiach is the faculty member charged with molding the students' characters.]

The following is from a lecture delivered by R' Povarsky on 23 Adar 5739 (March 22, 1979).

Chazal have instructed us, "Every single day, a person must see himself as if he participated in the Exodus." How is this possible?

There are certain facts and concepts upon which a Jew is expected to reflect until they become ingrained in him, until they become "real". One of these is the Exodus. Why does Hashem care whether a Jew possesses a tiny morsel of chametz on Pesach? The Mashgiach of Mir explained that laws such as this are intended to awaken a person and cause him to reflect upon the Exodus.

We are taught, "Who is wise? One who can see the consequences of his actions." Chazal carefully chose the word "see" to indicate that the consequences of good deeds and bad deeds must be so real to a person that he can "see" them.

The fact that the mitzvot must be ingrained in a person is reflected in the gemara (Sukkah 52a) which teaches: "In the future, Hashem will slaughter the yetzer hara and bring it before the righteous and the wicked. To the righteous, the yetzer hara will appear as a mountain and they will say, 'How did we conquer that great mountain?' To the wicked, the yetzer hara will appear as a hair and they will say, 'How did we fail to conquer that hair?'" The righteous will be surprised by the size of the yetzer hara because they have trained themselves to the point that even hard mitzvot are easy. The wicked will be surprised because they have lowered themselves to the point where even easy mitzvot are hard.

Pesach illustrates that a mitzvah can become ingrained in a person. To see this, one need only look at the number of people who make no effort to keep kosher but who would never knowingly introduce chametz into their homes during Pesach. (Mussar Va'da'at III p. 294)

*Sponsored by Rikki and Nat Lewin in memory of her father Rabbi Morris Gordon (Harav Eliyahu Moshe ben R' Yitzchak Dov a"h)*

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