

SUFFERING IN LIEU OF SACRIFICE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Vayikra

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion: Tape #806, Voice Recognition--How Reliable? Good Shabbos!

Suffering In Lieu Of Sacrifice

A great deal of Sefer Vayikra deals with sacrifices. One of the sacrifices a person brings is a sin offering (korban chatas), which is brought to attain atonement for an inadvertent transgression [Vayikra 4:2]. The Ramban explains the reason for the offering: All transgressions cause a person's soul to become blemished in an unseemly way. Inasmuch as it is inappropriate for a creature to face his Maker with a blemished soul and we all want to experience in the World To Come that which the early sources express by the term "receiving pleasure from the aura of the Divine Presence" (ne'heneh m'Ziv haShechina), therefore the Ramban writes, the soul who has sinned is charged with bringing an offering which will allow it to come close again to its Maker.

A sacrifice cleanses one's soul. L'Havdil, it is analogous to one who has smashed his car in an accident. He takes the car to a body shop and it comes out looking like new again. This is what a Korban does to a person's neshama. Therefore, we appreciate - writes the Ramban -- the great Chessed [kindness] the Almighty has done for us by providing us with the institution of sacrifices.

However, what do we do in our time? As a result of our many sins, we do not have a Bais HaMikdash and we do not have sacrifices to provide atonement for our inadvertent sins. The Ramban writes: When there is no Bais HaMikdash, He sends them suffering to cleanse them of their sins. In lieu of sacrifices, the Almighty causes people to suffer illness, financial troubles, and the list of problems that people face. These "yisurim" have the same effect as the sacrifices. They purge the soul of its blemishes. It would be much easier and more pleasant to be able to bring sacrifices. The Ramban says that "just as the sacrifices were given to us with Divine Love to draw us near to Him so that we may be brought close under the "Wings of the Divine Presence" so too the "yisurim" that befall man are sent with Love and Mercy.

This is a concept which is obviously much easier to verbalize than to internalize, but this is the reason troubles befall us - to trigger the same effect as that achieved by sacrifices: To draw us closer to Him.

There is one other avenue which can achieve a similar effect. The Talmud teaches: "One who occupies himself in study of the laws of the Chatas [sin offering] and the Olah [burnt offering] is considered as if he brought them. [This is part of the idea of the custom of reciting the portion of sacrifices prior to beginning our prayer services].

The Maharal in his Netzach Yisrael presents a very interesting idea. There is no place where we find a concept that if for some reason you cannot shake a Lulav but you will learn the laws of the Four Species that you will receive credit as if you shook the Lulav. Similarly we never find that if you cannot eat matzah on the first night of Pessach, you can achieve virtually the same benefit by studying the laws of matzah that night. Why, asks the Maharal, is learning the laws of the sacrifices considered "as if one brought the sacrifice"?

The Maharal answers that it is because bringing a Korban is about bringing oneself closer to the Almighty. There is something else in life that brings a person close to the Almighty as well - that is the study of Torah. The effect of offering a sin offering is to bring a person back (korban=>karov=>drawing close) to Hashem. Studying the laws of Chatas also bring a person closer to Hashem.

The Symbolism of the Bird Offerings

If a person who sinned cannot afford to bring an animal for atonement, in certain situations, he is allowed to bring a certain type of bird offering consisting of "torim" or "bnei yonah" (from the dove family). The Ramban explains why the Torah allowed specifically "torim" to be brought as atonement: This species of birds have the amazing quality that they mate for life. With other species of the animal kingdom, there is no real "matrimonial connection" between the male and the female. However "torim" mate for life to the extent that when one of the pair dies or is captured, the remaining partner will remain alone for the rest of its life! Symbolically, the Ramban writes, it is the same with Israel. They cling to Hashem alone forever and will never associate with other gods. The Ribono shel Olam likes these birds because they are similar to the Jewish people.

The other option besides "torim", are "bnei yonah" - the immature (small) species of the dove. They are still young and have never mated. Mature Yonim, unlike "torim" are jealous birds and they switch partners, therefore the Torah rejected them as suitable offerings. But the "bnei yonah", the young of the species, who have never mated, are acceptable as sin offerings. What is unique about this species? The Ramban explains that "bnei yonah" always stay in their nest. No matter what happens, they always go back to the nest in which they are hatched. A young dove always returns to the nest in which they were hatched, regardless of what has happened to that nest.

In other words the "torim" demonstrate loyalty to their spouse and the "bnei yonah" demonstrate loyalty to the place of their birth. The Almighty appreciates loyalty and therefore has designated these birds as the appropriate vehicle to help re-establish the relationship of loyalty between the poor unintentional sinner and Him.

Rav Simcha Zissel Brodie, the Rosh Yeshiva of the Chevron Yeshiva, makes an interesting comment. If we see that the Torah values loyalty to the nest in which you were hatched, how much more so must a person have loyalty to the Yeshiva in which he learned. Just as the "bnei yonah" never forgets and always values the environment and surroundings in which it was created, so too, a person should remember and value the environment in which he was "spiritually created and nursed" in his early days as a serious student of Torah.

The lack of demonstration of such loyalty is the indictment which Chazal attribute to the Jewish people when they left Mt. Sinai. On the pasuk "They journeyed from the Mountain of Hashem..." [Bamidbar 10:33], the Rabbis employ the simile "like a child running away from the schoolhouse". Rav Simcha Zissel asks, "How could they run away from Har Sinai? Har Sinai is what made us into a nation! The place where we received the Torah has to be so dear to us that we do not want to leave! To charge them with running away is an indictment of their loyalty to Torah and to the Giver of Torah." He says the same indictment is applicable to those who abandon -- be it mentally or be it physically -- the Yeshiva which nurtured them spiritually. Such abandonment demonstrates a lack of "hakaras haTov" [gratitude] that even "Bnei Yonah" possess.

Giving All That One Can

In connection with the person who brings a flour offering (korban mincha), the Torah states: "And when a nefesh [soul] will bring a meal offering to Hashem." [Vayikra 2:1]. Rashi asks why the person is called a "soul" (nefesh) in connection with the bringing of the Mincha offering and this is not the case with any other offering. Rashi explains that we are dealing here with a person who is too poor to bring an animal and too poor even to bring a bird offering. All he can afford is an inexpensive flour offering. Rashi writes: "The Holy One, Blessed is He said: Although the poor man's offering is modest, I consider it on his behalf as if he offered his soul."

A taxi driver in Eretz Yisrael once told the following story to an American Yeshiva student:

I once gave the Steipler Gaon a ride in my taxi. The Gaon asked me "Do you set aside times for learning Torah? Do you learn Gemara?" I told him the truth: I am exhausted when I come home from a long day of driving, but after supper I go to a Gemara shiur in the neighborhood. The nightly shiur is 1 hour long, but inevitably after 5 minutes, I fall asleep and I am only woken 55 minutes later by the sound of the Maggid Shiur [teacher] closing his Gemara. That is the end of the shiur. I pick up about 5 minutes worth of Gemara study every night. The Steipler responded by quoting the above referenced pasuk from our parsha: "When a soul shall bring a meal offering..."

The Steipler was saying this taxi driver is giving all that he can. The fact that he falls asleep every single night by the Gemara after 5 minutes is due to the fact that he is dead tired. But he makes an effort to come to the shiur and he is giving all that he can give. Giving all that one can give is all that the Almighty ever asks from a person.

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