

Toras



Space

To boldly go where no parsha newsletter has gone before!

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

Our parsha, which deals with a variety of sacrifices, devotes an extended section to the chattat, the sin offering, as brought by different individuals: first the High Priest (Lev. 4:3-12), then the community as a whole (Lev. 4:13-21), then a leader (Lev. 4:22-26) and finally an ordinary individual (Lev. 4:27-35).

The whole passage sounds strange to modern ears, not only because sacrifices have not been offered for almost two millennia since the destruction of the Second Temple, but also because it is hard for us to understand the very concepts of sin and atonement as they are dealt with in the Torah.

The puzzle is that the sins for which an offering had to be brought were those committed inadvertently, be-shogeg. Either the sinner had forgotten the law, or some relevant fact. To give a contemporary example: suppose the phone rings on Shabbat and you answer it. You would only be liable for a sin offering if either you forgot the law that you may not answer a phone on Shabbat, or you forgot the fact that the day was Shabbat. If, for a moment, you thought it was Friday or Sunday. So your sin was inadvertent.

This is the kind of act that we don't tend to see as a sin at all. It was a mistake. You forgot. You did not mean to do anything wrong. And when you realise that inadvertently you have broken Shabbat, you are more likely to feel regret than remorse. You feel sorry but not guilty.

We think of a sin as something we did intentionally, yielding to temptation perhaps, or in a moment of rebellion. That is what Jewish law calls be-zadon in biblical Hebrew or be-mezid in rabbinic Hebrew. That is the kind of act we would have thought calls for a sin offering. But actually, such an act cannot be atoned for by an offering at all. So how are we to make sense of the sin offering?

The answer is that there are three dimensions of wrongdoing between us and God. The first is guilt and

shame. When we sin deliberately and intentionally, we know inwardly that we have done wrong. Our conscience -- the voice of God within the human heart -- tells us that we have done wrong. That is what happened to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden after they had sinned. They felt shame. They tried to hide. For that kind of deliberate, conscious, intentional sin, the only adequate moral response is teshuvah, repentance. This involves (a) remorse, charatah, (b) confession, vidui, and (c) kabbalat le-atid, a resolution never to commit the sin again. The result is selichah umechilah, God forgives us. A mere sacrifice is not enough.

However, there is a second dimension. Regardless of guilt and responsibility, if we commit a sin we have objectively transgressed a boundary. The word chet means to miss the mark, to stray, to deviate from the proper path. We have committed an act that somehow disturbs the moral balance of the world. To take another secular example, imagine that your car has a faulty speedometer. You are caught driving at 50 miles per hour in a 30 mile an hour zone. You tell the policeman who stops you that you didn't know. Your speedometer was only showing 30 miles per hour. He may sympathise, but you have still broken the law. You have transgressed the speed limit, albeit unknowingly, and you will have to pay the penalty.

That is what a sin offering is. According to Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch it is a penalty for carelessness. According to the Sefer Ha-Chinuch it is an educational and preventive measure. Deeds, in Judaism, are the way we train the mind. The fact that you have had to pay the price by bringing a sacrifice will make you take greater care in future.

Rabbi Isaac Arama (who lived in Spain in the 15th century) says that the difference between an intentional and an unintentional sin is that in the former case, both the body and the soul were at fault. In the case of an unintentional sin only the body was at fault, not the soul. Therefore a physical sacrifice helps, since it was only the physical act of the body that was in the wrong. A physical sacrifice cannot atone for a deliberate sin, because it cannot rectify a wrong in the soul.



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"I'M A DOCTOR - NOT AN ACTOR!"



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What the sacrifice achieves is kapparah, not forgiveness as such but a "covering over" or obliteration of the sin. Noah was told to "cover" (ve-chapharta) the surface of the Ark with pitch (Gen. 6:14). The cover of the Ark in the Tabernacle was called kapporet (Lev. 25:17). Once a sin has been symbolically covered over, it is forgiven, but as the Malbim points out, in such cases the verb for forgiveness, s-l-ch, is always in the passive (venislach: Lev. 4:20, Lev. 4:26, Lev. 4:31). The forgiveness is not direct, as it is in the case of repentance, but indirect, a consequence of the sacrifice.

The third dimension of sin is that it defiles. It leaves a stain on your character. Isaiah, in the presence of God, feels that he has "unclean lips" (Is. 6:5). King David says to God, "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" -- "me-chatati tahareni" (Ps. 51:4).

About Yom Kippur the Torah says: "On that day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you [letaher etchem]. Then, before the Lord, you will be clean from all your sins." (Lev. 16:30)

Ramban says that this is the logic of the sin offering. All sins, even those committed inadvertently, have consequences. They each "leave a stain on the soul and constitute a blemish on it, and the soul is only fit to meet its Maker when it has been cleansed from all sin" (Ramban to Lev. 4:2).

The result of the sin offering is tehora, cleansing, purification. So the sin offering is not about guilt but about other dimensions of transgression. It is one of the stranger features of Western civilisation, due in part to Pauline Christianity, and partly to the influence of the philosopher Immanuel Kant,

that we tend to think about morality and spirituality as matters almost exclusively to do with the mind and its motives. But our acts leave traces in the world. And even unintentional sins can leave us feeling defiled.

The law of the sin offering reminds us that we can do harm unintentionally, and this can have psychological consequences. The best way of putting things right is to make a sacrifice: to do something that costs us something.

In ancient times, that took the form of a sacrifice offered on the altar at the Temple. Nowadays the best way of doing so is to give money to charity (tzedakah) or perform an act of kindness to others (chessed). The Prophet said so long ago, in God's name:

"For I desire loving-kindness, not sacrifice." (Hosea 6:6)

Charity and kindness are our substitutes for sacrifice and, like the sin offering of old, they help mend what is broken in the world and in our soul. *Covenant and Conversation is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl zt"l* ©2024 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org

"Metaphors be with you." - bumper sticker

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“**A**nd God called to Moses and He spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting saying...” (Leviticus 1:1) The portion of Vayikra opens with two separate expressions of “summoning”: “And God called to Moses and he spoke to him.” Why are there two distinct expressions, to call and to speak?

Perhaps one may suggest that this parallels the divine repetition of Moses' name at the burning bush, when the Almighty cries out “Moses, Moses” which the Midrash usually explains as being a repetition of affection. When I look back however upon my own early years, whenever one of my parents called my name twice (at that time it was “Steven, Steven”), it generally meant that I was in trouble for something I had done that was not particularly appreciated by the older generation. Why do we therefore assume that in this case of Moses the repetition reflects affection rather than anger?

The truth is that the Midrash in the beginning of this Torah portion presents another explanation. At the end of the book of Exodus, the Torah describes a cloud which descended upon the Tent of Meeting, a cloud which symbolized the Divine Presence. The Torah likewise insists that no one – not even Moses – could enter this divine cloud without being especially invited by God to do so. Hence, suggests the Midrash, God had to call out

to Moses to permit him to enter the cloud, after which God spoke and communicated a specific message.

This explanation not only interprets the repetition of the divine summons but also provides a most profound and magnificent symbolism expressing the divine challenge to humanity. The Almighty appears as a cloud; we apprehend Him only "through a glass darkly." Perhaps the reason why our God has neither shape nor form and is not clearly defined in any physical way is in order to teach that those who follow such a God must be prepared to chart new territories and to enter undefined areas. Our God created a world which contains chaos so that we can make order of it and He formed that world with evil so that we may perfect it in the Kingship of God. We must enter the nebulous and the unknown and bring God's presence into areas in which He is not yet manifest. Egypt was a clearly defined society with a specific caste system of masters and slaves, lordly Pharaohs and abject subjects. We followed an unknowable God into an unknown desert in order to bring out His divine word (dibbur) into the arid wasteland (midbar).

"A voice called out in the desert: prepare a place for the Lord, make a straight pathway in the desert for our God." (Isaiah 40:3)

And so does the prophet Jeremiah praise Israel: "I remember the lovingkindness when you were young, the love of your youth; you walked after me in the desert, in a land which was not yet seeded." (Jeremiah 2:2)

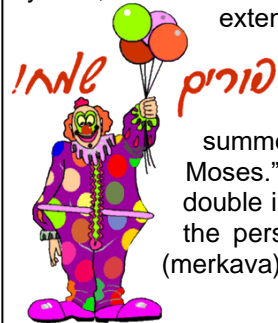
This is the ultimate challenge of the true person of faith: To enter unknown terrain and to bring the divine message of ethical and moral monotheism to a world that does not yet know it. This is the ultimate challenge of our life in Israel, filled as it is with uncertainty and danger. Israel the people, from the backdrop of Israel the land, must sanctify Jerusalem and proclaim from the holy Temple the message of world peace and human justice.

What gives the individual the strength and the courage to walk with God into the unknown and even to make a place for the Almighty in a wilderness? Perhaps if an individual really feels that he is being summoned by God, that he has a divine vocation – that he is being called by God to the

extent that he feels a "calling" – then he goes forward into the cloud unafraid.

Given this understanding, I believe we have an even deeper insight into why Moses is summoned twice and why God repeats his name "Moses, Moses." The Midrash teaches us that every individual has a double image: He/She is the person that he/she is but is also the person whose image is imprinted in the divine Chariot (merkava) in the highest heavenly sphere.

This double human identity is even given expression



in two very similar blessings which we recite at weddings under the nuptial canopy. One blessing reads: "Blessed are you, the Lord our God, who creates the human being." The second blessing reads "Blessed are you, O Lord, who has created the human being in His image, and in the image of the shape of His form has He fashioned him as an eternal building. Blessed are you, O God, who creates the human being."

These two blessings are two aspects of every individual. First, each of us is born at a specific time in a specific place to a specific set of parents with a specific physical build and appearance, slated to live for a specific number of years. Second, each of us as a member of a historic nation, has a collective memory which extends backwards to Sinai and the Garden of Eden, as well as collective anticipation which extends forward to the messianic age. It is this second aspect of our personality which links us to eternity and enables us to transcend our specific time and place.

God summons Moses twice and calls out at the burning bush "Moses, Moses" because there are in reality two Moseses: the first person, Moses of Egypt, was a prince in Pharaoh's court and fell in love with the Midianite Tzipporah; the second Moses spoke to God and sacrificed all of his princely comforts to link his destiny with his people and their redemption. Insofar as the first aspect of our transient personality is joined to the second aspect of our transcendent personality we will have the capacity to meet God in the haziness of the nebulous cloud of the unknown. God calls Moses twice because it is the second Moses who has the courage to face uncertainty and, because of that, he has gained eternity. *The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin's book Bereishit: Confronting Life, Love and Family, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid. © 2024 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

"My second favorite household chore is ironing. My first being hitting my head on the top bunk bed until I faint." - Erma Bombeck

RABBI JONATHAN GEWRITZ

Migdal Ohr

"He called to Moshe, and Hashem spoke to him from the Ohel Moed, saying." (Vayikra 1:1) When the cloud descended upon the Mishkan, Moshe stood outside, afraid to enter. Hashem said, "Moshe is waiting outside. That's not right." So He called to him.

Rashi tells us about the unusual way Moshe was called. Hashem's booming voice projected forth from between the cherubs on top of the Ark. However, the sound ended at the walls of the Tent. Then, the sound made its way to Moshe's ears, and no one else could hear it. That's how Moshe was called.

The act of calling him was an expression of endearment, and Moshe sought to downplay this. When Hashem told him to write, "Vayikra," and He called, Moshe countered that perhaps he should write, "Vayikar," and He appeared, or He chanced upon, Moshe. They compromised by making the aleph small, so it wasn't so noticeable that Moshe was called.

This was Moshe's humility, in not wanting to say that Hashem called to him, so he not seem better than other prophets, even though he was the greatest prophet who ever lived. The word at the end of the posuk, "saying," teaches us that Moshe was to go to the Jews and tell them that Hashem spoke to him. Wherein is the humility?

This message was intended to win the people over. Moshe told them, Hashem spoke to me because of you! Indeed, a leader is endowed with Hashem's presence for the benefit of his flock. The wisdom and insight he has are special gifts from Hashem, intended to be used to help other people. Therefore, it was actually an exhibit of Moshe's humility, saying that he, by himself, would not have been worthy of being called, were it not for the fact that he was the leader of the Jews.

Perhaps we can explain that since Moshe was the most humble man on the face of the earth, that made him the worthiest of being the leader. Since whenever Hashem spoke to him, Moshe understood that he was merely a vessel for Hashem to connect to His people, there was no loss of fidelity in the messages. This made him the perfect leader.

If this was true for Moshe, who was very great on his own, it is certainly true for us who are nowhere near his level. The more we think about others, and recognize that what Hashem gives us is not for our own pleasure, but to share, the more we become worthy of His gifts and bounty.

On Purim, we find ways to share our bounty with others, by giving gifts to the poor, sending items to friends, and by sharing our joyous meals with others. When we think of others more, Hashem thinks more of us, and there's nothing miraculous about it.

A din Torah once took place in Volozhin, with R' Chaim Volozhiner, z"l, presiding over the proceedings. The dispute concerned a parcel of land, with each of the men claiming that the land belonged to him. These men were obstinate, refusing to compromise.

R' Chaim asked to see the land in question. He bent down to the ground, placing his ear directly on it, as if he was listening for something. A few moments went by, and R' Chaim arose, and addressed them: "Gentlemen," he began, "I wanted to hear what the actual ground had to say

concerning your disagreement. Do you know what the ground said concerning your dispute?

It said, 'Why are they fighting over me? What does it really matter who I belong to? At the end of the day, they will both belong to me.' ©2024 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal Ohr

"If stupidity is what got us into this mess, then why can't it get us out?" - Will Rogers

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

This Shabat we begin to read the book of Vayikra. This book of Vayikra has very little narrative to it and concentrates mainly on the sacrifices that were offered in the Temple service of the Mishkan and the Beit Hamikdash; the laws of purity and defilement; and a listing of many of the commandments of the Torah and Jewish ritual.

This makes this section of the Torah a difficult one to comprehend, internalize and attempt to teach to others. Our educational sense would have postponed the teaching of this book of the Torah until the years of maturity and life experience have fashioned us as Torah devotees and scholars. Yet the rabbis of Jewish tradition have ordained that children begin their Torah experiences by studying the book of Vayikra.

Their statement is: "Let those who are still pure and holy begin their education by studying the concepts of purity and holiness." These are difficult concepts to study. They are states of being, more of the

heart and soul than that of the mind.

Someone who does not ever deal in being holy and pure will never be able to fathom the secrets of the Torah that lie in this book of Vayikra. That person will only see a seeming hodgepodge of laws and rituals, many of which would be judged to be anachronistic in our "enlightened" age.

But our Torah is a Torah of experience and emotion as much as it is one of soaring intellect and deep analytical thought. To begin to understand these concepts, one must be, or at least strive to be, a person of holiness and purity. And that is a most significant lesson that the book of Vayikra teaches us.

Purity and holiness are inextricably bound to the overriding value of constant sacrifice in Jewish life. It is no coincidence that the laws of the sacrificial worship in the Temple are connected to the laws of purity in this book of Vayikra. Without sacrifice, constant daily sacrifice, purity and holiness are unachievable goals.



In a very contaminated environment, it is most difficult to keep one's self clean and pure. It requires great discipline and restraint, care and will - in short, a supreme sense of sacrifice. In life we are always faced with myriad, daily choices. Every choice that we make indicates that we have sacrificed another choice that we could have made.

Then the only question that remains is whether we made the correct sacrifice. Will our choice bring us closer to a sense of holiness and purity and purpose in our lives or, perhaps, will it do the opposite? The seeming jumble of laws in the book of Vayikra is meant to guide our choices of which sacrifices we should wisely make in our lives.

The Torah details for us all of the categories of sacrifices – public, private, those of leaders and of paupers – and points the way to our sacrificing wisely and productively. This is the overall thrust of this great biblical book of Vayikra. ©2024 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

Duct tape is like the Force. It has a light side and a dark side and it holds the universe together

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Why is the letter aleph in the word va'yikra, the very first word of the Book of Leviticus, written smaller than the others? It is smaller, suggests the Ba'al Haturim, because it reveals Moses's humility, teaching an ethical lesson. Moses preferred the text to read va'yikar, without a final aleph, as va'yikar means "by chance." Rather than state that God called Moses (va'yikra), implying a constant close relationship, Moses in his modesty wished the text to read that on occasion, God spoke with him (va'yikar). Moses, of course, adheres to God's command that the aleph be included, but he does so humbly and writes a small aleph.

A second, more mystical thought comes from Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook, who proposes that the soul is comprised of Hebrew letters. When a person performs a mitzvah, the letters of that person's soul shine brightly, especially the aleph, the first letter of the alphabet, representing all Hebrew letters (since aleph literally means chief). In turn, the soulful lights of the letters, led by the aleph, inspire the doer of the mitzvah to draw closer to God. It does so gently, softly – hence it is written small.

Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach often told the story of the Munkatcher passport, which can also shape our understanding of the small aleph. A Chassid asked the Munkatcher Rebbe for a passport to travel from Munkatch (then part of Czechoslovakia) to Berlin before World War II.

Considering the climate of the times, the request seemed impossible to fulfill. After many hours, the Rebbe emerged from his private chambers and gave him an empty piece of paper soaked in tears, with which the chassid was escorted everywhere in Germany with great honor.

The Munkatcher passport surfaces over and over in our lives. When a bride walks around her groom, they give each other the Munkatcher passport. When children are born, they close their eyes and cry, giving to and receiving from their parents the Munkatcher passport. And when we stand near the Kotel and place a kvittel in its crevice, we do so with the Munkatcher passport. And, concluded Rabbi Carlebach, every tractate of the Talmud begins with daf bet (page 2). Where is daf aleph, the first page? It is blank, absolutely blank. It is the Munkatcher passport.

What is the Munkatcher passport? Perhaps it represents infinite love. The aleph of va'yikra is small to remind us of the importance of approaching God humbly, gently, and with daf aleph, with the Munkatcher passport – symbol of the unconditional love that we ought to have for God and that God has for us – and that we should all have for each other. ©2024 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

"The one thing that unites all human beings, regardless of age, gender, religion, economic status or ethnic background, is that, deep down inside, we all believe that we are above-average drivers." - Dave Barry

DONIEL T. TRENK

Remember to Not Forget!

If you were asked to rank the days in the Jewish calendar in order of importance, where would you place Purim? Probably not at the top. Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashana would likely come first, followed by Pesach, Sukkos, and Shavuot, and only then would we include Purim and Chanuka.

It is astonishing then, to read the following Medrash: כל המועדים ינוקלים לעולם, but the days of Purim will never be nullified.

How can we make sense of this teaching? Why is Purim, a minor Chag, a Mitzvah D'rabanan, a day of Chol lacking the seriousness of the Shalosh Regalim, the only one standing at the end of time? Further, aren't the Mitzvos eternal? How can the Yomim Tovim be nullified in the future?

A potential solution emerges if we interpret the Midrashic phrase "In the future" not as referring to the time of Moshiach but rather



to our present time, particularly the periods of persecution that many of our grandparents personally endured. As a vivid example, within the concentration camps built by the sons of Amalek, there was no Pesach Seder, no sitting in Sukkos or waving of the lulav, and certainly no staying up all night commemorating Matan Torah. There was no shofar or fasting unique to Yom Kippur (their “fasting” was every day of the year). In this shadow of death, all external signs of Jewry were abolished. The Yomim Tovim were effectively nullified- בטלים.

Yet, one thing remained: a small but powerful spark in the Jewish spirit that gave them the strength to carry on, the will to survive, and the hope for a better future. One uniquely Jewish idea passed down M’dor l’Dor, gave them a solid footing, a Kiyum L’olam.

The story of Purim gifts us with an enduring lesson about Jewish survival: despite periods of overwhelming Hester Panim where Hashem seems to have abandoned His people, during frightening times when evil men like Haman and Hitler, Yimach Shemam v’Zichram, ascend to the heights of power, we must remember- Zachor- that it can all be reversed, turned on its head, and be mehapech in no more than the blink of an eye, as it says, “Yeshuas Hashem k’Heref Ayin.”

When everything seems to be falling apart, the Purim message joyously lifts our spirits by reminding us- and we should never forget- that Hester Panim is but a disguise. At any moment, the mask can be removed, and the curtain lifted, to reveal the One who was orchestrating the show all along. And when we seem utterly helpless, we remember that Hashem is fighting our wars as His very own, “Milchama l’Hashem b’Amalek Mi’Dor Dor.”

In the “future,” the Yomim Tovim will often be “nullified”; they may not sustain us due to the pressures of an unforgiving Galus. Yet, Purim will always be there, calling out to us with hope and joy and reminding us to remain strong for now and forever.

“These days of Purim will never leave the Jewish people and their memory will not be lost to its children” (Esther 9:28). © 2024 D. Trenk

A chicken crossing the road is poultry in motion

RABBI DAVID S. LEVIN

Me’ilah: Misuse of the Holy

The Book of Vayikra (Leviticus) discusses the offerings (korbanot) brought to the Temple as the way in which the Kohanim would perform their service to Hashem. If the korban was the type called kodshei kadashim, a higher level of offering, certain parts would belong to the Kohanim and certain parts were placed on the Altar. There were also korbanot that were of a lower level of holiness, kodshei kalim, parts of which

were eaten by the person bringing the offering. These kodshei kalim were not subject to punishment for misuse as they were not exclusively for the Temple. Even those edible portions of kodshei kadashim that were given to the Kohanim, once the blood of the offering was sprinkled in its proper place, no longer were subject to punishment for misuse. If a person accidentally misused a portion of the kodshei kadashim that were exclusively designated for the Kohein or the Altar prior to the sprinkling of the blood, he would receive a punishment that was defined in this week’s parasha. This misuse of an item designated exclusively for the Holy was called me’ilah. As part of the discussion of an Asham, a guilt-offering for an accidental sin, the Torah discusses the misuse of the holy, as the punishment for unintentional misuse of holy objects includes an asham-offering.

The Torah states, “If a person will commit a misuse, and sins unintentionally against Hashem’s holies, he shall bring a guilt-offering (Asham) to Hashem, an unblemished ram from the flock, with a value of silver shekels, according to the sacred shekel, for an asham-offering. For what he has deprived the Sanctuary he shall make restitution, and add a fifth to it, and he shall give it to the Kohein; then the Kohein shall provide him atonement with the ram of the guilt-offering and it shall be forgiven him.”

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that the Torah looks upon gezel hediot, theft from non-holy objects, as more serious than gezel gavo’ah, theft from Hashem, sometimes called gezel hekdesch, stealing or misuse of property designated exclusively as holy. This is evidenced by the words “cheit, the sin of theft,” and “me’ilah, sin by misuse of the Holy.” When the Torah references gezel hediot, the Torah uses the word cheit before me’ilah: “when one sins and commits me’ilah.” When referencing me’ilah in our parasha, it mentions me’ilah before cheit: “when a soul commits me’ilah and sins, v’chat’ah accidentally.” One of the reasons for this change in order has to do with the laws involved in theft and misuse of holy things. With theft of non-holy things, the moment the thief removes the object from the area of the owner, he is guilty of a transgression. With me’ilah, one is not guilty until one gets a benefit from misusing that which is holy property. In this way, if a person mistakenly takes something which is designated as holy, and he then realizes his mistake before using the object and returns it, he is not guilty of a transgression. But only in this way is gezel hediot more severe than gezel gavo’oh. If a person steals from holy things on purpose (b’mездid), the punishment is death; should he steal from holy things by accident (b’shogeig), the punishment is the value plus an additional fifth and a korban. With a simple accidental theft from non-holy objects, the thief only pays the value of the object; if the theft was on



purpose, he does not pay the additional fifth plus a korban unless he lies to the court in his testimony.

The punishments as listed cause a larger question. Why is the punishment for unintentional misuse (stealing) of holy property even greater than intentional misuse (stealing) of another non-holy property? The payment of an additional fifth and the Asham offering is applied for the unintentional misuse of holy objects, but is only required of an intentional misuse if the misuser lies to the court. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that the punishment for accidental theft of a holy object is a warning against intentional misuse, since an intentional theft of holy possessions is punishable by death. It is not unlike other major warnings concerning things and places which are holy. The Torah warns against entering the area of the Temple with one's staff or while wearing sandals. One must be cognizant at all times when approaching places which are designated as holy. Hashem warns, "And from my Temple you shall be in fear, I am Hashem." That is the reason that me'ilah precedes cheit in the Torah, for lightheartedness will cause accidental misuse of the holy which can lead to a greater sin. The thief who steals from non-holy objects is different. A poor person might say, "He is rich and I am poor. His money also came to him by theft." When one has already decided that everyone is a thief, he has already justified theft in his mind. The Rashbam explains that man is warned against even minor theft in his business transactions, as, without this, it might encourage the conviction that theft is justified.

HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch presents us with a different perspective on Me'ilah. He quotes the Gemara Me'ilah (18a), "There is no ma'al without a change." Hirsch notes that the same expression is used when a woman is unfaithful to her husband as is used when the people are unfaithful to Hashem. The Torah sees this "as behaving differently from the way one was justified in expecting from you." This involves "behaving towards the holy things of Hashem differently to what is expected of us, considering what they were meant to be." There are two forms of holy things: (1) kadshei mizbeach, holy things which are themselves holy, and if used is a change of its holiness, its separation for the service of Hashem, making the sacred into the profane; and (2) kadshei bedek habayit, those things which are not inherently holy but have been donated to the Temple to be sold and used for the upkeep of the Temple. The change here is one of possession (even temporarily). This does not require personal use of the object; one could give a piece of jewelry owned by the Temple to someone else to wear. If damage is done to the object without any personal use or benefit, it does not come under the heading of me'ilah.

Misuse of any physical property that becomes dedicated to the Temple was taken very seriously. Taking something which is holy and using it in a way that makes it profane reverses the Divine plan for Man. Hashem

created the Torah in such a way that enables Man to uplift the profane and dedicate it to a holy purpose. That is what Man must strive to accomplish. We spend our lives performing simple actions, often just living our lives without goals and purpose. This is our profane which we must uplift to the holy. The study of Torah raises our level of holiness; every mitzvah which we perform adds to our spiritual growth. We must not take the Words of Torah and distort them to fit today's ever-changing morals. We must not misuse our Holy Torah and make it profane. We must uplift the profane and make it holy for Hashem. ©2024 Rabbi D. Levin

*Why do cows have hooves instead of feet?
Because they lactose!*



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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

*"Anyone who lives within their means suffers from a lack of imagination."
-Oscar Wilde*

RABBI YITZCHOK ADLERSTEIN

Saving the Tzadik

“He called to Moshe. Hashem spoke to him from the Ohel Moed, saying: Speak to the Bnei Yisrael, and say to them...” (Vayikra 1:1-2) There is a lot of speaking and saying before we get to the final message. Clearly, besides taking the instructions about the details of korbanos to the Bnei Yisrael, Moshe was to deliver a preliminary message to them. Rashi explains this to be, "dominating words: tell them that it is only on their account that Hashem speaks to me." This is difficult to understand. These words hardly express Moshe pitting himself against them, and effectively subjugating them. To the contrary. They are quite flattering to the Bnei Yisrael; they diminish Moshe's own importance, and credit the people as being the power behind his prophecy.

To add to the confusion, two positions in a midrash dispute the matter. (Yalkut Shimoni #431) One sees the community -- not Moshe -- as the purpose for the Divine Word revealing itself in the Ohel Moed. The second insists that it was for Moshe's benefit. Which is it?

The key to understanding all of this can be found in a few pesukim in Tehillim. (Tehillim 51:19-21) "The korban that pleases G-d is a humble spirit. A broken and contrite heart, dear G-d, You never reject. May You delight in doing good for Tziyon. Please build the walls of Yerushalayim. Then You will be happy with sincere offerings...Bulls will again be offered on Your altar."

There is much to unpack here. The second sentence seems to be a gratuitous repetition of the first. The last line indicates that the ones that preceded it speak of a time when bulls were not offered on the mizbeach. How's that?

These pesukim, I believe, deal with a time in which there is no beis hamikdosh, and actual korbanos are not brought. What substitutes during the periods of exile? Tzadikim, those with a humble spirit. Hashem takes them from us in place of korbanos. In turn, our response to those deaths should be broken and contrite hearts, which He will never reject. (Although we ordinarily emphasize that the Shechinah cannot dwell where there is depression, that is true only of our mood in general prayer. When a tzadik is taken from us, it is specifically our brokenness that invites in the Shechinah!) Thus, the second phrase in the pasuk in Tehillim is not a repetition. It refers to a different group of broken hearts -- those of the people, mourning the loss of a tzadik!

Now, the sacrifice of the life of a tzadik is an enormous loss. But when the sins of the people stand confronted by midas hadin -- particularly when there is no beis hamikdosh, and therefore no possibility of bringing the prescribed offerings -- the tzadik becomes a principal means of atonement. We therefore ask Hashem to rebuild Yerushalayim and the beis hamikdosh, so that the korbanos specified by the Torah can once again be offered on the altar, thus sparing the tzadikim!

The tzadik's relationship with korbanos is therefore a mixed bag. On the one hand, he doesn't really need them for his own kapparah. He possesses the "humble spirit" that Hashem considers to be a super-korban. (Certainly this is true of Moshe, the most humble of humans, ever!)

On the other hand, the tzadik desperately needs korbanos, because when they are not brought, he might become the substitute offering, and lose his life! So both opinions in the midrash are correct. The korbanos were only needed by the rest of the people, but Yet, they particularly served Moshe, lest as atonement for the generation. And Moshe's words to them were harsh and dominating: "Were it not for all your sins, I would have no personal need for the korbanos. Now that you have sinned, I need them for my survival!"

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Why is the rum gone?

not Moshe. he be taken



Pie-Rum Samayach!