

# CLOSING THE GAP

*by Rabbi Aron Tendler*

The first two Parshios in Sefer Vayikra are the primary compendium of sacrificial laws. The remainder of Vayikra presents a variety of special offerings, occasions, and instruments for sanctity and sanctification.

In this week's Parsha, Tzav, the Torah summarizes the basic categories of Korbanos. "This is the law of the Olah - elevation offering, Mincha - meal offering, Chatas - sin offering, Asham - guilt offering, Meelewwim - inauguration offerings, and the Shelamim - feast peace-offering." (7:37) Subsumed beneath the Shelamim category is the Todah - thanksgiving offering.

The different categories of offerings cover the spectrum of human behavior and interaction. They offer avenues for imposing G-d's presence onto our lives.

The Olah arises from the individual's awareness that he is in need of making greater strides toward goodness and g-dliness. It is offered in the awareness that one has failed to perform certain duties and that he should guard against such neglect in the future." (R.S.R. Hirsch 1:3)

"The person who brings the Mincha offering "already feels that his personality has come near to G-d; hence he feels that he must now bring near to G-d also the material aspects of his physical life. Thus, the person now stands before G-d and symbolically places at His feet the good things that symbolize his material resources." (Ibid 2:8)

The Chatas is the offering "through which a soul, having strayed from the sphere of G-d's will (which should be the focal point of all man's actions), now seeks to regain the nearness of G-d on which the purity of its active life depends and which it should never have left..." (Ibid 4:2) The offering is incurred only if the transgression was B'shogeg - unintentional.

The Asham offering has many applications. Like the Chatas, it is a sin offering, however, the Asham atones for intentional sinning. Swearing falsely is one such example. "G-d is the unseen Third Party Who is present wherever and whenever one man has dealings with another, even if no other witnesses are on hand. G-d Himself is the Guarantor for the honest dealings between men. If therefore this guarantor is invoked as a witness when any factor in these dealings has been disavowed, it is not merely an act of ordinary faithlessness. For in this case the offender has pledged his priestly character, his relationship to G-d, as surety for his honesty" (Ibid. 5:20-26)

The Melewwim offering was unique to the generation that dedicated the Mishkan.

The Shelamim offering "implies a state of completeness, of perfection. When used with reference to a human being it denotes a state in which the person does not feel a gap in any aspect of his life; he feels that he lacks for nothingâ€¦ It is that state of affairs in which no component of a person or thing detracts from any of the others but there is an organic agreement and interaction among all the parts of the whole. It symbolizes a quest for the nearness of G-d based on the fact that the person who makes the offering feels completely at peace, that he does not feel that he lacks for anything." (Ibid 3:1)

The Todah was motivated in two ways; as a response to a personal miracle (Rashi 7:17), or as an acknowledgment of G-d's providence and largess (Neder and Nedavah).

I would like to suggest that the Todah was the most profound of all the offerings. The offering of thanksgiving, more so than any of the other Korbanos, captured the essence of G-d's expectations for the human experience.

We were not intended to be angels. As G-d said to His heavenly court at the time of the giving of the Torah, "What value does the Torah have for you? You do not have free will. You cannot do the Mitzvos! Therefore, I give it To Moshe and the Bnai Yisroel. Therefore, I give the Torah to mortals!"

In His infinite wisdom G-d granted us the opportunity to willfully fulfill His commandments; however, He designed it to be a struggle, a confrontation between the physical and the divine. Whether we listen to G-d or not is a battle we wage with ourselves to either elevate the materialistic in service of G-d or marginalize the materialistic in service to ourselves. The challenge is to consistently impose G-d on our psyches and believe that our accomplishments are really His doing and our successes were by His design! Our assumed efforts and contributions are in playing our part in realizing the inevitable outcome of G-d's intentions.

The human condition involves inevitable failure and therefore forgiveness. The ever-changing ebb and flow of our relationship with G-d demands instruments of awareness, acknowledgment, regret and return. The Mishkan, the Temple, and the Korbanos were those instruments. Therefore, there had to be offerings such as the Oleh (elevation), Chatas (sin), and the Asham (guilt). In the same vein, there had to be a Mincha (meal). The Mincha offering extended personal commitment to include the sanctification of the physical as well. However, the Mincha was a goal setter, not a celebratory expression of personal success.

On the other hand, the Todah (thanksgiving) offering celebrated the sanctification of the material and the elevation of the physical in simple appreciation for Divine intervention at a time of need, or as a celebration of responsibility in the service of G-d (the Neder and the Nedavah). As Rav Hirsch wrote, "It symbolizes a quest for the nearness of G-d based on the fact that the person who makes the offering feels completely at peace, that he does not feel that he lacks for anything."

The Medresh (9:1) quotes verse 50:23 in Tehilim (Psalms), "I am honored by the one who brings me a Korban Todah." The Medresh points out that this is said only in relation to the Todah and not in

relation to any other offering. All other Korbanos are a response to some level of sinning and the need to rebuild our relationship with Hashem. The Todah is a sinless offering reflecting the human yearning to attain greater purpose and sanctification.

Furthermore. The Medresh (9:7) quotes the verse in Yirmiah (33:11), "The voice of rejoicing the voice of the groom and bride the voice that proclaims, 'Give thanksgiving to G-d for His kindness is without limit!' From this verse the Talmud concludes, "When Mashiach comes and the Temple is rebuilt all the Korbanos will be canceled, except for the Todah!"

On Purim 5761 / 2001, after the meal, I was privileged to hear Rabbi Avraham Miller, the Rosh Kollel of the Valley Kollel (LA), explain the lesson of Amalek. Amalek is our tendency to focus on what we do not have rather than what we do have. Amalek is Haman bragging to his wife and family about his greatness, his position, and his sons. Yet, Haman said, "all this is worthless to me so long as Mordecai the Jew is still alive!"

We all have a little bit of Amalek in us. Rather than focus on the goodness of our lives and G-d's benevolence we become obsessed with the little that we do not have. Such a person could not bring a Korban Todah. Such a person does not "feel that he lacks for nothing."

As we contemplate preparing for Pesach and our hope for redemption and rebuilding, may it be G-d's will that we all merit feeling a sense of wholeness and completion. That we are able to be thankful for that which we do have rather than make ourselves miserable over what we do not have. May we merit to bring a Todah offering along with the rest of the Jewish people, speedily and in our days!

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