

# SELF SACRIFICE

*by Rabbi Shlomo Jarcaig*

The Torah mandates and details the procedures for bringing korbanos (1), animal offerings in the Mishkan (Tabernacle). In a variety of circumstances - daily and seasonal offerings brought at specified times, thanksgiving offerings that demonstrate our appreciation of G-d's grace, and sin offerings to atone for various transgressions - we are told to kill them and offer them as "gifts" to the Almighty. Why would G-d want us to take the creatures He chose to create and destroy them? Why is this the prescribed form of Divine Service for such a wide array of occasions and circumstances? Are they merely self-preserving sacrifices?

Maharal (2) explains that the purpose of korbanos is to help us maintain the proper perspective of "who" G-d is and how He relates to the world. In His infinity, G-d is beyond all physicality. When creatures die, they return to the realm of existence which is removed from the physical, they return to their spiritual essence, reconnecting with Him. Everything in the Universe is comparatively nothing in relationship to Him. When korbanos are brought, there is recognition that this creature, indeed all of creation, is temporal and is eventually returning to its source.

Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler (3) explains that the purpose of this world is to reveal G-d's Glory. His kindness, mercy, and justice are manifest throughout the length and breadth of our lives. We facilitate their revelation through our emulation of His traits. But there is higher revelation that transcends these; the revelation that all of creation is virtually nothing relative to Him. The most compelling expression that everything in the world is null and void, vis-à-vis G-d, is to sacrifice oneself. But G-d does not want this; it is contrary to the human's role in the world. Man was given the gift of free will; through the choices he makes he assists in the revelation of G-d's presence. Killing him eliminates all of those potential revelations, which can only be made by him. In contrast, the entire purpose of animals is to be used by mankind to aid us in our revealing G-d's greatness. We offer korbanos on these various occasions to remind us of who we are and what our unique role is in this world. On a daily basis we recognize the unique blessing that accompanies the dawn of a new day. The arrival of a holiday heralds the recognition of His unfathomable kindness and the accompanying national miracles, and there are times when we are cognizant of His personal providence. All these moments of gratitude compel us to focus, to realize that His kindnesses exist to facilitate our fulfillment of our role. Similarly, when we transgress, we recognize we were remiss with the responsibility of using our free will to carry out that role.

Passover, our Sages teach us, is the season of freedom, which begs the question: Freedom to

accomplish what?

*Have a Good Shabbos!*

(1) lit. devices to bring one close (e.g. to G-d); plural of korban; often translated as sacrifices

(2) Acronym for Rabbi Yehuda (ben Betzalel) Loewe; 1526-1609; One of the seminal figures in Jewish thought in the last half millennium, he was Chief Rabbi in Moravia, Posen and Prague and author of numerous works in all fields of Torah

(3) 1891-1954; in Michtav Me'Eliyahu, his collected writings and discourses; from England and, later, B'nai Brak, he was one of the outstanding personalities and thinkers of the Mussar movement

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