

VIRTUAL SACRIFICES

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Tzav

Virtual Sacrifices

Our parashah opens: "Command Aharon and his sons, saying, 'This is the law of the olah / burnt-offering--it is the burnt-offering [that stays] on the flame, on the Altar, all night until the morning, and the fire of the Altar should be kept aflame on it.'" The Midrash Tanchuma comments: Regarding this it is written (Tehilim 51:20), "Do good with Your favor on Zion; build the walls of Yerushalayim." After this it is written (in the next verse), "Then you will desire the offerings of righteousness, burnt-offering, and a whole offering; then will bulls go up on Your Altar." This means to say, says the midrash, that if Yisrael does not offer burnt-offerings, Yerushalayim will not be built, for it is only built in the merit of the olah. [The midrash is reading the verses: "Do good with Your favor on Zion; build the walls of Yerushalayim. . . Then you will have desired the offerings of righteousness, burnt-offering, and a whole offering," i.e., the second verse precedes the first verse chronologically.] Why is the rebuilding of Yerushalayim dependent upon the olah more than on other offerings? Because they are called, "the offerings of righteousness." [Until here from the midrash]

How can the building of Yerushalayim be dependent upon the bringing of offerings, which cannot be brought, according to many halachic authorities, until the Temple in Yerushalayim has been rebuilt? R' Avraham Meir Rosen z"l (Warsaw; 19th century) explains that the midrash is not speaking of actually offering sacrifices. Rather, as our Sages teach, studying the laws of the sacrificial service is equivalent to offering a sacrifice. In this light we can better understand how this midrash relates to our verse: "This is the law of the olah--it is the olah . . ." Studying the law of the olah will enable you to have the opportunity to offer an actual olah. (Beur Ha'amarim)

"If he shall offer it for a todah / thanksgiving-offering . . ." (7:12)

Four individuals are obligated to bring a todah or, in the absence of the Bet Hamikdash, to recite the blessing known as birkat ha'gomet: one who crosses a sea, one who crosses a desert, one who is

cured from an illness, and one who is released from prison. The question is asked: Why do we thank Hashem for saving us from dangerous situations, yet we do not thank Him when He does not place us in dangerous situations in the first place?

R' Yekutiel Yehuda Halberstam z"l (1905-1994; the Klausenberger Rebbe) writes in the name of several authorities that being placed in danger is a sign that one is being judged for his sins. Thus, one thanks Hashem for saving him from danger despite his sins. (Shefa Chaim No. 222)

Another answer is that a person should be more grateful when he is placed in danger and saved than if he never is in danger. The reason, according to Sefer Hayashar, is that a person who experiences danger is undergoing cleansing of his sins. In contrast, a person who never suffers either is a perfect tzaddik -- which is extremely unlikely -- or is being ignored by G-d. That is the worst possible fate. (Heard from Rabbi Kalman Winter z"l)

"At the entrance of the Ohel Mo'ed you shall dwell day and night for a seven-day period . . ."
(8:35)

R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l (1903-1993) observes: It is impossible to move between the mundane and the holy instantaneously. Before Aharon and his sons were dedicated as kohanim, they had to prepare for seven days. Before the Kohen Gadol performed the Temple service on Yom Kippur, he had to prepare for seven days (as described at the beginning of Tractate Yoma). Before the Torah was given, there were three days of preparation (Shmot 19:10-11). Mentally, a person cannot switch between the "desert" and "Har Sinai"--between the street and the bet ha'knesset--in an instant.

For the same reason, halachah requires a person to arrive in shul some amount of time before davening and to linger some amount of time after davening. It is a "serious transgression" (in R' Soloveitchik's words) that people habitually remove their tefilin before or during Aleinu, except in truly pressing circumstances.

R' Soloveitchik adds: The word kedushah / holiness literally means, "set aside" or "prepared." Without preparation, there is no kedushah. If a person anticipates and looks forward to kedushah, it has a ta'am / taste. If one does not pine for kedushah, it will be tasteless. (Al Ha'tefilah p.29)

Pesach

R' Yitzchak Isaac Chaver z"l (1789-1852; rabbi of Suvalk, Lithuania) writes: Retelling the story of the Exodus is the foundation of the Torah and the root of our avodah / service [of Hashem], for the story

is the source of our faith in the existence of Hashem and our faith that He watches over the world; also, that He reigns in the heavens above and on the earth below, that He supports all the creations above and below, and that His wondrous supervision does not depart from them for an instant, as we read (Nechemiah 9:6), "You give life to all of them." Likewise, the Pesach story teaches that the existence of the world depends on Torah and avodah; when these are present, they add "light, which is good" [paraphrasing Bereishit 1:4]. On the other hand, when Bnei Yisrael deviate from the path of Torah and mitzvot, the "light" of the King of Kings leaves them and they are destroyed in a moment. The root of everything is the belief in hashgachah pratit / that G-d watches over the details of existence. This is evident from the sequence of the exile to Egypt and the Exodus from there--He took a nation that was lowly and despised, persecuted through back-breaking labor, and He overturned the regular functioning of nature on their account and humbled other nations' guardian angels in heaven and kings on earth.

R' Chaver adds: Hashem conducts the affairs of His world in two ways. One is analogous to the orderly functioning of a government, where the king issues decrees and delegates their implementation to lower officials [i.e., angels]. The second is the way He brought about the Exodus; disregarding formalities and taking a hands-on approach, so-to-speak. This latter mode is what our Sages refer to when they say the Exodus occurred "b'chipazon." (Haggadah Shel Pesach Yad Mitzrayim)

R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l (1914-2005) 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. And, 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 searches 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. Also, 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)

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