

## מתוקים מדבש



*Dei'ah, Binah and Haskel on the weekly parashah*

**RABBI MICHA BERGER**

## Bemachashavah Techilah

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..."<sup>1</sup> 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..."*<sup>2</sup>

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

***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.***

restoration of *korbanos* in the messianic age.

The Rambam<sup>3</sup> 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] in fire because they are the instruments of thought and desire in the human being. He should burn the legs [of the offering] since they correspond to the hands and feet of a person, which is analogous to the blood in his body. All these acts are performed in order that when they are done, a person should realize that he has sinned against his G-d with his body and his soul, and that his blood should really be spilled and his body burned, were it not for the generosity of the Creator, Who took from him a substitute and a ransom..."*

The Ramban offers two components to his explanation. The first, that just as sin involves action, speech and thought, so should repentance involve all three: the act of sacrifice, the words of confession, and the

<sup>2</sup> Moreh Nevuchim vol. III, ch. 32

<sup>3</sup> Vayikra 1:9

<sup>1</sup> Yishayahu 43:3-4

feelings of regret. Second, that man should be aware of the magnitude of his act; that by all rights it should be he who dies. This latter is also the approach of the Ibn Ezra<sup>4</sup>, that a *korban* is an exchange for his soul so that the person learns that it is only through Torah and mitzvos that a person merits to live. Note, though, that this explanation only addresses sin-related offerings, not the daily *tamid*, thanksgiving *korbanos*, holiday *korbanos*, etc....

The Narvoni<sup>5</sup> understands the Rambam in a manner that avoids the Rambam's objection. The element of human nature that Hashem did not ask us to uproot suddenly is not caused by being acclimated to idolatry. It is an innate human need that therefore consistently found expression in idolatry. Not that the Rambam was saying that *korbanos* were given as a way to slowly wean *Bnei Yisrael* from such practices, but that *korbanos* are a positive expression of a human need that would otherwise erupt negatively in idolatry.

The Narvoni's position is also implied by the *pasuk*. The Torah's discussion of *korbanos* opens with "A person, when he sacrifices from you a *korban* to Hashem."<sup>6</sup> The Torah does not start by ordering someone to make *korban*. Rather, it assumes that the person would be motivated to give on his own and therefore gives the proper procedure for doing so.

<sup>4</sup> Vayikra 1:1

<sup>5</sup> Moreh ad loc.

<sup>6</sup> Vayikra 1:2

The Abarbanel<sup>7</sup> argues against the Narvoni's understanding of the Rambam. He brings numerous proofs (roughly 1-1/2 columns in my edition) to show that *korbanos* are a concession, not part of the ideal. After all, prophets from Shmuel to David to Yishayahu and Yirmiyahu<sup>8</sup> speak of Hashem's preference for other forms of worship above *korbanos*. As the Gemara says, "Whoever toils in Torah needs neither sin offering, nor burnt offering, nor guilt offering nor *minchah*."<sup>9</sup> The Abarbanel therefore argues that not only does the Rambam insist the *korbanos* are a concession, even the Rambam limits his disagreement to the motivation for sacrifices, and agrees on this point.

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 a 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

<sup>7</sup> Introduction to Vayikra

<sup>8</sup> Shmuel I 15, Tehillim 50, Yishayahu 1, Yirmiyahu 7

<sup>9</sup> Menachos 110

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?

#### RABBI GIL STUDENT

## Bakeish Shalom

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

down, the bringer of the *korban* recites a confession for the sin that prompted him to bring this sacrifice. He must say, “I sinned and committed such-and-such act and have repented before You and this is for my atonement.”<sup>1</sup>

Not only Jews can bring sacrifices to the Temple. Hashem is the G-d of all people and welcomes everyone to pray to Him and to bring Him *korbanos*. Yishayahu refers to the *Beis HaMikdash* as “a house of prayer for all peoples” (Yishayahu 56:7). The Gemara<sup>2</sup> specifically learns out that Gentiles may bring sacrifices and, in this respect, Gentiles are given more leeway than Jews. A Jew who stops observing his commandments – a *mumar* – may not bring a *korban* while a Gentile *mumar* may bring one.<sup>3</sup>

However, there is a limitation on the Gentile who brings a *korban*. While he may present it at the *Beis HaMikdash*, he may not perform *semichah* on the animal. R’ Shimshon from Sens (“HaRash Mi-Shantz”)<sup>4</sup> explains that the reason a Gentile cannot perform *semichah* is that *semichah* includes the recitation of a confession – a *viduy*. However, this merely begs the question why a Gentile may not recite a *viduy*. If this confession is part of the procedure of bringing a sacrifice, and a Gentile may bring a sacrifice, why can he not also recite the *viduy*? He is certainly capable of reciting the proper formula just like he is physically capable of performing *semichah*.

The answer might lie in the Rambam’s formulation of the *teshuvah* process. According to the

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.<sup>5</sup> R’ Itzeleh Blaser of St. Petersburg explains that these four steps can be more generally broken into two groups.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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 detriments 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 Ramban<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>1</sup> See *Mishneh Torah*, Hilchos Ma’aseh HaKorbanos ch. 3

<sup>2</sup> Chullin 5a

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Commentary to Toras Kohanim (Sifra), parsha 4

<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> *Kochvei Or*, no. 6

<sup>7</sup> Leaving aside the issue of *aveirah lishmah* for the moment.

<sup>8</sup> 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

Hashem, through Yishayahu, tells Cyrus, “I form (*yotzeir*) light, and create (*uvorei*) darkness; I make/do (*oseh*) peace, and create (*uvorei*) evil; I am Hashem, Who does all these.”<sup>1</sup> Cyrus is called “His *mashiach*”, Hashem’s anointed<sup>2</sup>. He was king of Persia, which at the time was grappling with Zoroastrian dualism. This message was to a kingdom that could not believe that good and evil can both emerge from the same Source.

The first thing to notice is that the *pasuk* has symmetry. Light and peace are made parallel, both are derived, darkness and evil are described with the word “*borei*”, meaning to create something from nothing.

The word “*bara*”, used in the opening *pasuk* of the Torah, introduces an unformed world of “emptiness and chaos, and darkness on the face of the earth”. Until Hashem said, “Let there be light”. Darkness is not only scientifically an absence of light, but (with noted exceptions) the Torah understands ordinary darkness in those terms as well. Not a created thing, but a hollow, an opportunity, in which light could exist.

Similarly, evil is not a thing, but an opportunity for good, to make peace, that man has not yet

exercised; a chance to banish the chaos and emptiness and partner with Hashem to complete creation.

The second thing to note is that it is all in present tense: “*Yotzeir*” – He creates, presently, light. “*Uvorei*” – and He is currently creating darkness and evil into which we can allow light and peace to enter. “*Oseh*” – he is now making peace. Or perhaps, translating “*oseh*” as “does”, peace is not a thing to be made, but a process Hashem is constantly doing. The creation continues.

When this *pasuk* was adapted to become the opening of the *brachah* of *Yotzeir Or*, before *Shema*, the rabbis toned down the final word “*ra*”, evil, to “*hakol*”, all. Hashem makes all – good and that evil which we will not discuss. But despite the euphemism, the intent is the same. This *brachah* about “the Creator of light” opens by establishing that light is also being used as a metaphor for peace.

The *brachah* continues with “The One Who shines light on the world and those that live on it in mercy, and in His Goodness renews each day, constantly, the works of creation.” We still speak present tense. The creation of light continues. When facing the darkness of night, we can remember that Hashem is continuing to create light. As the world around us seems evil, somewhere the potential for peace is still being made.

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 (*beleivav 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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Mesukim Midevash is a project of The AishDas Society, offering words of machshavah, mussar and tefillah each week. For more information, email [mesukim@aishdas.org](mailto:mesukim@aishdas.org) or call (201) 757-0246.

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<sup>1</sup> Yishayahu 45:7

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. v. 1