The nation was reeling from the loss of the First Beis Ha-Mikdash, and did not see how their relationship with G-d could continue without it and its sacrifices. In this week’s hafrarah, Yishayahu reassures the masses, bringing them Hashem’s word that “You did not buy Me with silver, and that fats of your offerings did not sway Me… I, I am the One who erases your sins for My sake…”1 What a painfully far cry from our generation! They could not imagine how someone could continue to relate to Hashem without the korbanos, and we struggle to understand the role it was to play.

The Rambam explains the purpose of korbanos as follows:

“[T]he custom which was in those days general among all men, and the general mode of worship in which the Israelites were brought up, consisted in sacrificing animals in those temples which contained certain images, to bow down to those images, and to bum incense before them; religious and ascetic persons were in those days the persons that were devoted to the service in the temples erected to the stars, as has been explained by us. It was in accordance with the wisdom and plan of G-d, as displayed in the whole Creation, that He did not command us to give up and to discontinue all these manners of service; for to obey such a commandment it would have been contrary to the nature of man, who generally cleaves to that to which he is used…”2

The Rambam’s purpose for korbanos is because this is a practice we already engaged in since the days when our ancestors worshipped idols. But while this motivation would seem to no longer apply, the Rambam shares the general anticipation we express repeatedly in davening for the restoration of korbanos in the messianic age.

How much more painful it is, then, to realize the full implications of our disconnection from korbanos, to be in a state where they are not only impossible, but the majority of the Jewish people do not want them to be, and of those who do, do not in their hearts feel the lack.

The Ramban3 challenges this approach. After all, Noach left the teivah and made an offering before there were any Chaldeans or Egyptians, and the korban was pleasing to Hashem. In addition, the animals being offered are themselves the idols of these nations. And so this giving them a position of respect and honor as sacrifices would increase the problem, not eliminate it. The Ramban instead offers the following rationales for korbanos:

“It is far more fitting to accept the reason for the offerings which scholars say, namely that since man’s deeds are accomplished through thought, speech and action, therefore G-d commanded that when man sins and brings an offering, he should lay his hands upon it in contrast to the deed. He should confess his sins verbally in contrast to his speech, and he should burn the inwards and the kidneys [of the offering] as sacrifices would increase the problem, not eliminate it. The Ramban instead offers the following rationales for korbanos:

1 Yishayahu 43:3-4
2 Moreh Nevachim vol. III, ch. 32
3 Vayikra 1:9
The Abarbanel’s argument against the Narvoni’s understanding of the Rambam’s understanding of the korbanos is the approach of the Ibn Ezra. The korban is an exchange for his soul so that the person learns that it is only the act of doing so that needs neither sin offering, nor burnt offering, nor guilt offering nor minchah.

However, the Narvoni’s interpretation of the Rambam could also be understood as not necessarily implying that korbanos are part of the ideal. If we humans were less frail and physical beings, we would be able to address the need to give through Torah study, tefillah, investing our time doing His Will. It is as a concession to the limitation of human nature that Hashem needed to give us the ability to give a tangible gift, one that seems more “real” to us.

It is innate in a person to want to express his love with a gift. A husband buys his wife flowers, even if he knows that she will appreciate the flowers for only the moment they are received and then they will sit on the table unnoticed. It is the act of giving that is itself the greater gift. Idolaters felt that love toward their G-ds, and so they consistently came up with ways to give to their G-ds. And when we felt a love so intense that it forced a need to give, we had a Beis HaMikdash in which to bring korbanos.

However, as time progresses, a couple can hit hard times. The husband no longer brings flowers as a pure expression of love, but to get out of trouble. Similarly we find Yishayahu’s contemporaries no longer obeyed Hashem, no longer cared for the widow and orphan nor fed the poor. They too brought korbanos as a means to “buy off” Hashem. The opportunity to give was no longer constructive, and so Hashem revoked it. When the wife throws the flowers back in her husband’s face, he wonders if there is a relationship left to recover. For the same reasons we needed to hear Hashem’s words “I, I am the One who erases your sins.”

How much more painful it is, then, to realize the full implications of our disconnection from korbanos, to be in a state where they are not only impossible, but the majority of the Jewish people do not want them to be, and of those who do, do not in their hearts feel the lack. Where is the pining of the lover to give to the Beloved?

Part of the procedure of bringing a sacrifice is the semichah that is performed on the animal. Using all of his strength, the bringer of the korban places his hands on the head of the animal, in between the horns, and pushes down – however, certainly not pushing hard enough to injure the animal because it is prohibited to injure an animal dedicated to the Beis HaMikdash. While pushing...
Rambam, there are four steps to repentance: regretting the sin, refraining from sinning, consciously accepting not to repeat that sin, and confessing the sin to G-d.3 R’ Itzeleh Blaser of St. Petersburg explains that these four steps can be more generally broken into two groups.6 In one group are the actions that anyone who sins would intuitively pursue in order to cleanse himself of his misdeeds. Regardless of whether there was such a concept of teshuvah and forgiveness, someone who truly believes that he will be punished for each and every sin he commits will immediately cease from sinning. It is merely a matter of avoiding harm. Someone who burns his finger on a hot pan will certainly avoid touching the pan again. Similarly, a person who recognizes that sin leads to punishment will stop sinning. It is only common sense.

Additionally, regretting the commission of an act that will ultimately lead to Divine retribution should be reflexive. Anyone whose priorities are in proper order will automatically recognize that a sin is an unfortunate act whose benefits can never outweigh its negative repercussions.7 Even if G-d had never instituted a process by which sins can be forgiven, a believer who strays would still regret his actions and stop them as soon as possible. This is the first group, teshuvah steps that are intuitive and do not need to be commanded.

The second group contains actions that, were it not for a commandment, would not be intuitively initiated. A conscious decision to never return to the past sin is certainly helpful but is not necessary. Someone who strays would certainly try to avoid the act again, but making a conscious decision to never repeat the sin is, perhaps, somewhat extreme. Only because we are commanded to do so as part of the teshuvah process do we upon ourselves such bold mandates. Similarly, a verbal confession of sin is not necessarily something to which we would naturally gravitate. It does not seem to add much value to the struggle with which the former sinner is grappling. However, we must do so because G-d commanded us to verbally confess our sin and to consciously accept on ourselves to never return to the sin. Absent this commandment, we would not do so.

The first group of steps is the intuitive teshuvah process and the second group is the commanded teshuvah process. Truthfully, the first group of steps is the hardest part of teshuvah. Reordering one’s priorities to recognize the deterrents of this action and altering one’s behavior to longer repeat the sin are among the hardest tasks set to a person. The second group, though, is quite simple. It is merely the making of a decision and the verbal recitation of a formula. With this understanding, R’ Itzeleh Blaser explains how the Torah could refer to teshuvah as easy. “This commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away” (Devarim 30:11). The Ramban8 explains this verse as referring to teshuvah. Yet, how can teshuvah be called easy? Personal experience informs us all that it is incredibly difficult to change one’s ways. R’ Itzeleh explains that the difficult elements of teshuvah are the intuitive steps while this verse is referring to the commanded steps.

1 See Mishneh Torah, Hilchos Ma’aseh HaKorbanos ch. 3
2 Chullin 5a
3 Ibid.
4 Commentary to Toras Kohanim (Sifra), parsha 4
5 Hilchos Teshuvah 2:2. R’ Shlomo Yosef Zevin, in his HaMoadim BaHalachah, points out that R’ Sa’adia Gaon adds an extra step to the teshuvah process.
6 Kochvei Or, no. 6
7 Leaving aside the issue of aveirah lishmah for the moment.
8 Ad loc.
This last group is, indeed, relatively easy.

With this, we can understand why Gentiles are excluded from reciting viduy on a korban. While every person can stop sinning and bring a sacrifice to G-d in pursuit of atonement, reciting viduy is part of the atonement process only because G-d commanded it. To the Gentile, who is not subject to this commandment, the viduy is unrelated and external to his reaction to sin. To the Jew, however, it is an obligation and the final step in the teshuvah process.

RABBI MICHA BERGER

Sefasai Tiftach

On Shabbos, the brachah inserts a thought before reaching this message of hope. As Rav Dovid Lifshitz frequently said, true shalom is not merely the cessation of violence. It is shleimus, wholeness. It is when the whole world comes together, “and they all are made into a single union to do Your Will wholeheartedly (beleviv shaleim).” On Shabbos we remind ourselves of this higher level of peace. “All will know you, and all will praise you, an all will say ‘There is none as Holy as Hashem’.”

As the brachah ends, “A new light shine upon Tzion, and we will all merit [speedily] its light.” And may we soon see the world embrace unifying peace to serve Hashem together, amen.

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