

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

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Covenant & Conversation

The American Declaration of Independence speaks of the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Recently, following the pioneering work of Martin Seligman, founder of positive psychology, there have been hundreds of books published on happiness. Yet there is something more fundamental still to the sense of a life well-lived, namely, meaning.

The two seem similar. It's easy to suppose that people who find meaning are happy, and people who are happy have found meaning. But the two are not the same, nor do they always overlap. Happiness is largely a matter of satisfying needs and wants. Meaning, by contrast, is about a sense of purpose in life, especially by making positive contributions to the lives of others. Happiness is largely about how you feel in the present. Meaning is about how you judge your life as a whole: past, present, and future.

Happiness is associated with taking, meaning with giving. Individuals who suffer stress, worry, or anxiety are not happy, but they may be living lives rich with meaning. Past misfortunes reduce present happiness, but people often connect such moments with the discovery of meaning. Furthermore, happiness is not unique to humans. Animals also experience contentment when their wants and needs are satisfied. But meaning is a distinctively human phenomenon. It has to do not with nature but with culture. It is not about what happens to us, but about how we interpret what happens to us. There can be happiness without meaning, and there can be meaning in the absence of happiness, even in the midst of darkness and pain.

In a fascinating article in *The Atlantic*, "There's More to Life Than Being Happy," (9 January 2013) Emily Smith argued that the pursuit of happiness can result in a relatively shallow, self-absorbed, even selfish life. What makes the pursuit of meaning different is that it is about the search for something larger than the self.

No one did more to put the question of meaning into modern discourse than the late Viktor Frankl, who has figured prominently in these essays on spirituality. In the three years he spent in Auschwitz, Frankl survived and helped others to survive by inspiring them to discover a purpose in life even in the midst of hell on earth. He knew that in the camps, those who lost the will

to live died. It was there that he formulated the ideas he later turned into a new type of psychotherapy based on what he called "man's search for meaning." His book of that title, written in the course of nine days in 1946, has sold more than ten million copies throughout the world, and ranks as one of the most influential works of the twentieth century.

Frankl used to say that the way to find meaning was not to ask what we want from life. Instead we should ask what life wants from us. We are each, he said, unique: in our gifts, our abilities, our skills and talents, and in the circumstances of our life. For each of us, then, there is a task only we can do. This does not mean that we are better than others. But if we believe we are here for a reason, then there is a tikkun, a mending, only we can perform; a fragment of light only we can redeem; an act of kindness, or courage, or generosity, or hospitality only we can perform; even a word of encouragement or a smile only we can give, because we are here, in this place, at this time, facing this person at this moment in their lives.

"Life is a task," he used to say, and added, "The religious man differs from the apparently irreligious man only by experiencing his existence not simply as a task, but as a mission." He or she is aware of being summoned, called, by a Source. "For thousands of years that source has been called God." (*The Doctor and the Soul*, A. A. Knopf, 1965, p. 13.)

That is the significance of the word that gives our parsha, and the third book of the Torah, its name: Vayikra, "And He called." The precise meaning of this opening verse is difficult to understand. Literally translated it reads: "And He called to Moses, and God spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying..." (Vayikra 1:1)

The first phrase seems to be redundant. If we are told that God spoke to Moses, why say in addition, "And He called"? Rashi explains as follows: "And He called to Moses: Every [time God communicated with Moses, whether signalled by the expression] 'And He spoke,' or 'and He said,' or 'and He commanded,' it was always preceded by [God] calling [to Moses by name]." (Rashi on Vayikra 1:1.)

"Calling" is an expression of endearment. It is the expression employed by the ministering angels, as it says, "And one called to the other." (Isaiah 6:3)

Vayikra, Rashi is telling us, means to be called to a task in love. This is the source of one of the key

ideas of Western thought, namely the concept of a vocation or a calling, that is, the choice of a career or way of life not just because you want to do it, or because it offers certain benefits, but because you feel summoned to it. You feel this is your meaning and mission in life. This is what you were placed on earth to do.

There are many such calls in Tanach. There was the call Abraham heard to leave his land and family (Gen. 12:1). There was the call to Moses at the Burning Bush (Ex. 3:4). There was the one experienced by Isaiah when he saw in a mystical vision God enthroned and surrounded by angels: "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'" (Is. 6:8)

One of the most touching is the story of the young Samuel, dedicated by his mother Hannah to serve in the sanctuary at Shiloh where he acted as an assistant to Eli the Priest. In bed at night he heard a voice calling his name. He assumed it was Eli. He ran to see what he wanted but Eli told him he had not called. This happened a second time and then a third, and by then Eli realised that it was God calling the child. He told Samuel that the next time the voice called his name, he should reply, "Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening." It did not occur to the child that it might be God summoning him to a mission, but it was. Thus began his career as a prophet, judge, and anointer of Israel's first two kings, Saul and David (see I Samuel 3).

When we see a wrong to be righted, a sickness to be healed, a need to be met, and we feel it speaking to us, that is when we come as close as we can in a post-prophetic age to hearing Vayikra, God's call. And why does the word appear here, at the beginning of the third and central book of the Torah? Because the book of Leviticus is about sacrifices, and a vocation is about sacrifices. We are willing to make sacrifices when we feel they are part of the task we are called on to do.

From the perspective of eternity, we may sometimes be overwhelmed by a sense of our own insignificance. We are no more than a wave in the ocean, a grain of sand on the seashore, a speck of dust on the surface of infinity. Yet we are here because God wanted us to be, because there is a task He wants us to perform. The search for meaning is the quest for this task.

Each of us is unique. Even genetically identical twins are different. There are things only we can do, we who are what we are, in this time, this place, and these circumstances. For each of us God has a task: work to perform, a kindness to show, a gift to give, love to share, loneliness to ease, pain to heal, or broken lives to help mend. Discerning that task, hearing Vayikra, God's call, is one of the great spiritual challenges for each of us.

How do we know what it is? Some years ago, in *To Heal a Fractured World*, I offered this as a guide, and it still seems to me to make sense: Where what we want to do meets what needs to be done, that is where God

wants us to be. *Covenant and Conversation* is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt"l ©2016 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd He called to Moses and the Lord spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying: ‘Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them, anyone who brings a sacrifice to the Lord, from the animals, from the cattle and from the sheep you shall offer your sacrifices.’ (Leviticus 1:1,2) The opening words of this third book of the Bible, the Book of Vayikra, tells us that God first called to Moses and then communicated to him a specific message concerning the sacrificial offerings of the Sanctuary. Why this double language of “calling” first and then “speaking” afterwards? Why not cut to the chase: “And the Lord spoke to Moses from the Tent of Meeting”?

The Talmudic sage Rabbi Musia Rabbah, in Tractate Yoma (4b), explains that the Bible is giving us a lesson in good manners: before someone commands another to do something, he must first ask permission to give the order. He even suggests that before someone begins speaking to another, one must ascertain that the person wishes to hear what he has to say. With great beauty, the rabbis suggest that even God Himself follows these laws of etiquette when addressing Moses; asking his permission before speaking to or commanding him.

The Ramban (Nahmanides) takes a completely opposite view, limiting this double language of addressing to the Sanctuary specifically: “this (seemingly superfluous language of first calling and then speaking) is not used elsewhere (where God is addressing Moses); it is only used here because Moses would not otherwise have been permitted to enter the Tent of Meeting, would not otherwise have been permitted to be in such close proximity to the place where the Almighty was to be found” (Ramban ad loc).

From this second perspective, it is Moses who must first be summoned by God and receive Divine permission before he dare enter the Sacred Tent of Meeting of the exalted Holy of Holies.

This latter interpretation seems closest to the Biblical text; since the very last verses in the Book of Exodus specifically tell us that whenever a cloud covered the Sanctuary, Moses was prevented from entering the Tent of Meeting and communicating with the Divine (Exodus 40:34, 35). Hence, the Book of Leviticus opens with God summoning Moses into the Tent of Meeting, apparently signaling the departure of the cloud and the Divine permission for Moses to hear God's words.

This scenario helps us understand God's relationship – and lack thereof – with the Israelites in general and with Moses in particular. You may recall that the initial commandment to erect a Sanctuary was in

order for the Divine Presence to dwell in the midst of the Israelites (Ex. 25:8); such a close identity between the Divine and the Israelites on earth would signal the period of redemption. This would have been a fitting conclusion to the exodus from Egypt.

Tragically, Israel then sin with the Golden Calf and God immediately informs them that "I cannot go up in your midst because you are a stiff-necked nation, lest I destroy you on the way" (Exodus 33:3). Only if the Israelites are worthy can God dwell in their midst. If they forego their true vocation as a "sacred nation and a Kingdom of priest-teachers" while God is in such close proximity to them, then this God of truth will have to punish and even destroy them. He will therefore now keep His distance from them, retaining His "place", as it were, in the supernal, transcendent realms, and sending His "angel-messenger" to lead them in their battles to conquer the Promised Land (ibid 33:2,3).

As a physical symbol of the concealment – or partial absence – of the Divine (hester panim), Moses takes the Tent of Meeting and removes its central position in the Israelite encampment, to a distance of 2000 cubits away (33:7). He then remonstrates with God arguing that the Almighty had promised to show His love by means of His Divine Name, to reveal to him His Divine attributes; and to accept Israel as His special nation (33:11,12). In other words, Moses argues that that He, God – and not an angel-messenger – must reveal His Divine ways and lead Israel (Rashbam on 33:13).

God then responds that indeed "My face will lead" – I, Myself and not an angel-messenger – and "I shall bring you (you, Moses, but not the nation) to your ultimate resting place" (33:14). Moses is not satisfied, and argues that God Himself – His "face" and not His angel-messenger – must lead not only Moses but also the nation! Otherwise, he says, "do not take us (the entire nation) out of this desert". And finally, God agrees that although He cannot be in the midst of the nation, He can and will lead them, stepping in whenever necessary to make certain that Israel will never disappear and will eventually return to their homeland.

God may not be completely manifest as the God of love in every historical experience of our people, and will not yet teach the world ethical monotheism. Israel remains a "work-in-progress" with God behind a cloud and "incommunicado". Our nation, albeit imperfect, still serves as witnesses that the God of love and compassion exists, and orchestrates historical redemption through Israel. God is "incorporated," incorporealized, in Israel, the people and the land.

What God leaves behind even when He is in a cloud are the two newly chiseled tablets of stone – His Divine Torah with the human input of the Oral Law – as well as His thirteen "ways" or attributes: God's spiritual and emotional characteristics of love, compassion, freely given grace, patience, kindness, etc. (Leviticus 34:1-7). And when individuals internalize these attributes – imbue

their hearts, minds and souls with love, compassion, kindness, grace and peace – they cause God to become manifest, enabling them to communicate with God "face to face", like Moses. Then the cloud between Moses' Active Intellect and God's Active Intellect disappears, and Moses is enabled to teach and understand God's Torah.

And so, Vayikra opens when God perceives that Moses has reached the highest spiritual level achievable by mortals, the cloud is removed from the Tent of the Meeting and God invites Moses to enter it and receive more of those Divine Emanations which comprise our Bible. ©2023 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

With the beginning of the reading of the book of Vayikra this Shabat in the synagogue, the title of the book itself calls out to us for understanding what is meant when the Torah tells us that God called out to Moshe. Moshe experiences a special and unique method of Godly revelation. The Torah testifies to this by describing that God, so to speak, talks to Moshe 'face to face.'

The prophets of Israel receive Godly communication while in a dreamlike trance. But the thrust of Jewish tradition is that even though there is no longer any type of Godly prophecy present in our world, God still communicates with humans. But, He does so in very subtle means - in reflections of human behavior and world events themselves.

Free will allows humans to behave as they will, yet there is a guiding heavenly hand in world affairs visible to those who wish to see it. A few decades ago two scientists won a Nobel Prize for proving their ability to yet hear the echo of the sounds of the original birth of the universe at the moment of its creation. We all know that human hearing is possible only within a limited range of wave frequencies. Judaism preaches that good deeds, moral behavior, Torah observance and loyalty to traditional Jewish values help expand our hearing ability – and this enables us to tune into heavenly sound frequencies which were originally blocked to us.

The auxiliary message of Vayikra, when God called out to Moshe, is that Moshe's hearing is so perfectly attuned to heavenly communication, he is always 'face to face' with his Creator. That is the true indication of the greatness of Moshe and makes him the most unique of all the world's prophets, teachers and leaders.

The word Vayikra, as written in the Torah, contains a miniature letter 'aleph.' This indicates to us that God's message to us is subtle, quiet, and easy to ignore temporarily, but persistent and ongoing. As the Lord told the prophet Elijah, 'I do not appear in the great wind or in earthquakes or other terrifying natural phenomena, but rather in a small, still voice.' Listening

to a still, small voice requires good hearing acumen and intense concentration. Casual hearing will not suffice.

In our times, the small 'alef' requires us to really listen and pay attention to what transpires in our personal and national lives. Oftentimes, we, like the prophet Yonah, attempt to flee from the still small voice that continually echoes within us. But it remains persistent, and waits patiently for our hearing ability to improve in our everyday lives.

The Bible teaches us that Shimshon began his career as the savior and Judge of Israel when he was able to hear the spirit of the Lord beating within his heart. In our busy and noisy lives, with so much incessant sound exploding all around us constantly, we really have little time or ability to listen to our true selves – those small voices that are always speaking to us. Our inner voice is the medium that Judaism uses to teach us that the Lord calls out for our attention, to give us moral and courageous guidance. But it can only be of value if we listen - and that requires concentration, thought and commitment.

A great sage once remarked that when a Jew prays to God he or she is talking to God. But, when a Jew studies Torah then God, so to speak, is talking to him or her. That is one of the reasons that Judaism places such a great emphasis on Torah study. As the Talmud says: 'the study of Torah outweighs all other commandments.' It is the proven method for attuning to the spiritual frequencies that beat within us. Our Creator constantly calls out to us, and we have to make every effort to improve our hearing and our listening. ©2023 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The Book of Leviticus opens with the word va'yikra, "and He [the Lord] called" (Leviticus 1:1). Rashi notes that va'yikra is a term of endearment. The text tells us that God spoke to Moses from the Ohel Moed (Tent of Meeting).

The Midrash understands this to mean God's calling came from the two keruvim (cherubs) atop the Ark in the Tabernacle (Torat Kohanim). The Talmud explains that the keruvim were angels depicted in the form of children with wings embracing, even as they are lifted heavenward (Chagigah 13b). What is the significance of this image, and what does it mean given that it was the seat of God's enduring love?

It can be suggested that God relates to us through two different types of love. On the one hand, there is the love of a lover for his or her beloved, reflective of God's intense love for the Jewish People. There is no love more powerful or more intimate. But that love has its limits. Spousal relationships are humanly

made and also can be humanly terminated.

In fact, the Torah tells us that if a woman divorces and marries another, she can never return to her first husband (Deuteronomy 24:1-4). What, then, would happen when the Jewish People rebel against God for other beliefs? If reconciliation is not possible, how can they reunite with the Lord? In the words of Jeremiah, "If a man divorces his wife and she leaves him and marries another man, should he return to her again? Would not the land be completely defiled?" (Jeremiah 3:1).

It is here that another form of God's love emerges. It is the love of a parent for a child. This love is not as passionate as spousal love, but it contains a quality that spousal love does not have – the element of eternity. It lasts forever. A parent-child relationship can never terminate. So too God's love for Am Yisrael.

This then can be the meaning of the keruvim. They are symbolic of two loves: the embrace represents spousal love; the children, a reminder of unbreakable parental love. It's from this space that the Shechinah hovers and God speaks, reflecting God's intense, eternal love in the spirit of va'yikra, God's loving call. ©2023 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

DR. ERICA BROWN

The Torah of Leadership

Sometimes we wait for a formal invitation only to be told, "You don't need to be invited. You're always welcome." But we don't necessarily feel welcome until someone extends a real invitation to us. This is the way we open the very first chapter of Vayikra, Leviticus.

Our sedra and our book commences with the power of an invitation: "And God called..." (Lev. 1:1). The "and" connects this Torah reading to that which preceded it. When we turn back to the last chapter of Exodus, we find Moses in a flurry of activity to complete the Mishkan. It's the way the last chapter begins: "On the first day of the first month you shall set up the Tabernacle of the Tent of Meeting. Place there the Ark of the Pact, and screen off the ark with the curtain" (Ex. 40:1-2). And it's the way the chapter continues: "In the first month of the second year, on the first of the month, the Tabernacle was set up. Moses set up the Tabernacle, placing its sockets, setting up its planks, inserting its bars, and erecting its posts" (Ex. 40:17-18). This was hard physical labor, and Moses executed it alone.

Fifteen chapters of Exodus are filled with the vision and action necessary to build the Mishkan. Many commentaries ponder the need for such detailed instructions and the repetition that these instructions were carried out. There is an important leadership lesson embedded in this structure. You can have a vision, an architectural rendering or a strategic plan, but your ideas

are only as good as your follow-through. Your actions reflect your accountability. And if you're the leader, your actions matter most.

Larry Bossidy and Ram Charan, in their best-selling leadership book, *Execution: The Discipline of Getting Things Done*, write about the importance of leaders having a granular understanding of the personnel, activities, and directions of their organizations. This is the job. When this kind of close monitoring for accountability is absent, visions fall flat. Strategies die. Results tank. "Execution has to be a part of a company's strategy and its goals," they write. "It is the missing link between aspirations and results. As such, it is a major—indeed, the major—job of a business leader. If you don't know how to execute, the whole of your effort as a leader will always be less than the sum of its parts." Talk can only get you so far. Only clear goals, measurable performance, and tight operations bring results.

The entire close of the book of Exodus reflects this intense concern for details and execution. Holiness, like love, resides not only in the amorphous cloud but in the small things, the sockets and the planks. Leaders must care about the minutiae of the work because that creates the foundation for everything else, especially when there is much to do and little time to do it in. Bossidy and Charan continue the theme: Follow-through is a constant and sequential part of execution. It ensures that you have established closure in the dialogue about who will be responsible for what and the specific milestones for measurement. The failure to establish this closure leaves the people who execute a decision or strategy without a clear picture of their role. As events unfold rapidly amid much uncertainty, follow-through becomes a much more intense process. Milestones need to be placed closer together so there is less room for slippage, and information needs to flow faster and in more detail so that everyone knows how the strategy is evolving.

Finally, in the very last verses of Exodus, the Mishkan was complete. Herein lies the irony. The very leader who ensured the instructions were carried out precisely was then forbidden to enter the space: "Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting, because the cloud had settled upon it and the Presence of God filled the Tabernacle" (Ex. 40:35). God filled the entire Mishkan and there was no room for human beings.

This is why the word "Vayikra" – and He called – is so essential to understanding the entire book. God formally invited Moses back into the space after it was infused with the Divine Presence. Only then would the activities taking place there be full of vitality and purpose. Without God's presence, the walls would have been just walls. God's presence made the space a sanctuary. But not until Moses re-entered the space did it become a true covenantal center, a meeting place where God and human dwelt together in holy partnership. Without God's

invitation, Moses would never have re-entered the Mishkan. He would have created it and remained outside its boundaries.

An ancient rabbinic text celebrates the importance of invitation (Kallah Rabbati 8:11). God called (vayikra) to Moses from the Mount Sinai: "God called to him from the mountain..." (Ex. 19:3). Just like our opening verse in Vayikra, a momentous occasion calls for a formal invitation. God calls out to Moses, reflecting His active engagement with humanity, as Rabbi Jonathan Sacks notes in his book *The Great Partnership*: "Far from being timeless and immutable, God in the Hebrew Bible is active, engaged, in constant dialogue with his people, calling, urging, warning, challenging and forgiving." Calling is part of this essential, Divine dialogue. Moses, in turn, called out to other leaders at the foot of the mountain: "Moses called (vayikra) the elders of the people and put before them all that God had commanded him" (Ex. 19:7). Later, in prophetic literature, Isaiah calls the people to attention: "When I call (ekra) to them, they stand up together (Is. 48:13). There is a reason we have a term for professions and obsessions that speak to the most alive part of us: a calling. We feel called.

Leaders grow people by inviting them to a task, to a project, or to a new level of service. Calling matters because it lets people know that they matter. "You're always welcome" is not the same invitation as "I was thinking about you. I'd like to invite you..." Think of a time you were not invited to take on a leadership responsibility. You felt excluded, unimportant, or even rejected. Now think of a time you were invited to assume a significant role. Whether or not you said 'yes,' you still felt special and included. You can gift that gift to others.

What invitation can you extend right now that would grow someone else's leadership? ©2023 Dr. E. Brown and Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks-Herenstein Center for Values and Leadership

ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

A Fifth

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

As a general rule, a person who steals from another must reimburse the victim, paying the monetary value of the stolen item. There is, however, an exception to this rule: "When a person sins and commits a trespass against G-d by dealing deceitfully with his fellow in the matter of a deposit or a pledge, or through robbery, or by defrauding his fellow... and if he swears falsely... he shall repay the principal amount and add a fifth to it" (*Vayikra* 5:21-25). In other words, he must add an additional twenty percent (*chomesh*) to the value of the stolen item. He is also obligated to bring a guilt offering (*korban asham*).

In order for a person to be liable to this penalty, there are three conditions:

1. He must have stolen.

2. He must have falsely sworn that he did not steal.
3. He must have later admitted that he lied under oath.

May a victim decide to waive his right to the payment of the *chomesh*? According to the Mishnah in *Bava Kamma*, he may.

Given this explicit statement of the Mishnah, it is very difficult to understand the Rambam's statement, "The *chomesh* and the [*asham*] offering are for atonement" (*Hilchot Gezeilah* 7:8).

If the payment of the *chomesh* serves to achieve atonement for the sinner, it would seem that the victim should not be allowed to waive it. Refusing payment would leave the thief without the ability to achieve atonement for his sins (swearing falsely as well as stealing).

One possible way to explain the Rambam is to say that the victim is permitted to waive payment of the value of the stolen item itself. Once he has done this, the additional fifth becomes irrelevant, as a fifth of zero is zero. If this happens, the thief does indeed lose his chance to gain atonement (*Kovetz Shiurim*). Alternatively, one might argue that the obligation to pay the victim is first and foremost a financial one. Once the thief fulfills this monetary obligation, he achieves atonement for his sins. Therefore, when he has no monetary obligation, even if it is because the victim chose to waive his rights, he achieves atonement (*Avnei Nezer*).

What if there is a case in which the thief does not need atonement? Is there still be an obligation to pay the *chomesh*? If the reason for the payment is atonement, then the answer should be no. Yet we know that if the thief dies before making the *chomesh* payment, his heirs must pay it (even though they do not need atonement). This strengthens our earlier suggestion that the obligation is first and foremost monetary, and taking care of the monetary obligation is what achieves atonement. ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

The Olah Offering

Seder Vayikra is often referred to as Torat Kohanim, the Laws of the Priests. It deals with the various offerings that were brought on the Altar, the donors of those offerings, and the purpose of each type of offering. Some offerings were required by an individual's actions, while others were required for the daily service or for a holiday offering. Each offering had its own set of requirements and procedures. Each offering also accomplished either atonement for a sin, a thanks to Hashem, or an elevation of a person to bring him closer to Hashem. The Olah offering, sometimes translated as an Elevation offering, can be a combination of all of these purposes.

An olah offering can come from cattle, sheep and goats, or a bird, depending on the ability of the

person to afford the offering. An olah is brought for the transgression of an intentional sin for which no specific punishment has been stated in the Torah, but it can also be brought by someone who failed to perform a positive commandment, someone who had sinful thoughts even though he did not act upon them, anyone who goes up to Jerusalem and the Temple on one of the Pilgrimage Festivals, or anyone who wishes to raise his own spiritual level. An olah can be brought by an individual or by the entire community. One advantage of the breadth of this offering is that a person need not be embarrassed when bringing the offering, as no one need know whether he is bringing it for something he did or thought or simply to raise his personal spiritual level.

The Torah tells us, "If one's offering is an olah-offering from the cattle, he shall bring a perfect male; he shall bring it to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, in accordance with his will, before Hashem. He shall lean his hands on the head of the olah-offering; and it will be considered pleasing on his behalf, to atone for him. He shall slaughter the bull before Hashem; the sons of Aharon, the Kohanim, shall bring the blood and they shall throw the blood on the Altar, all around – which is at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting." The other offerings of a sheep or goat or a bird are performed in a similar manner.

HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch explains that there is an inherent problem with any translation of the word "korban." "The unfortunate use of the term "sacrifice" implies the idea of giving something up that is of value to oneself for the benefit of another, or of having to do without something of value, ideas which are not only entirely absent from the nature and idea of a "korban" but are diametrically opposed to it. Also, the underlying idea of "offering" makes it by no means an adequate expression for "korban." The root of the word indicates "coming near." Thus, the purpose of bringing a korban is to attain "a higher sphere of life." By bringing an animal onto the Altar, man is attempting to devote the "animal" part of his own existence to Hashem, thereby purifying and ennobling his actions.

The Torah tells us that this offering must be made "in accordance with his will." This is one of several offerings which are termed "free-will offerings." Yet, since one of the categories which requires the bringing of an olah-offering is atonement for an intentional sin, knowing full well what the law required, but doing the opposite, it is reasonable to assume that a sinner may rebel against bringing an olah. Our Rabbis inform us that we may compel the sinner to do so. This appears to directly contradict the concept of free-will. The Bet Din, the court system, understands that a Jewish soul always wishes to do the right thing even when the person sins. His emotional state or his embarrassment at having sinned may cause him to withhold his permission until he is forcefully persuaded to comply with what his soul knows to be the right action of bringing the olah.

The Torah requires that the one who brings the olah offering must place his hands on the head of the animal before it is slaughtered. The Kli Yakar points out that the Torah gives the command in the singular, namely that one hand should be placed on the head of the animal. In the performance of the action of s'micha, placing the hand on the animal's head, we find that the Torah says that two hands were placed on the animal. The Kli Yakar and the Ramban explain that the use of two hands counters both the thoughts of sin as well as the actual transgression of that sin.

According to Hirsch, "One who brings an olah is aware that he must make strides toward goodness and godliness, and that he is capable of doing so.... In any case, one who brings an olah is aware that he has failed to carry out his duty; the purpose of the olah is to caution against such failure in the future. Surely, fulfillment of duty is a positive step forward, an ascent in moral perfection, another step toward the moral heights which lead to closeness to Hashem."

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that "one does not receive a tangible benefit (use of the meat for food) from bringing an olah on the Altar. The olah does not signify a benefit for the Altar, but instead thoughts of the heart, and the thought about doing a sin can be more damaging than the performance of that sin. A sin acts as a mark against one's body, but thoughts about sinning indicate a mark against his soul. Therefore, the laws of sacrifices begin with the olah, to repair the damage to the soul. Since this damage is to the soul, there is nothing in the animal itself which can repair that damage; there can be no benefit to the body of either the person who brings the olah or the Kohanim who place the olah on the Altar. The Kohein burns the entire offering on the Altar." This differs from the chatat (sin) offering, which is brought for an unintentional sin. Here there was no damage to the soul, so the flesh of the offering can heal and repair the damage caused to the body. With an unintentional sin, the Kohein eats from the chatat and the person who brings the offering is forgiven.

Though the concept of bringing a korban is foreign to many of us, and there is a debate as to whether sacrifices will be reinstated in a third Temple, it is clear from our discussion that the purpose of the sacrifice is still an important aspect of our commandments. The olah helps us to return to our connection with Hashem through devoting our lives to His commandments. We are able to raise our lives spiritually through our reconnection with Hashem.

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RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

Cross-Currents

Animal sacrifices begin not only the parsha and the sefer of Vayikra but the world as we know it. Because Noach was commanded to take extra animals of certain species on the ark for the purpose of

offering them as korbonos.

Interestingly, it was Noach who was the first person permitted to eat animals; before the flood, vegetarianism was the Divine order. That might have bearing on understanding what a korbon is.

The hierarchy of creation noted in many Jewish sources are: domeim, tzomei'ach, chai, medaber: "still" (mineral), "growing" (vegetation), "living" (animal) and "speaking" (human). It was a hierarchy innately understood by early humans.

At least until the generation of the flood, when the Torah refers to the people as basar, "flesh" (Beraishis 6:3, 6:13). That reflected the fact that men mated with animals (Rashi, Beraishis 6:2, based on Beraishis Rabba 26). Society had devolved to the point where it considered all "flesh" to be essentially the same, that saw humans as simply evolved beasts.

It is conceivable that the permission to consume animal flesh was intended to re-establish the hierarchical distinction between "living" and "speaking" beings.

If so, perhaps a message that lay, and lies, in the concept of an animal sacrifice is that we humans are a momentous and qualitative step above the animal world, that we can kill and eat animals, and are meant to rise above the animalistic elements of our nature, which misled the generation of the flood to equate the animal and human spheres.

And our position at the pinnacle of nature forces us to recognize our proximity to what is above us. Which would well fit the meaning of the word korbon, which does not mean "sacrifice." It is from the word karov, "near." And is best rendered, if awkwardly, as "bringer of closeness." Closeness to Hashem. A korbon reminds us that we are above animals, hence closer to the Divine.

Which may be why Rabi Yehudah HaNasi states that an am ha'aretz, a person oblivious to his calling to holiness, is "forbidden to eat meat" (Pesachim, 49b). It would be, in a way, cannibalism. © 2023 Rabbi A. Shafran and torah.org

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Meor Einayaim

“He called to Moshe, and Hashem spoke to him from the Ohel Moed." (Vayikra 1:1) Look carefully at the pasuk. The line opens with an unidentified "He." Of course, it does not take too long before we learn in the next phrase that it was Hashem who called to Moshe. Why does the identification have to wait at all? Why does the Torah not write, "Hashem called to Moshe, and spoke to him?" We learn here of a process that applied to our nation in its infancy, and to a great many individuals to this day.

A person kept in complete darkness for a long period of time cannot tolerate light. To make him visually functional, you need to first expose him to the smallest sliver of light, perhaps through a hairline crack. As his eyes adapt, you can gradually widen the crack, and let

increasingly more light in. In time, he can move to a place with conventional lighting.

Similarly, Hashem brought them to the point of our pasuk in a journey of small steps. He first took the Bnei Yisrael out of Egypt, gave them just the few mitzvos of milah and pesach, split the Reed Sea, displayed His presence continuously with clouds of glory by day and a fiery pillar at night, and brought them to Sinai to receive the Torah. Only then did He command them to construct a mishkan that would cause His presence to reside within them.

Hashem similarly deals with the individual. He contracts Himself -- allowing only a bit of his light to shine through -- to be available to each and every person. Included in this are even evildoers. Evidence of this can be found in the occasional thoughts of teshuvah that cross the mind even of the rasha. These are nothing less than Hashem calling to him -- beseeching him to return - - even though he remains unaware that Hashem has planted these thoughts in his consciousness.

Here we have the meaning of the unusual way of writing the word Vayikra/He called. In our Torah scrolls, the last letter of that word is an undersized aleph. It stands for Alufo Shel Olam/the Chief of the world. It indicates that He is available to every Jew, albeit in a contracted presence, in calling him to teshuvah. Initially a person does not understand the source of the call. At times, he has regrets and recriminations, and wonders if he should mend his ways.

He may, in time, come to realize that G-d has been the One prodding him. At that point, Hashem can speak more openly to him from the Ohel Moed. As he makes slow progress, he will find that he will sometimes attempt to sin, but find himself unable. His hand will be stilled, as it were, from Above. He will realize that Hashem is speaking directly to him, plaintively saying, "Return to Me! How long will you pursue emptiness?" (Based on Meor Einayim by Rav Menachem Nochum of Chernobyl) ©2023 Rabbi Y. Adlerstein & torah.org

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"And the Olah shall be skinned, and you shall cut it into pieces." (Vayikra 1:6) This Parsha introduces the korbanos, the various sacrifices that would be offered by the Jewish People to Hashem. There is much discussion amongst the commentaries as to the purpose of these sacrifices, but the bottom line is that they were intended to be a way for us to create closeness with Hashem. That is why the root of the word 'korban' is 'karov', meaning close.

The first sacrifice discussed is the Olah, also known as the burnt-offering. This is because it was almost entirely burnt upon the altar. While other sacrifices had portions burned and the remainder eaten by



either the owner of the sacrifice or the kohanim, the Olah was cut up and then burnt into ashes. It was because of this "loss of money" that Hashem would require Moshe to urge the Kohanim on in next week's parsha, Tzav.

The question for today is why the need to skin the animal. If everything is being burned anyway, why not make the job complete and include the skin? Yes, when offering a meal to a King, one would make it very nice, hence skinning and portioning the animal, but what else can we infer from the process?

Since an Olah could be voluntary, used as a way to come closer to Hashem, removing the skin can represent getting beneath the superficiality of life and identifying what is important. Skin obscures what is beneath it, and in order to enjoy true closeness with Hashem, one must be open and ensure that he is sincere to his core.

Though this was a sacrifice, the skinning did not need to be done by the Kohanim. Instead, the owner of the korban could do it. This teaches us that our relationship with G-d requires effort and intent. We have to work for it in order for the relationship to work and to be strong. Anything that comes easy is underappreciated and rarely lasts.

Though the owner skinned the animal, the skin itself was given to the Kohanim who offered the korban and burned it on the mizbe'ach. Though a relatively minor gift to them, it's still something given to one who is helping you. On our paths to increase the bond between Man and G-d, we cannot ignore our bond between Man and Man. Appreciation and acknowledgement are crucial elements.

Finally, once the Olah was burned, its ashes were to be removed from the altar and a small pile placed at a special place in the Mishkan or Bais HaMikdash. Called the Terumas Hadeshen, the uplifting of the ashes, this was a coveted service. Perhaps the final message is that in our quest for the spiritual and holy, we must be aware of the mess we might be leaving along the way. We must clean up after ourselves and not feel we are above the "mundane" task of ensuring we don't burden others.

When one learns all these lessons, he is already closer to Hashem, because he is a more thoughtful and caring person, as Hashem is the ultimate giver, concerned with our welfare.

After delivering a shiur at Yeshivas Kol Torah, R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l went to visit a child in the hospital. On the way, he asked the driver to stop at a kiosk, where he bought a candy bar for the boy.

Back in the car, the sage turned the snack this way and that, looking at the label. Seeing this, the driver knowingly commented, "I recognize that candy bar. It has a very good hechsher (Kosher certification.)"

"Thank you, but I wasn't looking for the hechsher," said the Rav with a smile. "I was looking to see if it tastes good." ©2023 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr