

NOT THE FIRST AND NOT THE LAST

by Shlomo Katz

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Vayikra

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Today's Learning:

Shevuot 4:13-5:1

Orach Chaim 608:4-610:1

Daf Yomi (Bavli): Bava Metzia 114

Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Terumot 51

In this week's parashah, we begin to read of the different sacrifices that one might bring. These laws begin (in verse 2), "When adam / a person among you brings an offering to Hashem . . ." On this the Zohar comments, "Not the first man and not the last man." What does this mean?

R' Mordechai Rogow z"l (1900-1967; Lithuanian rabbi, later rosh yeshiva in Chicago) explains: When Adam Harishon, the first man, served G-d, he was in the Garden of Eden. There, the presence of G-d was clearly revealed, and it was easy to recognize His power and divinity and to show allegiance to Him.

The "last man" will also be in a unique position. He will witness the conclusion of our present exile. He will possess a full, panoramic perspective on history, and he will be able to appreciate the meaning and purpose of all of our sufferings. With that outlook, he, too, will have an easy time serving Hashem. As the verse states (Yishayah 12:1), "You will say on that day, 'I thank you Hashem,

for You were angry with me, and now Your wrath has subsided and You have comforted me'."

It is neither the offering of the "first man" nor the offering of the "last man" which is most desired by Hashem. Rather, it is the offering that we bring in our present circumstances which He desires. We have not directly witnessed the beginning of Hashem's plan, nor have we been shown the end of His master strategy. We are confused by countless questions about how Hashem runs His world. Even so, we bring offerings to Him, and we do so with our full hearts. These, teaches the Zohar, are the offerings that Hashem desires most. (Ateret Mordechai)

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

The previous parashah ended with the words: ". . .before the eyes of all of the House of Israel, throughout their journeys." R' Akiva Yosef Schlesinger z"l (1835-1922; one of the founders of Petach Tikvah) comments on this juxtaposition as follows:

The revelation of the Torah in every generation is not a new event, but a continuation of the revelation that occurred through Moshe Rabbeinu. This is why we find in the gemara (for example, Shabbat 101b) that a wise person is told, "Moshe! You have spoken well." Moreover, in every generation, throughout the Jewish people's journeys, Hashem reveals himself to a "Moshe", as it is written (Amos 3:7), "For the Lord Hashem/Elokim will not do anything unless He has revealed His secret to His servants the prophets."

Of course, G-d's revelation is not as clear today as it was to Moshe; it is heard only through a bat kol or a dream. Therefore the letter "aleph" of the word "vayikra" is small, to indicate that Hashem's call to later "Moshes" will be of a lesser intensity. (Torat Yechiel)

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

Rashi comments: "Why is the term 'adam' employed here for 'man' [rather than the more common 'ish']? To teach: Just as the first man ('Adam Harishon') did not offer sacrifices from anything acquired by theft - since everything was his - so you, too, shall not offer anything acquired by theft."

R' Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler z"l (Mashgiach of the Gateshead and Ponovezh yeshivot; died 1953) observes that Rashi's comment (which is derived from Midrash Rabbah) has a deeper message than the purely halachic / legal statement: "A stolen animal is invalid for a sacrifice." He writes:

One who brings an animal sacrifice is supposed to picture that he is offering _himself_ to G-d. The animal merely stands in the place of the person who brings it. Who is capable of doing this? Only a person who is, in R' Dessler's lexicon, a "giver." (A recurring theme in R' Dessler's writings is that all people fall into one of two groups: "givers" and "takers." While every person must both give and take during his lifetime, some people are inherently "givers" - even when they take, it is only in order to

give. Most people, though, are inherently "takers" - even when they give, it is only in order to take. See Michtav M'Eliyahu, Vol. I, pp. 32-51 / In English: Strive for Truth, Vol. I, pp. 118-158.)

A "taker" cannot bring a proper sacrifice, because he does not really give. He certainly is incapable of giving of himself, as a sacrifice requires. Moreover, even if a person is a "giver" in practice, but in his heart he is a "taker", his offering is not complete. Therefore Rashi tells us: What characterized Adam? Not only did he not steal, for everything was his, but even the thought of taking was unknown to him. Only such a person, Rashi teaches, can offer a proper sacrifice. (Michtav M'Eliyahu Vol. 1, p.126)

***** **Thirty Days Before Pesach . . .**

Why is the Seder called by that name?

R' David Moshe Hakohen z"l (son-in-law of the last Radomsker Rebbe; killed in the Holocaust) offers the following explanation:

Regarding all foods prohibited by the Torah, there is a minimum amount that one must eat before he is considered to have transgressed. (Usually, that amount is a ke'zayit / the volume of an olive.) Not so chametz, which is prohibited down to the smallest morsel. Also, in no case where the Torah prohibited eating a particular food did the Torah prohibit owning the food. No other food-related prohibition requires us to search for the contraband and destroy it. Why does chametz have these unique requirements?

The Radvaz (16th century) answers this by referring to the midrash which alludes to a connection between chametz and the yetzer hara. [Just as chametz rises, the yetzer hara causes a person to "rise," i.e., to become haughty.] Just as one is supposed to uproot every vestige of the yetzer hara from within himself, so one must uproot every vestige of chametz from his house.

There are four ways to interpret the Torah: peshat / the simplest explanation, remez / allusion (like gematria), drush / homiletics, and sod / the esoteric meaning. It seems, however, notes R' David Moshe, that there is no "simple" explanation for the severity of the prohibition of chametz. The peshat is missing, and all that is left is the "SeDeR" - sod, drush and remez. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Tiferet Shlomo p. 53)

If chametz alludes to the yetzer hara, why is it not prohibited all of the time? And, why is it that one can only fulfill the mitzvah of matzah using a dough that could potentially have become chametz? [If one had a dough that contained anti-leavening agents, he could not fulfill the mitzvah with that dough.]

R' Avraham Shmuel Binyamin Sofer z"l (rabbi of Pressburg; 1815- 1871) answers that the Torah was given to humans, not angels. Man's mission is not to live without a yetzer hara; it is to control and regulate his yetzer hara. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Ketav Sofer)

"Baruch Ha'Makom!" / "Blessed is the Omnipresent! Blessed is He! Blessed is the One Who has given the Torah to His people, Yisrael! Blessed is He! Concerning four sons does the Torah speak . . ." (From the Pesach Haggadah)

Why does the Haggadah introduce the passage about the "Four Sons" with a blessing over the gift of Torah? R' Moshe Yisrael Feldman z"l (rabbi of Dragomiresti, Hungary; killed in the Holocaust) explains:

The mishnah (Eduyot Ch. 2) teaches that wisdom is hereditary. If so, how is it possible for one person to have four sons like the Four Sons of the Haggadah: a wise son, a wicked son, a simple son, and a son who does not know how to ask? The answer may be found in the teaching of the gemara (Nedarim 81a): "Why is it rare for Torah scholars to have sons who are Torah scholars? Because they do not recite the blessings over the Torah first thing [in the morning]." [The Mefarsh / Anonymous Commentary on Nedarim explains that the Torah scholars referred to are in such a hurry to return to their studies when they awaken that they neglect to recite the blessings, including the prayer, "May we and our descendants . . . be students of Your Torah."]

Says R' Feldman: Now, as we are about to speak of the Four Sons, we remind ourselves to recite the blessings over the Torah, lest our sons grow up to be as different as these four. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Shem Yisrael)

A Pesach Parable

We read in the Haggadah: "If Hashem had not taken our forefathers out of Egypt, we, our children and our grandchildren would be enslaved to Pharaoh in Egypt." R' Chaim Elazar Shapira z"l (the "Munkatcher Rebbe"; died 1937) writes that the purpose of this statement is to answer the question: Why is our present exile so long and drawn out? Why doesn't Hashem redeem us in the same dramatic way that He redeemed our ancestors from Egypt?

R' Shapira explains with the following parable:

A doctor was once rushed to the bedside of a sick man and, seeing the condition of the patient, he performed an emergency appendectomy that saved the patient's life. Within days, the patient was up and about, and he thanked the doctor accordingly.

Several years passed, and again this man took ill, this time with painful kidney disease. The same doctor was called, and he prescribed a regimen of diet and medication. "If you follow these instructions," he said, "you will be cured in several months."

"A few years ago, I was sicker than this - was I not?" the patient asked.

"You were," the doctor answered.

"And on that occasion you operated and I was cured in a matter of days - was I not?"

"Yes," said the doctor.

"Then why have you chosen to give me a gradual cure that will leave me suffering for several months rather than operating and curing me immediately?" the patient inquired.

The doctor explained: "Surgery is a drastic measure that is performed as a last resort. Had I not operated then, you would have died shortly. Now, however, there is no immediate danger to your life. Although you may suffer for a time, this diet and these medications will cure your illness at its source and you will remain healthy."

The Exodus, R' Shapira explains, was a "dramatic rescue" because the Jewish people were on the verge of total assimilation. Even we and our children would have been lost. This is what the above excerpt from the Haggadah is teaching us. The present exile, though painful, can be "cured" more gradually and less dramatically.

(Sha'ar Yissaschar: Ma'amar Aggadeta De'Pisacha, No. 22 quoted in Haggadah Shel Pesach Sha'arei Armon p. 43)

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