**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT VAYIKRA**

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Motzaei Shabbat

Parashat Vayikra begins with the basic laws related to the voluntary *ola* sacrifice, which would be entirely burnt upon the altar. The final type of *ola* discussed by the Torah is the *olat ha-of* – a bird offering, which was typically brought by the poor, who wished to offer a sacrifice but could not afford an animal.

The Torah (1:16-17) requires that after the bird is killed, it must be placed on the altar nearly in its entirety, the only exception being the area containing the bird’s waste. Rashi (1:17), citing the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabba* 3:5), notes the seeming peculiarity in the Torah’s requirement to place the bird’s feathers on the altar together with the rest of the bird. He asks, “Isn’t there no ordinary person who smells the foul odor of burnt wings and is not repulsed?” Placing the entire bird in fire produces a foul odor, and it thus seems strange that the Torah would issue such a command. The reason, Rashi explains, is so that “the altar will be satiated and glorified by the sacrifice of a poor person.” This offering is especially precious because it would be offered by a poor person, who was likely making a considerable financial sacrifice by bringing a bird as an offering to God. Therefore, the entire bird is welcomed on the altar – even the portion that emits a foul odor – given the special quality of this sacrifice.

One of the lessons conveyed by the Midrash’s comment is that we must be prepared to endure a degree of discomfort for the sake of lifting the spirits of a downtrodden person. The interest in showing respect to the poor person offering his small bird as a sacrifice, and in giving him the gratification of seeing the entire bird offered on the altar, warranted the extreme measure of allowing a putrid smell in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. The *kohanim* and the others in the area would be subjected to this foul odor because of the encouragement and satisfaction the pauper would receive knowing that he brought a substantial sacrifice. If the feathers would be removed, the remaining portions of the bird would comprise a very small sacrifice, which would cause the poor individual to feel uneasy and ashamed. In order to protect him from these feelings, the Torah required everyone in the Temple courtyard to endure a foul odor, teaching us that we must be sensitive to people’s feelings even at the expense of our comfort. We are expected to go to great lengths, and even to put ourselves in unpleasant situations, when this is necessary to lift a person’s spirits and bring comfort and succor to an embittered soul.

Sunday

Yesterday, we noted Rashi’s comments, based on the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabba* 3:5), regarding the *olat ha-of* – the bird sacrifice which would be offered by a poor person who could not afford an animal sacrifice. The Torah (1:17) requires placing nearly the entire bird on the altar, including the feathers, leading Rashi to ask, “Isn’t there no ordinary person who smells the foul odor of burnt wings and is not repulsed?” Despite the foul odor produced by placing the feathers on the altar, the Torah nevertheless required doing so, because, in Rashi’s words, “the altar will be satiated and glorified by the sacrifice of a poor person.”

The Tolna Rebbe noted that in posing his question, Rashi observes that an “ordinary person” (“*hedyot*”) would be repulsed. Interestingly, it is not all people that would be disgusted by the stench of burning feathers, but only “ordinary” or simple people. The Tolna Rebbe explained that when a person of stature would smell the odor of a poor person’s bird offering, he would not be repulsed at all. He would pay no heed to the stench, and would experience nothing but joy and satisfaction over the sight of a downtrodden individual making a great sacrifice by offering a bird as a *korban*. People who truly recognize the value and significance of *mitzvot*, and have an appreciation for the inestimable worth of every sacrifice that is made for the sake of *avodat Hashem*, would not react to the smell, and would instead rejoice and marvel over this display of religious commitment.

This insight teaches us about the perspective we must have on the immeasurablevalue of *mitzvot*, but also about the need to view other people from a positive, favorable vantage point. When a poor person brings a sacrifice that emits a foul odor, we should focus not on the disagreeable aspect of the sacrifice, but rather on its admirable quality – the heroic devotion displayed by the pauper. It is a sign of cynicism and negativity to react to this sacrifice by complaining about the odor, whereas admiring and marveling at the pauper’s sacrifice is a sign of nobility and refinement. *Chazal* here teach us to judge and assess people’s actions from a positive viewpoint, to focus our attention on the admirable elements of people’s behavior, rather than on the negative aspects. All people make noble “sacrifices” of one kind or another, but we are also all guilty of unbecoming conduct that creates an “odor,” that invites disapproval and rejection. We are urged to overlook, as much as we can, the “odor” of people’s shortcomings, and to focus our minds on their qualities that we can admire, respect and seek to emulate.

Monday

Parashat Vayikra begins with God’s commands to Moshe regarding *korbanot nedava* – voluntary sacrifices that a person could bring to the Almighty in the *Mishkan* (and, later, in the *Beit Ha-mikdash*) if he so desired. God introduces this presentation with the words, “*Adam ki yakriv mi-kem korban le-Hashem*” – “When a person among you offers a sacrifice to the Lord…” (1:2).

Rashi, citing the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabba* 2:7), famously comments that the word “*adam*” in this verse alludes to Adam, the first human being. According to this Midrashic reading, the Torah here teaches, in Rashi’s words, “just like Adam Ha-rishon did not offer a sacrifice from stolen goods, you, too, should not offer sacrifices from stolen goods.” In introducing the laws of sacrifices, the Torah alludes to the fact that our sacrifices must resemble the sacrifice of Adam: just as Adam could not have possibly offered a stolen animal as a sacrifice, as all animals on earth at that time belonged to him, similarly, we cannot offer stolen goods as an offering to the Almighty.

Many commentators struggled to explain the Midrash’s comment. Is it not obvious that offering stolen goods as a sacrifice is illegitimate? Do we really need to look to Adam’s sacrifice as a model from which to infer this self-evident law? And once we are looking for a source, why would we point to the sacrifice brought by Adam, who did not even have the possibility of stealing? How does his example prove that stealing to bring a sacrifice is not legitimate for us, who share the world with others and are thus capable of theft?

These questions perhaps invite us to understand *Chazal*’s reference to “theft” in this context more broadly, as including more than simply stealing another person’s property.

We might suggest that *Chazal* speak here of “stealing” in the sense of imitation. Adam had nobody from whom to learn to bring a sacrifice. His sacrifice must have been sincere and genuine, and not just an attempt to imitate or copy somebody else’s deed. Adam could not have “stolen” this idea, and therefore must have offered a sacrifice out of a sincere desire to connect with his Creator, as opposed to cheaply imitating something he saw others doing.

It is perhaps this idea of sincerity and true devotion to which *Chazal* seek to draw our attention. Certainly, we are entitled, encouraged and expected to learn from and be influenced by the good deeds performed by the people around us. However, a fine line needs to be drawn between emulation and cheap imitation. Particularly when it comes to “*korbenot nedava*,” the voluntary *mitzvot* we wish to perform, beyond our strict halakhic obligations, our actions must be sincerely driven, motivated by a genuine desire to serve God, as opposed to a desire to conform with others or to blindly go along with a trend. We are to emulate the values, qualities and good deeds of other people, but out of a real, genuine desire to grow. Just as Adam was sincere in his sacrifice, our voluntary measures must likewise be sincerely driven, and not undertaken as simply a means to conform and be like the people around us.

Tuesday

As we saw yesterday, the Torah in the beginning of Sefer Vayikra introduces the topic of voluntary sacrifices with the phrase, “*Adam ki yakriv mi-kem korban le-Hashem*” – “When a person among you offers a sacrifice to the Lord…” (1:2). The *Midrash Tanchuma*, like the Midrashic passage cited by Rashi (as discussed yesterday), associates the word “*adam*” in this verse with Adam, the first human being, but it explains this association differently than Rashi, commenting, “It [the Torah] wishes to say that when a person sins like Adam Ha-rishon, the first person to sin, he should offer a sacrifice.”

Why would the Midrash make reference to Adam Ha-rishon’s sin in this context? How does the story of Adam in *Gan Eden* relate to the notion of offering a sacrifice as a means of atonement?

The explanation, perhaps, is that *Chazal* here seek to offer encouragement to those who have sinned and have doubts about the prospects of God accepting their repentance. The Midrash reminds us that the process of sin and repentance is as old as humanity itself, that already the very first human being failed to observe the only command he was given, and although he was punished, he earned God’s favor and forgiveness. The obligation of *teshuva* requires us to maintain a delicate balance between shame and remorse, on the one hand, and, on the other, a realistic perspective on our inherently flawed nature, and a recognition that we are not expected to be perfect. Just as repentance is not possible without an appreciation for the gravity of sin and of violating the will of the King of the universe, repentance is likewise impossible without the firm belief that the King wants us to continue serving Him and striving for perfection even after making grievous mistakes. And thus right at the outset of the Torah’s discussion of sacrifices, as we begin to study the laws relevant to those who seek to earn God’s favor after sinning, we are reminded of the example of Adam. We are told to have confidence in God’s compassion in light of the long history of *teshuva*, which began with the history of humankind. Just as Adam earned the Almighty’s favor by repenting after his sin, we, too, are able to access God’s boundless compassion through sincere *teshuva* and prayer, regardless of how far we have fallen.

Wednesday

The opening verse of Parashat Vayikra tells of God summoning Moshe inside the *Mishkan* for the first time since its construction. The final verses of Sefer Shemot tell that Moshe stood outside the *Mishkan* after it was assembled, as the cloud, signifying God’s presence, had descended upon the *Mishkan*. Now, as Sefer Vayikra opens, God calls to Moshe from inside the *Mishkan*.

The Midrash (*Vayikra Rabba* 1) notes the significance of the fact that Moshe waited outside the *Mishkan* until he was summoned by God:

On this basis it was said: Any Torah scholar without *dei’a* [wisdom] – an animal carcass is better than him… Go learn from Moshe, the father of wisdom and the father of all the prophets, who led Israel from Egypt, through whom numerous miracles were performed in Egypt and wonders at the Sea of Reeds, who ascended to the highest heavenly spheres and brought the Torah down from the heavens, and who involved himself in the work of the *Mishkan* – and yet he did not enter inside until he was called.

The Midrash here teaches that if a scholar lacks the kind of “wisdom” displayed by Moshe, who waited outside the *Mishkan* until he was called inside, then “an animal carcass is better than him.” What precise quality is the Midrash referring to, and why do they use specifically the image of an animal carcass?

The example set here by Moshe is one of humility, but a particular kind of humility, namely, avoiding feelings of entitlement and privilege despite one’s outstanding accomplishments. As the Midrash emphasizes, nobody could have possibly deserved the right to enter the *Mishkan* more than Moshe Rabbenu, and yet he humbly waited outside. It has been suggested that this quality reflects true “*dei’a*” because one who truly pursues and acquires knowledge recognizes how much he still does not know and understand. The more one knows, the more he realizes how much knowledge he lacks. Somebody with true “*dei’a*” does not feel entitled to any special privileges or honor because he is keenly aware – more than ordinary people – of how much he has not yet achieved. And so a scholar who demands recognition and privileges, who feels that his achievements entitle him to respect and special benefits, lacks true “wisdom,” because true wisdom leads a person to recognize his smallness and limited achievements.

This is true not only of scholarship, but of all areas of personal achievement. The more we grow in any area, the more we realize how much more there remains to be achieved. Growth should lead us to humility, not pride, because as we grow we become more aware of how much we have not yet grown.

And thus the Midrash says about an arrogant scholar, “an animal carcass is better than him.” A carcass is expected to rot and decompose; it is a natural process that everyone anticipates. But if somebody lacks humility due to his achievements, he does not recognize his potential decline, he does not expect that he will “rot.” He feels secure in his achievements, when in truth, there is still so much more that he has not accomplished. And so he is, in a certain sense, lower than an animal carcass, as he does not anticipate the regression that his arrogance and complacency will undoubtedly produce.

Thursday

Yesterday, we noted the well-known comment of the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabba* 1), Any Torah scholar without *dei’a* [wisdom] – an animal carcass is better than him…” This remark was made in reference to the humility and respect shown by Moshe Rabbenu after the *Mishkan* was constructed. Despite all he had achieved, Moshe felt unworthy of entering the *Mishkan* before being summoned by the Almighty, and so he remained outside until he was called. This kind of decency and courtesy is expected of all Torah scholars, and somebody who has acquired Torah knowledge but fails to live at this standard of “*dei’a*” – common-sense respect and courtesy – is deemed worse than “an animal carcass.”

To explain the unusual image of a carcass mentioned by the Midrash, the Maggid of Duvna points to the long-term impact and repercussions of a scholar’s inappropriate conduct. When a Torah figure acts discourteously, disrespectfully or without proper discretion, this creates a ripple effect that spreads far and wide. News of his misconduct is shared and disseminated, and remembered by all. The “juicy” nature of such gossip makes it especially potent, and it reaches the ears of people very distant from the scholar, and remains in circulation for many years after the incident. For this reason, the Maggid explains, such a scholar is described as being worse than an odorous animal carcass. A carcass emits an offensive stench, but that stench gradually subsides as the carcass decomposes. Soon enough, nothing is left of the foul-smelling body. The “odor” of indiscretion by a Torah personality, however, does not subside. It remains in the air and continues spreading, bringing shame to Torah and those committed to Torah, and engendering feelings of disgust and resentment for Torah and all it represents. The memory of this misconduct lingers far longer than the stench of a carcass, and thus yields disastrous and far-reaching long-term effects. *Chazal* here warn us of the vital need to build our Torah lives upon a foundation of “*dei’a*,” common-sense decency, in order to avoid the catastrophic consequences of dishonoring Torah through unbecoming behavior.

Friday

The Torah in Parashat Vayikra (2:13) introduces the obligation to add salt to sacrifices. Although the immediate context of this command is the *korban mincha* (meal offering), the Gemara (Menachot 20-21) establishes that it in truth applies to all sacrifices. The Rambam discusses this obligation in Hilkhot Issurei Mizbei’ach (5:11), where he writes that the Torah requires salting “all sacrifices before they are brought onto the altar.”

A number of commentators inferred from the Rambam’s formulation that in his view, the requirement to salt sacrifices applies only to the portions that are placed on the altar, whereas the portions of sacrifices that are eaten do not require salt. He formulates this obligation as a command to salt all sacrifices before they are placed on the altar, indicating that it is relevant only to those portions which are offered on the altar, as opposed to the portions which are eaten by the *kohanim* or by others.

This issue is subject to a debate among the *Rishonim*. The Ra’a, in his *Bedek Ha-bayit* critique of the Rashba’s *Torat Ha-bayit* (3:3), maintains that all portions of sacrifices require salting. He explains on this basis the Gemara’s comment in Masekhet Menachot (21a) that the procedure for adding salt to sacrifices must be followed also “for roasting” (*li-tzli*). The commentators struggled to explain this passage, which seems to imply that meat must be salted to remove the blood even before roasting, as opposed to the conventional assumption that roasting alone suffices to remove the animal’s blood. The Ra’a therefore suggested that the Gemara refers to portions of animal sacrifices which are roasted for consumption, and instructs that they require salting – not to remove the blood, but because even these sacrificial portions require salting just like the portions which are placed on the altar. This view, of course, stands in direct contradistinction to the implication of the Rambam. The Rashba, in his *Mishmeret Ha-bayit* (his sharp response to the Ra’a’s critique), dismisses the Ra’a’s reading of the Gemara, asserting that the obligation to salt sacrifices applies only to the portions placed on the altar. (The Rashba follows a different version of the text of the Gemara, according to which the text reads, “*li-kdeira*,” rather than “*li-tzli*,” and refers to salting ordinary meat before boiling it in a pot.)

Interestingly enough, this issue comes into play in the discussions concerning a practical halakhic question relevant to Pesach. The Mishna in Masekhet Pesachim (35a) establishes that one may, under certain circumstances, fulfill his *matza* obligation on Pesach with the unleavened portions of sacrificial bread. The *korban toda* (thanksgiving offering), as well as the sacrifice brought by a *nazir* upon completing his term of *nezirut*, include loaves of unleavened bread, and according to the Mishna, these are eligible for the *matza* obligation on the night of the *seder* under certain conditions. The Rosh (Pesachim 2:23) cites those who prove on the basis of this Mishna that *matza* baked with salt is permissible for Pesach, and is not assumed to have undergone leavening due to the salt content. Since sacrifices require the addition of salt, the fact that the Mishna permits the use of sacrificial bread for *matza* necessarily proves that bread baked with salt may be eaten on Pesach.

The Rosh, however, refutes this argument, asserting – in according with the view of the Rashba, and the implied view of the Rambam – that salting is required only for portions of sacrifices placed on the altar. The bread accompanying the *korban toda* and sacrifice of a *nazir* is eaten, not offered on the altar, and thus it does not require salting. Hence, its eligibility for the *mitzva* of *matza* cannot provide any proof regarding the status of *matza* baked with salt. Those who brought this view, of course, followed the Ra’a’s opinion, that all portions of sacrifices require salting, even those which are not offered on the altar.

As for the issue of baking *matza* with salt, the *Shulchan Arukh* (O.C. 455:5) codifies the practice to avoid adding salt to the *matza* dough, and the Rama adds that even after the fact, if this was done, one should not use the *matza* on Pesach. The *Mishna Berura* (455:42) cites those who maintain that even according to the Rama’s stringent ruling, if a small amount of salt was added to the batter just before it was placed into the oven, then the *matza* is permissible, as under these circumstances the salt cannot cause any fermentation process.

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