

LET US PRAY!

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"G-d spoke to Moses, saying: 'Command the Children of Israel, and say to them, "My food sacrifices, for My fire, My pleasing fragrance, you shall guard to bring to Me in its proper time.'" [28:1-2]

Immediately following the appointment of Yehoshuah, Joshua, as Moshe's successor, the Torah turns to the congregational offerings -- the daily, Sabbath and holiday sacrifices. What is the connection? Why are this presented now, rather than, for example, in Leviticus? There, the sacrifices offered by individuals are described. The holidays are discussed, and there is even an allusion to the sacrifices detailed here. So there must be a reason why the Torah waited until now.

One answer, provided by the Leket Bahir, is that the sacrifices are part of inheriting the Land of Israel. In this week's reading, the appointment of Yehoshuah follows a discussion of the laws of inheritance of land. Yehoshuah is then appointed as the leader who will bring the Children of Israel into that Land, so they are prepared to enter. The Leket Bahir explains that our occupation of the land was in the merit of the sacrifices which we would offer while there, and the connection to G-d thereby expressed.

The Sfas Emes and Rabbi Shmshon Raphael Hirsch both suggest a different answer -- that, in fact, the sacrifices were a component of the succession, the continuation of leadership after Moshe.

The Sfas Emes writes that we must remember the giving of the Torah, in both word and action, every day. We said on Mt. Sinai, "we will do, and we will listen." We listen, or express the giving of the Torah in words, when we recite the Shema: "Hear O Israel, the L-rd our G-d, the L-rd is One," and the paragraphs which follow. What is our action? During Moshe's lifetime, he himself was a walking source of Torah. Going to him, following his instruction, was acting to remember the giving of Torah, for it was he who taught G-d's Torah to us. After Moshe, it was the sacrifices which acted to strengthen and remind us of our connection to G-d who gave us the Torah. Performance of those sacrifices was the action.

Rav Hirsch focuses somewhat differently upon this same component of our relationship with Moshe, which could not be duplicated through Yehoshuah. He writes that Moshe ensured the appointment of a successor, so that "the People of G-d should not remain without a leader who would shine in front of them as a model for private and public life, and who would... guide and keep the individual and communal life of the people in the paths indicated by G-d.

"But that the people and their leaders should never come to lose this, their calling, that Israel should always keep in mind their never-ending mission, their relations to G-d from His special guiding of their fate, and their obligations, and taking these ever afresh to heart, for that the procedures of the national offerings which follow here, are to be effective." [from the English translation by Isaac Levy]

Maimonides writes in his Laws of Prayer that although there is a Torah obligation to pray every day, it was the Rabbis who established the order of prayers, following the order of the sacrifices: three daily prayers plus an additional prayer on Sabbath and holidays, like the sacrifices. This is in accordance with the words of the prophet Hoshea [14:3], "let our lips substitute for bulls."

Prayer is our connection, our reminder. It is so powerful that it can be not merely speech, but the equivalent of action -- if we put ourselves into it and concentrate upon it.

Someone wisely commented that when one is in the habit of praying daily, it then becomes so much easier to do when one feels the most urgent need. "There are no atheists in the foxholes" -- but when one suddenly finds an urgent reason to speak with G-d, one must know what to say!

There was a tank unit in the Yom Kippur war composed primarily, but not exclusively, of hesder-yeshiva students, who studied and performed military service together over a period of five years. In one tank, all but the gunner were yeshiva students -- the gunner himself was a secularist, who teased his comrades for their "silly" devotion to observance, study and daily prayers.

During one momentous battle, they crested a hill only to discover an array of Arab tanks waiting for them at the bottom. They frantically radioed back and attempted to reverse direction, but in the next second one track of the tank was hit, and they were disabled. Death loomed before them.

In a panic, the gunner screamed out: "Shema Yisrael... I don't know the rest! Shema Yisrael, I don't know the rest!"

One second later, a grappling hook latched on to their tank, and they were pulled back over the hill.

Let us pray, and mean it, now -- and not wait for such a horrible time to learn!

Good Shabbos,

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