

# UNDERSTANDING THE SACRIFICES

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

This week's Parsha continues the basic laws of the various offerings, as well as the detailed procedure for inaugurating Aharon and his sons into the service of the Mishkan. In last week's Parsha, the Torah introduced the five categories of offerings: a) the Olah - ascent offering; b) the Mincha - meal offering; c) the Shelamim - peace offering; d) the Chatas - sin offering; e) the Asham-guilt offering. Each of these offerings required the Kohein to facilitate the Korban - offering. It is important to understand the symbolic meaning of the offering process as well as the circumstances and laws requiring a "son of Aharon" to be involved.

The Torah in Breishis 2: 7 explained that Adam, the first human being, was created from "the dust from the earth." The Gemara Yerushalmi in Nazir explains that this dust was gathered from the four corners of the earth, or from what would eventually be the location of the Mizbeach - Alter. Both explanations focus humankind on the reason for their creation and the unique relationship they should have with G-d and His universe.

The Torah states (Breishis 2:15) that Adam was placed in Gan Eden "to serve it and safe-keep it." These two terms, "service and safe-keeping" capture the essence of the human mission. Simply put, our mission is to reveal and understand G-d's intentions. This is done through studying the natural laws of His universe and attempting to emulate His actions.

As the very last of Hashem's creations, we were chosen as His crowning achievement and the reason for the creation of the universe. All things that preceded our creation are the means for our understanding Hashem's intent and revealing His divine reason. This is the meaning of "to serve it and safe- keep it." We serve the universe by safe-keeping the intent of the Creator as it is revealed to us through the laws of nature. G-d's intention is for us to recognize the absolute dependency of the universe on His constant maintenance. Our behavior should reflect that understanding by following His commandments.

G-d's intention and "doing good" should be, for us, the same thing. Therefore, the greatest possible good is to understand divine intent and serve His purpose. If we accept this formulation then we should be devoted to accomplishing the greatest good as revealed through nature. In essence, we should all be students of the natural sciences spending our time researching G-d's intentions in the laboratory of His universe. However, as history has revealed, we needed a more direct revelation of the Creator's intentions than nature. We needed a manual that spelled out G-d's intentions. We

needed the Torah.

More so than the manual, we needed a model world which we could closely study and thereby manifest, through our behavior, G-d's intentions in the greater world and universe. The model world was the Mishkan and the Bais Hamikdash, and the model humans were the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon. Through studying the workings of the Temple, its construction and services, we have a working model of Hashem's intentions in creating the universe. From the very beginning, Hashem said to the Bnai Yisroel (Shemos 25:8) "Make for me a ... and I will dwell among them". Construct a model world called a sanctuary and study its workings, so that we can understand what Hashem's intentions are, and thereby recognize G-d's presence in our midst.

First of all, the building itself is a micro-world. Each and every detail, along with the 39 types of labor necessary for its construction, model the 7 days of creation. As an aside, it now makes sense why the Torah forbids us to do those very same 39 types of labor on Shabbos. Just as Hashem completed His activities of creation on the 7th day, so too we must stop our acts of labor on the 7th day. We are emulating the Creator!

Secondly, the building itself reflects the concept of "in accordance with the commandments of G-d." (Shemos 39:42) Every element and intention of the Mishkan's construction was reviewed by Moshe to be certain that the teaching model of the world reflected the singular purpose of fulfilling G-d's intentions.

Thirdly, the Kohanim, the sons of Aharon, teach us the ideal behavior of the human who understands his absolute dependency on the Creator and acts accordingly. For example: The Kohanim and the Leviyim do not have a designated portion in Eretz Yisroel. "G-d is their inheritance." They do not depend upon standard economic interactions for their income. Their financial well being is gifted to them by G-d. They spend their days servicing the nation as teachers and priests, effectively doing G-d's work; and the people, in turn, support them with specified gifts, as per G-d's instructions. They live the ideal life of Adam and Chava in the Gan Eden who should have spent their time exploring G-d's intentions and being cared for by G-d, rather than struggling to make a living "from the sweat of your brows". The Kohanim and the Leviyim are the model humans in G-d's model world teaching us by example how to behave.

It now makes sense why the inauguration of the Kohanim into the service of the Mishkan is the final act of the Mishkan's construction. At the end of this week's Parsha, the eight-day inauguration is described. Just as the world was first created and then Adam was introduced; so too, the Mishkan was first constructed and then the Kohanim were introduced!

Lastly, the actual service in the form of the offerings teach us how we are to grow in understanding and acceptance of our dependency. Every nuance and instruction should bring us nearer to Hashem. The nearer we are to G-d the closer we are to "goodness" and the more motivated we should be to do as G-d commands. Sometimes it requires an Olah - ascent offering to bring us to the

next stage of our dependency. Other times, we need to confront our own neglect and bring a Chatas - sin offering before feeling G-d's closeness. Certainly, when feeling at peace with our lot in life and proud of our accomplishments, we must acknowledge G-d's providence by offering the Shelamim - peace offering.

The Mishkan and the Bais Hamikdash were constant models and examples of Hashem's intention and purpose for creating the world and choosing us as His nation. The Kohanim and the Leviyim were the intended teachers for us to understand how we, the Jew and the human, fit into the Creator's plans. In the absence of a fully functioning model of the ideal G-d - human relationship, the Shul and the Bais Medresh, along with prayer and Torah study, have replaced the Bais Hamikdash and the service. Hopefully, through our devotion to Torah and Tefilah Hashem will soon give us back the real thing!

***This issue of Rabbis-Notebook is dedicated by Moshe Hillson in memory of his father Dov Arye (Benjamin) Hillson, his mother Machla Zlata (Marion) Hillson, and his aunts Frieda Friedman and Sara Lea (Lilian) Port.***

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The author is Rabbi of Shaarey Zedek Congregation, Valley Village, CA.

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