CHAMPION OF SACRIFICE

by Rabbi Berel Wein

A portion of the Torah reading of Pinchas is read on the days of every major holiday of the Jewish calendar. This Pinchas reading always forms the "maftir" - the additional reading for the day. And it is also read from a second, different Torah scroll than the main reading of the day that describes the holiday itself. The obvious and correct reason for this use of the "parsha" of Pinchas on the holidays is because the special additional Temple service and sacrifice - the "musaf" of the day for each of the holiday days of the Jewish year - is recorded and described there. In a Jewish world, now far removed from the Temple service and alien to the cosmic reasons for animal sacrifices, this entire additional reading ("maftir") strikes as foreign, strange and irrelevant. However, there perhaps may lie within these "maftir" readings an important and valuable lesson for ourselves, one that has survived the destruction of the Temple and the consequent suspension of the "musaf" sacrifice itself.

The rabbis of Israel have always warned their flock that there are no easy victories in life. This is certainly true in all realms of daily physical life, but it is even more appropriate and definitive in matters of the spirit and the soul. One of the cruelest hoaxes that the modern, progressive, socially-correct but spiritually-empty, forms of Judaism have perpetrated on their hapless and ignorant constituents is that religion, and especially Judaism, makes no hard demands on its believers. The portrayal of Judaism as a feel-good, guitar-playing, kumsitz-type of liberal, secular-humanist faith is a travesty and a tragedy. The synagogue was never meant to be a place of comfort, but rather one of challenge and goal-seeking. The Sabbath and the holidays are days of spirit that have to be earned - that require sacrifice and effort and preparation. They are not cheaply obtained. The rabbis of the Talmud stated: "Torah is as expensive and difficult to acquire as vessels of gold, and it is as fragile and as easily shattered as the thinnest crystal glass." Thus, on the holidays of the Jewish calendar, Jewish tradition demands that we read of the sacrifices that were part of the Temple service in order to remind us of the sacrifices necessary from us in order to achieve an inner appreciation of the holidays and their meaning. The concept of sacrifice as described in the Torah relating to the Temple service, is, according to the insight of Rabbi Moses ben Nachman (Ramban), to impress upon us the idea of self-sacrifice for the Torah and God of Israel. Thus, on the easiest and most enjoyable days of the Jewish year, the holidays, we are nevertheless bidden to remember the constant cost involved in remaining a Jew and in achieving the spiritual pleasure and meaning that the holidays invariably bring with them.

We can therefore return to examine and understand why these portions of Torah sacrifices were specifically placed in the "parsha" of Pinchas. For is not Pinchas, in his heroism, courage, selflessness

and denial of self-interest, the epitome of sacrifice, both physically and spiritually? The Lord Himself recognizes Pinchas' act of sacrifice and extends to him and his descendants the eternal spiritual blessings of peace, harmony and Godly service. These blessings, as we all know from our own personal life-experiences, are not easily obtained. But Pinchas, the champion of sacrifice, has earned them and will be able to maintain them throughout Jewish history. Every day that we give ourselves over to God's service, that we willingly sacrifice our time, talents, energies and wealth in His cause, is a holiday. The attitude of sacrifice ennobles our days and makes us a special people - a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Shabat Shalom.
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