

MAKE THE SACRIFICE

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

SACRIFICE. IT SEEMS TO be an unavoidable and sometimes nasty part of life. Who wants to give up something they value? Yet, it happens anyhow, and on many different levels.

There is a difference though between sacrifice and loss. A loss is exactly that. Something was seemingly UNJUSTIFIABLY removed from a person's possession. There was no worthwhile recompense.

When a person goes into a store and buys something with hard-earned money, it is also a loss. Money is lost. Something valuable was gained in the process however, making it a "purchase" instead. We can live with that, even happily.

We do not mind giving up things we cherish. Sometimes we even enjoy doing it, like giving SOMETHING we like to SOMEONE we like. The pleasure of seeing the happiness of the other person receiving our "gift" makes the sacrifice a worthwhile "purchase."

Life becomes uncomfortable when we have to sacrifice something, according to us, unjustifiably. "Ah, Dad," a disappointed child moans to his father, "do I have to miss my game for a silly family get together?"

We do the same thing as adults as well. Watch what happens to adults when you tell them a certain privilege is curbed, or a certain tax has been levied. People kick and scream like children until they can be made to understand what it is they are "purchasing" with their sacrifice.

When Moshe Rabbeinu asked the Jewish people to contribute to the construction of the Mishkan, he ended up with more than he needed. That doesn't usually happen when it comes to fundraising drives, which is why many organizations ask for more than they actually need.

Then again, most fundraising drives do not occur AFTER the nation has sinned in a major way. Parashas Terumah, when the people were asked to contribute, comes before Parashas Ki Sisa, when they built the calf. The rabbis say it happened the other way around. When Moshe Rabbeinu came collecting, he was "selling" some sorely need life-saving atonement. They probably thought they were getting a great deal.

We begin Sefer Vayikra this week. It is also called "Toras Kohanim" since it discusses many of the sacrifices and other aspects of the Temple service. It is information, for the most part, that applies only to kohanim. Why must the entire nation learn it as well?

The answer now should be more obvious. It may discuss sacrifices that the kohanim offered, but it is teaching the rest of us how and what to sacrifice. Everyone makes sacrifices. Not everyone sacrifices the right thing, or in the right way.

For example, Arab terrorists sacrifice themselves to harm innocent people. They sacrifice their own lives, either by being a human bomb or knowing that they will get shot dead during their attack. They think it's worth it. The rest of the world thinks they're nuts.

During World War, Japanese kamikaze pilots gave up their lives, knowing the war was already lost, just to inflict additional death and destruction on the Americans. They went out knowing that this was their mission.

American pilots, even after being shot down, focussed instead on survival, and usually parachuted. They took their chances behind enemy lines, hoping to survive the war and eventually make it back home again. Few if any turned their planes into missiles like the Japanese.

Furthermore, even within the Torah world people make unnecessary sacrifices, or they do not make sacrifices where they should. For example, some people will run to do something they have been told that is a "segulah" for what they want, and yet show up late for dovening against the halachah.

Kabbalah explains that every sacrifice brought rectified the world in some way. When Adam HaRishon sinned, he blemished the four elements of Creation: man, animal, vegetation, and mineral. The salt used in the sacrifice rectified the mineral world. The wood used to burn it rectified vegetation. The animal offered rectified the level of animal, and the person making the sacrifice rectified the level of man.

The goal of every sacrifice was "rayach nechoach," to be pleasant smelling to God. Of course God doesn't need to smell anything, so Rashi explains it means that the sacrifice was carried out as commanded. The fact that the law was followed to the letter made the act "pleasant smelling" to God.

Considering that the first man did just the opposite when he ate the forbidden fruit, it is clear that this alone is a major tikun. In fact, when Shaul HaMelech returned with Amalekian animals to sacrifice to God, he was severely reprimanded. He was supposed to kill them all, and instead he saved some to thank God for their military success.

Big mistake. Shmuel told him:

"Has God desire in burnt offerings and peace-offerings, as in obeying the voice of God? Behold, to obey is better than a peace-offering; to hearken (is better) than the fat of rams." (I Shmuel 15:22)

Shaul HaMelech lost the kingship because of this. He had the best of intentions. He really brought the animals back to thank and praise God. It's just that God had commanded that everything Amalek owned be destroyed with him, not taken as spoils of war.

Making sacrifices is an integral part of life. Making the right ones is a matter of free choice, something that can only be done properly if a person knows what God wants. A mistaken sacrifice accomplishes little. Only a sacrifice to act on behalf of God pleases Him, and rectifies the world at the same time.