

BRINGING CLOSE

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Tzav

Bringing Close

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Today's Learning:
Sukkah 1:5-7
O.C. 538:6-539:2
Daf Yomi (Bavli): Pesachim 81
Daf Yomi (Yerushalmi): Shevi'it 4

This week's parashah continues the laws of the korbanot / sacrifices. R' Elazar M. Shach z"l observes that we pray daily for the return of the sacrificial service. Yet, the haftarah for our parashah seems to downplay the importance of korbanot! We read (Yirmiyah 7:22-23): "For I did not speak with your forefathers nor did I command them on the day I took them out of the land of Egypt concerning olah-offerings or shelamim-offerings. Rather, I commanded them only regarding this matter, saying,

'Hear My voice that I may be a G-d unto you and you will be a people unto Me . . . ' [Note: Most, though not all, congregations will not read this haftarah today but will replace it with the haftarah for Shabbat Ha'gadol.]

Why does the prophet downplay the importance of the sacrifices? Moreover, what is the significance of the fact that Hashem did not command our forefathers "on the day [He] took them out of the land of Egypt" concerning the sacrifices? Didn't He command them regarding the sacrifices when He gave the Torah?

R' Shach explains: The purpose of the Exodus was to make us Hashem's nation. Thus we read (Shmot 19:4): "You have seen what I did to Egypt and that I have borne you on the wings of eagles and brought you to Me." As a result of the Exodus, we are charged with coming close to Hashem and with maintaining that closeness.

The Torah's laws, including the laws of the sacrifices, are the tools that Hashem gave us to bring us close to Him. While we are not free to substitute other tools for Hashem's Torah - in any case, no other tools will work - we also should not confuse the tools - the mitzvot - with the goal - being close to Hashem. This is the prophet's message: "Do not confuse the sacrifices, which are the means, with the end." Our sages teach that the Bet Hamikdash was destroyed because our ancestors studied Torah without reciting a blessing, i.e., as a subject rather than as the word of G-d. Mitzvot must be performed with religious feeling, not by rote. This is the lesson of the above verses and the purpose of the Exodus. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Avi Ezri p.14)

"If he shall offer it as a todah / thanksgiving-offering, he shall offer with the todah unleavened loaves . . . With loaves of leavened bread shall he bring his offering." (7:12-13)

The above verses teach that a todah / thanksgiving-offering must be accompanied by loaves of both chametz and matzah. R' Don Yitzchak Abarbanel z"l (15th century) asks: Since the Korban Pesach seems to be, in essence, an offering brought in thanksgiving for the Exodus, why is it not accompanied by both chametz and matzah?

R' Avraham Shmuel Binyamin Sofer z"l (the "Ketav Sofer"; 19th century) answers that the Korban Pesach is not a todah-offering. Rather, it is more like another set of sacrifices described in our parashah - the inaugural sacrifices brought at the dedication of the mishkan. Those sacrifices were accompanied by matzah, but not by chametz.

He explains further: Chazal instructed that when we relate the story of the Exodus at the Seder, we should begin with disgrace, with the fact that our ancestors were idolators, and conclude with praise. Why? This may be understood through a parable:

When one gives a garment to a laundry in order to have a stain removed, the laundry applies soaps and chemicals which first make the garment dirtier than it was before. Of course, when the customer

pays the laundry, he does not intend to pay for the labor that was expended in dirtying the garment; he intends to pay for the cleaning of the garment.

Similarly, we do not praise Hashem at the Seder for redeeming us from Egypt. Who asked Him to take us to Egypt in the first place? Rather, we praise Hashem because He cleansed the stain of idolatry from our souls. Just as the laundry cleanses the garment with vile chemicals, the process by which Hashem cleansed us was our enslavement in Egypt. It follows, that we do not owe Hashem a debt of gratitude for the Exodus, and the Korban Pesach is not a todah offering. Rather, the Korban Pesach is a sacrifice brought upon our inauguration into Hashem's service.

(Haggadah Shel Pesach Ketav Sofer p.18a)

"Take Aharon and his sons with him . . . Hakhel/Gather the entire assembly to the entrance of the ohel mo'ed / Tent of Meeting." (8:2-3)

Rashi writes: "Take Aharon with persuasive words." R' Baruch Sorotzkin z"l (1917-1979; rosh yeshiva of Telz in Cleveland) explains as follows:

Being Kohen Gadol means giving up all semblance of a "normal" life. This is a tremendous commitment to ask of a person, even a person of the caliber of Aharon. One has to be persuaded that being Kohen Gadol is the greatest fortune possible, notwithstanding the inconveniences involved. Therefore Moshe had to "take Aharon with persuasive words."

To ease Aharon's transition, he was appointed be'hakhel / in an assembly of the entire congregation. Very few mitzvot had to be done be'hakhel, but Aharon's appointment was done before all of the Jewish people so that he would see that they accepted him. A leader who is not accepted by a segment of the people cannot influence the people. (For similar reasons, Pirkei Avot teaches, "Make for yourself a teacher." Only if you accept the teacher upon yourself can he influence you.)

(Ha'binah Ve'ha'berachah pp. 216 & 204)

Pesach

R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l (famed teacher of mussar, whose first yahrzeit falls during Pesach) writes:

Education consists of two parts: First, building a stable human being, and second, enabling the student to continue to grow from within. These two processes are represented by halachah / law and aggadeta / ethical and philosophical teachings, respectively.

Halachah creates structure and stability. Without halachah, the Jewish people would not be a unique people. Furthermore, halachah is universal, applying equally to young and old in their respective circumstances.

Aggadeta, on the other hand, inspires growth and change, not stability. Furthermore, each person's grasp of aggadeta is bound to vary depending on the refinement of his soul.

Our Sages say, "Don't challenge statements of aggadeta." Many people mistakenly take this to mean that Chazal endorsed an "anything goes" attitude toward aggadeta, i.e., nothing a person says in the realm of aggadeta can be "wrong." In fact, says R' Wolbe, that is not at all what our Sages meant. Rather, the statement, "Don't challenge aggadeta," means, "Don't attempt to study the non-halachic sections of Torah in the same analytical question and answer format ("shakla v'taria") with which you study the legal sections of the Talmud. Aggadeta is something one comes to understand through reflection over a long period of time while living his life within the framework of halachah.

For example: A person who bakes matzah is engaged in a process strictly governed by halachah. He must meticulously follow the laws associated with that act, taking care of every minute detail to avoid any possibility that the dough will leaven or come in contact with chametz. There certainly is no time during the matzah-baking for philosophical or ethical reflection. But afterward, the realization sets in that the zerizut / alacrity with which one bakes matzah is a paradigm for all mitzvah observance. The Torah says (Shmot 12:17), "You shall guard the matzot." In Hebrew, the word "matzot" is spelled the same as the word "mitzvot"; thus, our Sages derive from this verse that one must "guard" the mitzvot, i.e., perform them with alacrity. Just as matzah-dough can become chametz if it is not prepared quickly, so any mitzvah can be "spoiled" by laziness or delay.

Another example: One who carefully performs the search for chametz, checking every corner of the house and every pocket of his children's garments, is too busy to reflect on the meaning of the mitzvah. But later, he realizes that chametz is a metaphor for the yetzer hara. Indeed, the Gemara (Pesachim 7b) derives the obligation to use a candle for bedikat chametz from the verse (Mishlei 20:27), "A man's soul is Hashem's candle, which searches the chambers of one's innards." Just as a candle is used to search for physical chametz, so the soul should be used to search inside oneself for spiritual chametz. Furthermore, the physical inspection of the house demonstrates the importance of physical cleanliness. On further reflection, we sense the importance of spiritual cleanliness as well.

(AleI Shur Vol. II p.388)

"Yesod Ve'shoresh Ha'avodah"

("The Foundation and Root of Divine Service")

This year, we are presenting excerpts from the work Yesod Ve'shoresh Ha'avodah by R' Alexander Ziskind z"l (died 1794). The primary theme of this work is improving one's concentration in prayer. In Sha'ar Ha'tzon, Chovat Ha'moadot, the author discusses the Yom Tov prayers. He writes:

"Atah vechartanu" is part of the same thought as "Ya'aleh ve'yavo." A person should recite these with

a broken-heart and with intense concentration, asking Hashem to have mercy on us and remember us on this holiday.

"Va'hasee'ainu" - R' David Avudraham [14th century] writes that this word derives from the verse (Bereishit 43:34), "He had masot that had been set before him served to them." In that context, the word means "gifts." Thus we ask Hashem to present us with "birkat mo'adecha" / "the blessing of Your festival" as a gift. The word "masah" also can mean "load." In other words, we ask Hashem to place the blessing of the festival upon us.

When one says the conclusion of the blessing, "He sanctifies (the Shabbat), Yisrael and the festivals," one should take care to concentrate and to give praise to G-d for the portion He has given us and for the festivals which He gave us because of His love for us.

When one says "Amen" to this blessing during the chazzan's repetition, one should have in mind that he is confirming the many praises of Hashem that this berachah includes.

Chag Kasher Ve'sameach!

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