

# YOU WANT ME TO KILL AN INNOCENT ANIMAL?

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

\* A "shor" is the Hebrew word for a bull.

As mentioned last week, Sefer VaYikrah deals a lot with sacrifices, most of which include animal sacrifices. Not all Torah concepts seem foreign to our generation-but of those that do, animal sacrifices have got to be up there with the likes of the Red Heifer, which was used as part of the spiritual purification process necessary after coming into contact with the dead and related things. Living in a society that has never witnessed Temple life, and being part of a generation that can even value its pets more than its fellow human beings, the thought of killing an animal to be burned on an altar to an abstract G-d, seems, to many, to be an abhorrent thing to do.

A parable!

Imagine someone who has never witnessed farming. Having grown up in the city, he always assumed that Corn Flakes grew on the shelves of the supermarket. As it happened to be, one day he found himself traveling along a country road when he spied a beautiful spread of grassy land. In fact, the land was so beautiful that he decided to get out of the car and take in the scenery and fresh country air in for a while.

After a few blissful moments, he hears from a distance the hum of machinery. Minutes pass, and the hum becomes a buzz, until finally, the buzz itself becomes the unmistakable sound of a tractor, which is now heading for the man across that beautiful piece of pasture land. The man is in shock!

"Who would get on a piece of twentieth century machinery and deliberately, and maliciously, tear up a gorgeous piece of ol' Mother Earth?!" the man thought to himself.

In fact, so outraged was the man that he hurdled over the wood fence and ran out to the farmer yelling, "Stop! You can't do that! Stop! You can't do that!"

The farming, seeing the city slicker waving his hands in excitement removes the cotton from his ears and says, "Say what?"

While trying to catch his breath, the city fellow, in between breaths, asks the farmer,

"Why ..." puff ... puff ... "Why would you ..." puff ... puff ... "want to destroy this beautiful piece of land?"

The farmer, more confused than he's ever been, takes off his hat and scratches his head. Then he sizes up the man before him, and, realizing what the man's trying to say, gets off his tractor, and

begins to explain the ABC's of farming and food production.

"You see," said the farmer, "first we have to dig up the land to prepare it for the seeds. Without the seeds, aint no food gonna' grow from ol' terra firma. Digging up the ground may look bad, but its got to be if you want to have food for you and your loved ones ... Then we ..."

And so on.

After a good hour of talk, the city man, in awe of the process and the farmer who works so hard for the food of others, thanks the farmer for enlightening him, and goes along his merry way, a changed person. "So Corn Flakes doesn't grow on the shelf of the supermarket after all ..." he muses to himself.

Thus it is with us. We look on and see an animal being slaughtered in the Torah, and lacking a sophisticated understanding of G-d and how He runs his world, we see a beautiful animal being destroyed. What waste! it seems to us.

However, for the sake of free will, G-d's greatest gift to mankind, and for the sake of keeping the physical world functioning so that we can merit to use our free will, animal sacrifices were a necessary component of every day spiritual life. In fact, the Talmud states that, had it not been for the sacrifices, the world would have ceased to exist (Megillah 31b). We may take the spiritual world for granted, like the city dweller who overlooked the process of making food, but that does not negate its existence, or our responsibility to "feed" it to keep it, and ourselves, for that matter, alive and well.

To begin the discussion, let's agree that little else shows our concern for something than our willingness to sacrifice for it. Society creates many heroes, but the real hero in any thinking society is the person who sacrifices for the sake of a moral cause. In an extreme case, like during wartime, the sacrifice may even be of one's life. Self-sacrifice is the ultimate statement one can make about the value of something they care for.

The ultimate moral cause in the universe is the Ultimate Moral Cause-G-d Himself. Since we've known Him, serving Him and upholding His values has always required some amount of sacrifice, either of time and, or of creature comfort. And sometimes, following His path has resulted in the supreme sacrifice-of life itself.

But, as the Talmud teaches us, for the most part, G-d would prefer that we **LIVE** for Him rather than **DIE** for Him (Phew!), which is often harder to do (Oh...). For, dying for something is a one-time thing; once a person has died for the cause, though the cause may go on, he does not. However, living for something means constantly pushing oneself to live up to his or her commitment, which can become very tiring, both mentally and physically.

Take prayer, for example. For those who pray a couple times a day, every day, year after year, it can become very difficult to stand in prayer with a renewed sense of devotion and vigor, each time. For

this reason, prayer, like many other mitzvot, becomes ritualistic and habitual. This is service of G-d? This is an expression of love and commitment to the Ultimate Morality?

In the words of David Hamelech, the "sacrifice of God is a broken spirit." (Tehillim 51:19)

However, little us wakes us up to the reality and value of life better, and faster, than the sight of blood. Almost instinctively, from the earliest age, the sight of blood, from anything, signifies life and leaves us with a sense of vulnerability. Prayer may have replaced the sacrifices of the Temple days, but let's face it, it is far less dramatic to stand in a minyan set to pray than it is to stand in the Temple Courtyard and witness the ritual slaughter of a living animal. And, it is our sensitivity to life, to its value and its opportunities for spiritual growth, that justify the world's existence, without which could exist.

Sacrifices made living for G-d easier to do on a daily basis.

Aside from this, every detail of each sacrifice was custom-designed by G-d to have a specific effect, not just on our consciousnesses, but on the spiritual world itself. Different parts of the process corresponded to different aspects of the spiritual and physical world, and by completing each act as commanded, a rectification of creation occurred that was vital to bring the world to its ultimate completion, whether we could detect this or not.

This is no different than the Red Heifer I referred to at the beginning of this page. As mentioned previously, the Red Heifer is a "chok," a statute, the kind of mitzvah whose effect is beyond human comprehension. Had the Torah not prescribed the procedure for the Red Heifer as a way to purify ourselves from spiritual defilement, we would not have thought to implement such a procedure on our own.

To date, there have only been nine such red heifers (heifers that are completely red, with the exception of, at most, two hairs). The tenth red heifer will only come during the time of Moshiach, so that the nation can become purified from its existing state of spiritual defilement. (At the time of writing this page, I heard a rumor that a red heifer was born about six months ago, but I have yet to confirm this. I do know that, for some years now people have tried without success to breed one. If one has in fact since been born, then ...) The actual preparatory process of the Red Heifer is described in detail in BaMidbar (19:1).

The Talmud states that, in the merit of Avraham referring to himself as "dust and ashes" (Bereishis 18:27), we received the mitzvah of the ashes of the Red Heifer (Sota 17a). What connection, though, is there between Avraham's humility before G-d, and the ashes of the Red Heifer? The answer to this question is simple, but profound.

Of all the things man must subjugate to the will of G-d, the most difficult one is his own mind. G-d's greatest gift to man can also be man's greatest curse, when used to rationalize his own superiority, and worse, when used against G-d. And nothing is more offensive to a creator than to be usurped by

his own creation, with the very ability the creator gave to it, as a gift!

Though G-d had invited Avraham in to debate the merit of saving or destroying S'dom and Amorah, which took a superlative mind to do, Avraham still managed to keep in mind that ultimately, it is G-d's will that must prevail; ultimately, there is a level of wisdom that even the human mind, no matter how great and mysterious it may be, cannot ever fathom. Thus, in a real sense, the question of whether or not destroy S'dom was not a debate about S'dom's merit to survive, but about Avraham's willingness to subjugate his mind and genius to the will of G-d. For having succeeded in doing so, Avraham's descendants were rewarded with the ultimate symbol of such subjugation, for:

*Red Heifer = Para Aduma*  
*(Hebrew) = Paradox.*

Nothing tests our belief in G-d's wisdom than a paradox.

Perhaps, then, one of the reasons we read Parashas Parah as the special maftir this week in advance of Pesach is not just because the Jewish people had to be sprinkled with its waters first before sacrificing the Pesach Offering. For, Pesach is about a renewal of our sense of mission; it is a time to recall for what purpose G-d took us out of Egyptian bondage.

May this can help to explain a mysterious connection between the word Paroah, whose root is poray-ah (peh-reish-ayin), and the word dust (ah-far: ayin-peh-reish), which symbolized Avraham's humility before G-d. After all, wasn't it Paroah who arrogantly asked Moshe, "Who is G-d?" while it was Avraham who humbly asked G-d, "Who am I?"

This is the time of year to cleanse ourselves of "chometz," of all the facades we create for ourselves in order to appear more competent than we might actually be. Purim was the first stage in removing the masks. Pesach is the next stage in removing them once and for all. Within humility, especially intellectual humility, is freedom from Paroah and intellectual arrogance. Our inability to understand G-d and the spiritual world through which He operates does not imply that it is faulty, or that it doesn't exist. It implies that, as great as human intelligence may be, it has its limitations. And where human thought leaves off, Divine intelligence only begins.

Perhaps this is why the Beis Levi has written that the Red Heifer will be especially central in the ending of the fourth and final exile, the Roman Exile, the exile of the **RED** Edom. It is Eisav who used his mind to overcome the natural world, to subjugate it and everything else in it to his will, while at the same time, throwing off any obligation to Heaven. It was his grandson, Amalek, the ancestor of Haman, who used his mind to "disprove" the existence of G-d.

The Red Heifer in particular, and sacrifices in general, remind us that our minds are limited. Knowing THIS is the beginning of entering into the world of Pesach. Living with THIS is what it means to be a true descendant of Avraham, a genius of a man whose own humility knew no bounds.

But best of all, being real with this is the beginning of unlocking the mysteries of Heaven, for, as King David wrote, "The mysteries of G-d to those who fear Him" (Tehillim 25:14).

Have a great Shabbos, and happy Pesach cleaning.  
Pinchas Winston

P.S. Ever wonder why we give so much chometz to people so soon before Pesach in the form Mishloach Manos? Me too. Next year, why not give a gift certificate to a kosher for Passover matzah factory ... or at least kosher for Passover macaroons? That way, you won't have to panic as your children run through the house eating chocolate wafers that fragment into more chometz pieces than fine crystal does on a stone floor! Perhaps when Moshiach explains the Red Heifer to us, he'll also answer the riddle about chometz Mishloach Manos too. P.W.

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