

THE SUPREME SACRIFICE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

G-d called Moshe, and spoke to him from the Appointed Tent, saying, "Tell the Children of Israel that when any of them offer" (Vayikra 1:1-2)

Although there was references to sacrifices in Sefer Shemos, it is in Sefer Vayikra that we begin to look at them in greater detail.

The concept of sacrificing life for a "higher cause" is an old one, and, quite a noble one -- when the cause is real and the person being sacrificed has chosen such a "noble" end. If either the cause is fake or the person unwilling, then, it goes from being noble to tragic.

This is why many people today have difficulty with the idea of animal sacrifices -- certainly now and even in the past. After all, didn't anyone consult the animals first to see whether or not they agreed to their role in serving the "higher cause"? Or, such people don't accept the "higher cause" as being real, and therefore, see the sacrifice as being wanton wastage of life.

(As an aside, I once heard a talk show on a related issue that asked the question: Would you sanction the sacrificing of animal life to create cures for human sicknesses? One woman said that, even if her own son were dying that still she would not allow an animal to be killed to the save the life of her child. She said she loved her child. Most other callers-in, however, vehemently disagreed, as did the broadcaster, who difficulty fathoming this mother's logic.)

The second point is more difficult to deal within in the context of this parshah sheet, because, it begs for proof that Torah is true. Such a person is not grappling primarily with the concept of animal sacrifices, but, with the validity of Torah, and requires a more direct and intensive approach to the issue.

And, I can't answer for the animals either. I could tell you that the sheep, should they be asked just before going, would tell you, "Yes, we have lived for this moment," but, it would not be true. More than likely, just as in the case of slaughtering animals for food, there was probably resistance on the part of the sacrifice-to-be. Besides, would you even believe me if I did tell you such a thing?

Then, WHAT can I tell you to help make sense of the concept of sacrifices even in today's terms? I

can only tell you what is wrong with creation, and how sacrifices, according to (Kabbalistic) Tradition come to rectify this, which, I believe, is to make them noble, even when we can't get the animal to "agree" to its participation.

1. ZUHAMA: One of the principle effects of Adam's and Chava's interaction with the snake was that they became the recipient's of an kind of indelible spiritual impurity called "zuhamah" (Shabbos 146a). Spiritual impurity is a tricky concept to begin with, since it is of the spiritual realm, though it will eventually manifest itself physically.

How to describe it? Well, imagine looking at the world without any glasses, and then, slipping sun glasses on, which, for some reason could not be removed after. Colored glass mean colored vision, and, in time, your mind would adjust to the new way of looking at life, and accept it as being real. Eventually your judgment of reality would become inaccurate, because, your decisions in life would be based upon how life appears to you, not as it actually is.

That's what zuhamah did, does. It was a spiritual infiltration of the negative spiritual forces ("Chitzonios" or "K'lipos") that had been embodied in the First Snake, and which colored the way we related to the spiritual world, and, by extension, the physical world. It was a partial deadening of our spiritual senses, and therefore, ability to relate to G-d. Thus, zuhamah is the true source of sin.

Now, the first thing to know is that creation consists of four levels of existence, which, in Hebrew, are: Domaim, Tzomayach, Chai, and, Medabeh -- Silent, Vegetation, Animal, and, Speaking. The middle two of the list are self-explanatory, whereas the first one refers to the non-animate (mineral) world, as "Medabeh" refers to the level of man.

According to Kabbalah, the "infection" of zuhamah was only on the first three levels of existence. However, this still affects man, since he, too, possesses all FOUR aspects of creation within him, either directly in him or through interaction with them (such as eating vegetables or animals). And, it certainly affects the animals world, since that is what they are made of and what sustains them.

Thus, says Kabbalah, when an animal is burned on the altar, tremendous "tikun" occurs. The wood that is burned is the spiritual representative of the Vegetation World, while the salt, which is mandatory for all animal sacrifices, is the "Domaim" stand-in. The animal, of course, is the "Chai," and, when all three are consumed on the altar, then, the zuhamah itself in creation is weakened, along the way to its eventual and complete obliteration in the time of Moshiach.

Another way of saying this is that, as a result of the sin of Adam HaRishon, he became "physicalized." According to the Arizal, prior to the sin, Adam and Chava possessed skin that was as translucent as fingernails, because it was still more light than skin, like Moshe Rabbeinu when he emitted light after G-d passed by him at the end of Parashas Ki Sisa. It was called "Kesones Ohr" -- spelled: aleph-vav-raish," as in "light."

Like steam to water when "H₂O" molecules are distanced from their source of heat, so, too, did

Adam's "Clothing of Light" turned to "Clothing of Skin" -- "Kesones Ohr," spelled: ayin-vav-raish, as in "skin" -- when Adam was distanced from the Source of Life, G-d. His skin went from being translucent like fingernails to opaque as we have, thus suppressing and containing its own light and the light our souls on the "inside."

Today, when we talk to people, we do so as physical beings who only "see" physical beings. We all but completely ignore the holy soul within every human being, because, it is often so hard to detect.

Chazal tell us that whither man goes so too does creation. In other words, if mankind's nature changes and becomes more physical, so too, by necessity, will creation's. Thus, the physicalization of man resulted in the physicalization of the world as well.

History is supposed to be a process of reversing this trend, eventually back to the spirituality of Adam HaRishon before the sin. And, even though this won't really FULLY happen until Techiyas HaMeisim (Resurrection of the Dead), still, the process can begin, has begun, and can be furthered through our actions, especially through sacrifices when they are consumed by the fire on the altar.

That is the first level of purpose of sacrifices. We will now discuss the second, b"H.

Shabbos Day:

The priest must offer all of it by burning it upon the altar; it is a Burnt-Offering, a Fire-Offering, a pleasing fragrance to G-d. (Vayikra 1:13)

And, because man and creation became more spiritually distanced from G-d, another way of describing added constriction of G-d's Holy Light, the result was increased "din," or, "judgment."

Thus, a second reason for sacrifices is that they come to "sweeten" (i.e., rectify and elevate) the judgment and change it from the "Trait of Judgment" to that of Mercy. For, Domaim and Tzomayach -- the essence of physical creation -- are the result of the "Strong Judgment" and physicality. That is, the physical world is a "projection" of the reality of the distancing of the lower spiritual worlds from the Light of G-d, which is why they are SO physical, and, hide the hand of G-d SO well.

Hence, when they -- the wood, the salt, and the animal -- are offered to G-d they became "sweetened" and "fragranced" (i.e., pleasing to G-d) when they are consumed by the fire on the altar, for, they ascend upwards. And, this does not simply mean that particular animal, wood, and salt, but, the entire categories of Chai, Tzomayach, and Domaim (DTz"C) for all of creation.

You see, people think that Western Society is as materialistic as it is today solely as a function of technological advancement and greater distribution of wealth. But, those two particular points are themselves just results of another situation, and that is, a lack of elevation of DTz"C.

People choose their priorities in life based upon what they understand about the purpose of life, and their role within that master plan. And, they often draw their conclusions based upon the world around them, and if that world lacks spiritual elevation, then, so will their decisions and their life.

Two-way mirror is a good parable. From one side, the reflecting side, all a person sees is a mirror-reflection of himself, though the glass hides what's actually "inside": people who can see and evaluate him. If the person doesn't know better, he may walk up to the mirror and perform private actions, such as brush his hair, check his teeth -- whatever people do in front of mirrors when in the privacy of their own home -- and become totally embarrassed later when he discovers the truth.

LIFE is like that TWO-WAY mirror. We look at the Mineral World, and the Vegetation World, or, the Animal World, and even the Human World, and assume that all things are as spiritually shallow as they appear to be on the surface. But, they are far from that, and we will be totally humiliated in the end because of the way we profaned creation.

The prophets speak about how, after Moshiach comes (bHb"b), the world will be full of "da'as," godly knowledge that will allow us to look at creation from the "other side" of the "glass," from the side that allows us to see the true, intrinsic holiness of creation. And, by burning these elements on the holy altar, in a holy way, for a holy purpose, sacrifices act as a way to begin "burning" up the layers.

Fasting for Torah reasons acts in the same way. The "burning up" of the fat of our bodies by abstaining from eating is supposed to resemble the burning up of the fat that was consumed on the altar from animal sacrifices. There is even such a declaration made at the end of the Minchah-Shemonah Esrai when a person has fasted for his own personal reasons (as opposed to for the sake of a communal fast).

And, of course, being self-sacrificing for Torah-learning (either for your own learning or for that of others) and mitzvos is one of the highest methods for achieving this result. G-d looks at our self-sacrifice for Torah and mitzvos as if we allowed ourselves to be consumed on the altar of spirituality. And, the more sincere we are about what we do, the more pleasant the fragrance of our actions becomes, and, the more we earn mercy, as opposed to judgment.

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

The third and final reason for sacrifices is far more esoteric, Kabbalistic, and difficult to explain.

If you recall from last week's session, we said:

Children's stories and morals aside, the reduction of the moon's light represents one of the deepest of Kabbalistic ideas. It is an allusion to the fact that a very holy light, for the sake of creation and free-will, was forced to leave its holy abode in the Sefiros, and "descend," spiritually-speaking, to a far

less godly "environment."

In Sefiros-terms, the light to which we refer is that of the sefirah called "Malchus of Atzilus," the last level of sefirah said to be imbued with intrinsic godliness. Like the unwilling soul that is forced down to occupy the mundane body and bring both the body and itself to fulfillment, so, too, did the light of the Malchus of Atzilus go down to act as a kind of "soul" for the Lower World, so that both could fulfill their *raison d'Être*.

Thus, creation is one of those strange concepts that is a very non-ideal situation for the sake of an ideal purpose. It is not ideal because it means, by necessity, that G-d's light has to be constricted to the point that even a Holocaust can occur. But, all of this is for the sake of man, that he can exist, have free-will, and, earn an eternal portion in the World-to-Come.

We do this by "undoing" creation, that is, by reversing the situation and causing the Malchus of Atzilus to become spiritually buoyed to higher levels until it is able to return to its proper place. This won't fully happen until the seventh millennium, but, in the meantime, sacrifices assist with the process.

In a sense, as long as the Lower World remains spiritually heavy and anchored at the bottom of the spiritual sea, the Malchus of Atzilus, the life-line of all of it is held down as well. This is the result of a lack of spiritual connection of mankind to creation, which leaves it vulnerable to feel a need to service the animal side of our being.

In fact, on a recent trip outside of Israel, I stayed in a hotel that offered "Pay-TV" through the television in the room. Looking at the program they provided, there were three choices offered, two of which were suitable for children's viewing, and one which was called "Adult Entertainment," which, I assume, needs no explanation.

But, if you think about it, you will see that what they call "Adult Entertainment" is anything but that. For, an adult is someone who should not feel the need to have to take that which is holy to G-d and mankind and profane it by making it a form of viewing entertainment. A true "adult" is one who has the spiritual and intellectual maturity to know to preserve the holiness of physical intimacy by leaving Hollywood and the like out of it.

It is that culture, and anything that smacks of it, that keeps the Malchus of Atzilus from being able to return "home," so-to-speak, and creation from achieving its fulfillment. And, that being the case, all else that goes wrong in life from the lack of godly knowledge is free to occur.

However, as soon as the lower worlds become spiritually "lighter," and are able to become elevated, then, so too does the Malchus of Atzilus begin its own ascent. And thus, by consuming on the altar the elements of creation that were most affected by the snake, they become spiritually rectified, spiritually "lighter."

And, as a result, the Malchus of Atzilus is able to move in the direction of its proper position, and

mankind, in the direction of complete fulfillment.

MELAVE MALKAH:

For the Conductor, on the Gittis, a psalm by Dovid. G-d, our Master, how mighty is Your Name throughout the earth, Who places Your majesty on the heavens. (Tehillim 8:1-2),/i>

This is the beginning of this psalm, but, perhaps its most telling line is the posuk:

What is frail man that You should remember him, and the son of mortal man that You should be mindful of him? Yet, you have made him but slightly less than angels, and crowned him with soul and splendor. You give him dominion over Your handiwork, everything you placed under his feet. (5-7)

What a difference between Dovid HaMelech's attitude towards man's place within the scheme of things, and, the prevailing Western one, which goes something like this:

"What? Man frail? Says who? Unimportant? G-d is lucky we even pay any attention to Him, if and when we do!"

Not that anyone actually says the words, but, it is implied in Western man's attitude towards life and G-d. When we take life for granted, and everything life encompasses; when we make light of what is serious in life and fail to live with an air of humility, we basically say that we are more important than anything else.

We are like a son-in-law who holds an important position in the father-in-law's firm, but only because of the father's love for his daughter, and therefore, her husband. In all honesty, had the same person not married the boss's daughter and had shown up for the job, he would barely have been hired for lower management, let alone anything higher.

Yet, after a short while of bossing subordinate around, sitting in a cushy executive office, and having access to the company credit card, the son-in-law begins to take himself too seriously. He begins to act as if he earned his position in his own merit, which is often the first sign that he did not, and, humility come confidence eventually erodes into blatant arrogance -- and a confrontation with his boss father-in-law.

Or, in the case of mankind in general, a confrontation with our boss Father-in-Heaven.

Sheep and cattle, all of them, even the beasts of the field; the birds of the sky and the fish of the sea; for man even traverses the lanes of the sea. (8)

Okay, they may not be "employees" and subordinates in the typical sense of the word, but, they do represent the phenomenal dominion G-d has given man over creation. They also represent

vulnerability to man's will and strengths, and therefore, our own potential to be abusive.

This was also one element of the sacrificing process that drove the point home to man how dear the life of creation and aspects of creation must be to us. If any one has ever seen a pet being put to "sleep," or, an animal that was run over by a car and killed, then, they know how easily emotions are affected by the death of animals that seem to have an innocence about them. I feel great remorse when I accidentally hit a butterfly while driving on the highway.

Animal sacrifices were a solemn event. They were commanded by G-d, and, like with any mitzvah we do, we carried them out with loyalty. The entire universe belongs to G-d, including the animals, and no one cares for them more than He does; they're HIS creations.

It is no coincidence that their blood resembles our blood, and, that they possess many similar characteristics to humans. Seeing animals should invoke strong feelings of mercy, though not at the cost of our feelings for G-d, Torah, and fellow human beings.

We may have dominion over the world and all other living peoples, but not because we earned it, but because it was gifted to us. Sometimes we can realize this through mature, spiritual, and godly means. Other times, and, historically, it seems to be the vast majority of times, we have to be reminded of this through the destruction of others because of us.

Unbridled human pride can be an ugly thing. There are few things more noble, more godly than a humble person.

Have a great Shabbos,
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