

JUST THINK!

by Shlomo Katz

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Contributing Editor: Daniel Dadusc

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Today's Learning:

Eruvin 10:4-5

Orach Chaim 267:3-268:2

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Yevamot 116

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Nedarim 31

We read in our parshah, "This is the Torah of the olah- offering," and, "This is Torah of the minchah-offering." The Gemara (Menachot 110a) comments: "If one studies the laws of the olah, it is as if he brought an olah. If one studies the laws of the minchah, it is as if he brought a minchah."

R' Michel Barenbaum shlita (mashgiach ruchani of Mesivta Tifereth Jerusalem in New York) writes that one who studies the laws of the sacrifices gets credit for bringing a sacrifice if his studies lead him to recognize the seriousness of his sins. Just as the purpose of bringing a sacrifice is to cause a sinner to recognize that he deserves to be sacrificed on the altar, so this is the goal of studying the laws of the sacrifices.

Once we understand that the goal of a sacrifice is to bring a person to a certain mental state, we can

readily understand the Sages' teaching (originally said about the korban oleh ve'yored/the sin-offering that has a fluctuating price depending upon the net worth of the person who brings it, and later applied to other halachic contexts): "Whether one brings more or one brings less, what matters is that he direct his heart to Heaven." Since the real goal of a sacrifice is to make a person think, what difference does it make whether his thoughts are inspired by a large sacrifice or a small one?! (Sichot Mussar p. 167)

"This (zeh) is the offering of Aharon and his sons, which each shall offer on the day when he is inaugurated . . ." (6:13)

The midrash comments on this verse: Thus it is written (Tehilim 75:8), "He humbles this (zeh) one and elevates this (zeh) one." Aharon was humbled by the word "this" when he said (Shemot 32:24), "I threw it [the gold] into the fire and this (zeh) calf emerged." Likewise, Aharon was elevated by the word "this" [in our verse].

What is this midrash teaching? R' Chaim Zvi Teitelbaum z"l (the Sighetter Rebbe; died 1926) explains:

It is well known that the primary purpose of bringing a sacrifice is repentance. Specifically, the one bringing the offering is supposed to imagine that he is the sacrifice -- that his blood is being sprinkled and his flesh is being burnt on the altar.

Chazal teach that a person who causes others to sin is not permitted (by Heaven) to repent. How, then, could Aharon bring a sacrifice, an act of repentance, since he had made the Golden Calf? The answer is that Aharon's intentions were noble. He reasoned, "The people will sin anyway; let me accept all the blame."

The midrash quoted above is proving that Aharon's intentions were pure. Not only was Aharon permitted to repent for making the idol, the command that he bring a sacrifice was introduced with the very same word that he used to describe the Golden Calf that he had made! (Atzei Chaim)

"Moshe said to the assembly, 'This is the thing that Hashem commanded to be done'." (8:5)

Rashi explains: That which you will see that I am doing [during the inauguration of Aharon and his sons], Hashem has commanded me to do. Do not say that I am doing it for my honor and the honor of my brother.

The Gemara (Horiot 12a) relates that when Moshe anointed Aharon with the Anointing Oil, Moshe feared that he had committed the sin of me'ilah/deriving pleasure from Temple property (through his joy at seeing his brother anointed as Kohen Gadol). Aharon, too, feared that he himself had committed the sin of me'ilah when he was anointed. Therefore, two Heavenly voices ("bat kol") proclaimed that the brothers were innocent.

R' Elya Meir Bloch z"l (Rosh Yeshiva of Telshe; died 1956) observes that Moshe not only feared that he had committed the sin of me'ilah, he also worried (as our verse shows) lest someone suspect that he had derived personal benefit from his office. These are concerns that anyone involved in a position of responsibility should share - first, that he not derive improper benefit from his office, and second, that no one suspect him of such. (Peninei Da'at)

Pesach

Why were our ancestors exiled to Egypt? R' Shlomo Halevi Alkabetz z"l (1505-1584; Tzefat, Israel; author of the poem Lecha Dodi) answers:

The Torah states (Devarim 32:30), "If not that their rock had sold them out." Who is "their rock"? The prophet Yishayah answers this question (Yishayah 51:1): "Look to the rock from which you were hewn," i.e., Avraham.

How did Avraham sell us out? The midrash relates that Hashem allowed Avraham to choose what would happen to his descendants when they sinned, and he chose exile. And, since Avraham was a loving father, the paradigm of chessed/ kindness, we can presume that he chose something that is good for us, his children.

How is exile good? What does it accomplish? The Torah tells us (Vayikra 26:41), "Perhaps then their uncircumcised heart will be subdued, and then they will gain appeasement for their sin." When Hashem exiles us, it is not an act of vengeance, but rather a means by which we can be purified.

The ultimate goal of our existence is to purify ourselves. This is the meaning of the Sages' comment on the verse (Bereishit 1:31), "And G-d saw all that He had made, and behold it was very good" - "This refers to death." Why is death "very good"? Because it is at death that one finally frees himself of his yetzer hara and is left with a pure soul.

This allows us to understand why Hashem expelled Adam from Gan Eden and posted guards at the gate, "lest he stretch out his hand and take also from the Tree of Life, and eat and live forever" (Bereishit 3:22). Wasn't it G-d's desire originally that man live forever? Yes, before Adam sinned. However, after man sinned, he could only purify his soul through death.

This also explains why Moshe Rabbenu broke the first Luchot/Tables. The Zohar says (making a play on the words of Shemot 32:16) that mankind was freed of the Angel of Death when the Luchot were given. Yet, after Bnei Yisrael made the Golden Calf, they needed to repent and purify their souls once again. Thus, as just explained, immortality would have been a curse for them, and therefore Moshe broke the Luchot. (Berit Halevi Ch. 1)

R' David Hakochavi z"l (approx. 1260-1330; Avignon, France) writes: When one contemplates the

mitzvah of eating matzah, one sees the Torah's perfection. How so?

G-d wished to prohibit us from eating chametz. Had the prohibition been for only one or two days, it would not have made the necessary impression. Therefore, the prohibition on eating chametz lasts for a week [eight days in the diaspora].

In contrast, we are not commanded to eat matzah for seven days. One's obligation to eat matzah is only on the first night [the first two nights in the diaspora], and only one kezayit [a very small volume]. Why is there this difference between the prohibition on eating chametz and the commandment to eat matzah? Because the Torah takes into account the fact that too much matzah can make a person ill. (Migdal David: Mitzvah 151)

A Parable for Pesach and the Parashah

In the berachah which concludes the "Maggid" portion of the Seder, we say, "[W]e shall rejoice in the rebuilding of Your city and shall be joyful in Your Temple service; and there we shall eat of the sacrifices and the Pesach offerings . . ." What are we saying? Is it in order to eat of the sacrifices that we pray for the rebuilding of the Bet Hamikdash?

R' Yaakov Kranz z"l (the "Dubno Maggid"; died 1804) answered this question with a parable: A merchant once hired a wagon and wagon-driver to take him home from the market with the goods he had purchased. On the way, they stopped at an inn to eat.

When they came out, a shock awaited them, for the unattended wagon had been robbed of all of its contents. The merchant turned white, but said nothing. In contrast, the wagon-driver fell on the ground in bitter tears, screaming, "Woe is me! My raincoat is gone! My umbrella is gone! What will be with me?"

All the other visitors to the inn began to chastise the wagon-driver: "Your passenger, who has lost thousands of rubles in merchandise, is standing by silently, and you are crying hysterically for a raincoat and umbrella?!"

"Yes," answered the wagon-driver. "You see, my passenger's goods were insured. He has lost nothing. However, I depend on my raincoat and umbrella to help me earn my living. While my loss may be objectively small, to me it is a real loss."

So, too, said the Dubno Maggid, eating the sacrifices may seem like a small, even insignificant, part of the Temple service, but it is the only part that is really lost. Are we not taught that when one studies the laws of the sacrifices, it is as if he had brought those sacrifices to the Bet Hamikdash? [See page 1.] If so, Hashem is receiving our offerings even though there is no Temple. We, however, are missing our share of the sacrifices - the part that we would be eating if real sacrifices could be brought in the Temple - and it is for this that we pray. (Quoted in Sha'arei Armon p. 161)

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