**S.A.L.T. – PARASHAT VAYIKRA**

**By Rav David Silverberg**

Motzaei Shabbat

One of the sacrifices described in Parashat Vayikra is an offering referred to by *Chazal* as the “*korban oleh va-yoreid*” (literally, “the sacrifice that ascends and descends”). It is so named because the size of the offering depends on the individual’s financial status. One who commits one of the transgressions requiring a *korban oleh ve-yoreid* offers a female sheep or goat, but if he is poor and cannot afford an animal, he instead brings two birds (5:6-7). If he cannot afford even two birds, then he brings a grain offering (5:11).

Interestingly, in the case of an individual who brings two birds, the birds are offered as different sacrifices – one is offered as a *chatat* (sin-offering) and the other, an *ola* (burnt offering). Several practical differences exist between these two sacrifices, including the fact that when a bird is brought as an *ola*, its head is completely severed from the body, while in the case of a *chatat*, the head remains attached. Moreover, whereas the *ola ha-of* (bird brought as a burnt-offering) is entirely burned on the altar, the meat of the bird *chatat* is eaten by the *kohanim*.

In any event, the question arises as to why a poor person requiring this sacrifice would need both an *ola* and a *chatat*, whereas others bring just a *chatat*. If the Torah sought to lessen the financial burden on a person facing financial hardship, why did it require him to bring two small sacrifices, instead of just one?

Ibn Ezra (5:7) cites “Rav Yitzchak” as suggesting that the needy individual must bring a second sacrifice because of the likelihood that he feels embittered over his condition. Upon becoming obligated to bring a sacrifice, he realizes that had he been more financially secure, he would have been able to bring a more respectable sacrifice, but instead, he is forced to bring a small sacrifice. In case he harbors resentful feelings towards the Almighty, instead of serenely accepting his condition, he is required to bring a second sacrifice.

Rav Eliyahu Baruch Finkel deduces from this remark cited by Ibn Ezra a meaningful insight into the famous rabbinic adage, “*kin’at sofrim tarbeh chokhma*” (“jealousy among scholars increases wisdom” – Bava Batra 22a). This statement, essentially, encourages jealousy among scholars, teaching that it is beneficial for the field of Torah scholarship when students feel envious of their more accomplished peers, as this incentivizes achievement, thus engendering greater ambition. More broadly, this adage has been understood as establishing the benefits of jealousy regarding religious achievement generally. We are encouraged to envy those who are more righteous and devoted, as this will motivate and drive us to raise our own standards. However, Rav Finkel noted, a crucial difference exists between envying the work and effort of our more accomplished peers, and envying their natural talents or their favorable circumstances which allowed them to achieve. In the case of the *korban oleh ve-yoreid*, the struggling individual is penalized for envying those who are blessed with the ability to purchase a larger sacrifice. This ability is due solely to Providence, as it is God who determines each person’s financial standing. Therefore, Rav Finkel explains, the disadvantaged individual should not feel envious of his peers’ larger sacrifice. We are not to feel envious of other people’s God-given strengths and capabilities which enable them to offer “large sacrifices.” Religious envy is appropriate when it relates to other people’s utilizing their God-given talents and abilities, not to the talents and abilities themselves. God gives each of us a set of skills and circumstances for us to use to its fullest, and therefore what matters most is not the final product, the “size” of the “sacrifice” that we offer, but rather the extent to which we maximized our potential and ability. Our “*kin’at sofrim*,” then, should be roused not necessarily by those who achieve the most, but rather by those who work hard to achieve the most they can.

Sunday

Yesterday, we noted Ibn Ezra’s discussion (Vayikra 5:7) regarding the *korban oleh ve-yoreid* – the sin-offering required to atone for certain transgressions, which applies differently to people in different financial situations. A financially secure individual brings a sheep or a goat; a needy person brings two birds; and a destitute person brings a grain offering. The two birds brought by those in the middle category are offered as two separate sacrifices – one as a *chatat* (sin-offering), and the other as an *ola* (burnt offering). Ibn Ezra cited a source explaining that the second offering is required to atone for the angry thoughts and feelings which the disadvantaged individual likely has over his difficult condition. People enduring financial hardship often complain and express resentment towards God, and thus when a poor person is required to bring a *korban oleh ve-yoreid*, a second sacrifice is added to atone for his resentful thoughts.

Chida, in his *Penei David*, raises the obvious question of why, according to this explanation cited by Ibn Ezra, the additional sacrifice is required only in the middle case, when the individual can afford birds but not an animal. As we saw, there is also a third category – those who cannot even afford birds, whom the Torah allows to earn atonement through a simple grain offering. Why are these needy individuals not required to offer a second sacrifice to atone for their feelings of grievance?

Chida explains, very simply, that for people in this condition, facing severe hardship, such feelings are understandable. Atonement is needed for the times when we complain about relatively common and tolerable difficulties. If a person is struggling and cannot afford what most others can afford, this should not cause bitterness and anger. But in the case of a person enduring actual deprivation, these emotions are excusable. God does not demand atonement for such a person’s thoughts of bitterness, because he truly suffers, and so these thoughts are natural and understandable.

Chida’s comments perhaps remind us that while on the one hand, we are expected to strive for, and demand from ourselves, very high standards, at the same time, we must recognize and accept our human limitations. A delicate balance must be maintained between high ambitions and realism. God, who created us as frail, limited creatures, recognizes our constraints and the pressures we face. We, too, must recognize our limits, and strive to achieve as much as we can without being discouraged by our inability to achieve more than that.

Monday

Towards the end of Parashat Vayikra, the Torah discusses several different situations of theft, and addresses the specific case of a thief who falsely denies the crime on oath. In such a case, the Torah requires the thief (when he repents, of course) to return the stolen goods, and then bring a sacrifice for atonement. The command in this section to return the stolen goods – “*ve-heishiv et ha-gezeila asher gazal*” (5:23) – is the source of the *mitzvat asei* (affirmative command) requiring a person who stole to return what he stole to the victim. (See *Sefer Ha-chinukh*, 125.)

The Mishna in Masekhet Bava Kama (103a) establishes that if a thief falsely denied his crime on oath, he bears an obligation to do whatever it takes to return the stolen goods. Even if the owner is very far away, the thief must bring the stolen goods to the victim. The Gemara infers this provision from a verse in Sefer Bamidbar (“*la-asher hu lo yitenenu*” – Bamidbar 5:7). The clear implication of the Mishna is that if the thief did not falsely swear, then he is not required to bring the stolen goods all the way to the victim. Accordingly, the *Shulchan Arukh* (C.M. 367:1) rules that in such a case, if the victim is far away, the thief can keep the stolen goods with him until the victim is in the area. The Rama adds that the thief must inform the victim that he has the stolen goods and wishes to return it, so the victim can come retrieve them. It is unclear from the Rama whether he is referring to a situation where the victim is far away, or to the time when the victim comes to the area. In other words, the Rama is either qualifying the exemption from bringing the stolen goods to the victim, explaining that the thief nevertheless bears the responsibility to contact the victim and inform him that he has the goods, or instructs that once the victim comes to the area, the thief must reach out to him. (See *Sema* and *Shakh*.)

Regardless, the question arises as to why the thief is not required to do whatever is takes to return the stolen goods. Why is it only in the case of a false oath that this is required? Why doesn’t *Halakha* demand of every thief that he incur the travel or delivery expenses necessary to ensure the victim receives the stolen property?

The *Sema* (367:2) explains that this provision was enacted for the purpose of “*takanat ha-shavim*” – in order to make the penitence process easier, so as to encourage thieves to repent. If the obligations cast upon a penitent thief were too difficult, thieves would be far less likely to go through the process, and so *Chazal* enacted several provisions to ease the burden. According to the *Sema*, the rule exempting a thief from bringing the stolen property to the victim in a far-away land falls under this category.

The *Shakh* (367:2), however, disagrees. In his view, which he claims is indicated by the Gemara, this provision reflects Torah law, and is not a later enactment by *Chazal*.

The question, then returns: why does the Torah absolve the thief from bringing the stolen goods to the victim?

One approach to answering this question is offered by Rav Yechiel Michel Epstein, in *Arukh Ha-shulchan* (C.M. 367:3), who suggests that *Chazal* apparently interpreted the Biblical command to mean that the thief needs to assure the victim that the goods would be returned. The command, “He shall return the stolen item which he stole” should not be taken literally, to mean that the thief must actually hand the item to the victim, but should rather be understood as requiring the thief to make the item available to the victim such that the victim is confident that he will retrieve it. The *Arukh Ha-shulchan* follows the view that if the victim is far away, the thief must inform him that he wishes to return what he stole, and this, according to the *Arukh Ha-shulchan*, is the definition of the command, “*ve-heishiv et ha-gezeila asher gazal*” – a requirement to assure the victim that the stolen property is available to be returned.

The *Arukh Ha-shulchan* answers on this basis a question many have raised regarding the Rambam’s formulation in discussing this law. In *Hilkhot Gezeila* (7:9), the Rambam gives a reason for why a thief who falsely denied the crime on oath is required to bring the item to the owner, even if he is far away. The Rambam explains that this is required because once the thief falsely swears, the owner despairs of ever retrieving his item until he actually receives it, as he no longer trusts the thief. And for this reason, the Rambam writes, the thief must track down the owner and bring him the stolen goods. Since the owner in this case is unlikely to make any effort to try to retrieve what was taken, the thief bears the responsibility to go bring him the lost item. Many *Acharonim* noted that this reasoning does not appear in the Gemara, and they wondered how the Rambam arrived at such a theory. The *Arukh Ha-shulchan* suggests that since the Gemara distinguished between situations where the thief falsely swore and situations where no oath was taken, the Rambam deduced that the command to return a stolen item is defined as making the stolen item available to the victim. If no oath was taken, this means simply that the thief must make the victim aware of his willingness to return it, but once an oath is taken, even informing the victim does not suffice, as the victim no longer trusts the thief, even if the thief expressing his preparedness to return the item. And therefore, specifically in such a case, the thief does not fulfill his obligation until he actually brings the item to the owner.

Tuesday

Yesterday, we noted the ruling of the *Shulchan Arukh* (C.M. 367:1) that when a thief wishes to repent, he is required to return what he stole, but he does not have to bring the item to the victim if the victim is far away. This is required only if the thief had falsely sworn that he did not commit the crime. As we saw, this ruling is based on the Mishna in Masekhet Bava Kama (103a), and the commentators to the *Shulchan Arukh* debate the question of whether the thief is required to at least send a message to the victim to inform him of his interest in returning the item. The question arises, though, as to why the Torah command of “*ve-heishiv et ha-gezeila asher gazal*” (“he shall return the stolen item that he stole” – Vayikra 5:23) does not require doing whatever it takes to return the stolen item.

The *Minchat Chinukh* (130), in addressing this question, references the Rama’s ruling (O.C. 656:1) that one is not required to spend an exorbitant amount of money (“*hon rav*”)for the sake of fulfilling an affirmative command (as opposed to avoiding a prohibition, which is required even at great expense, unless one’s life is threatened). (Specifically, Rabbeinu Yerucham (cited by the *Beit Yosef*, O.C. 656) states that one is not required to spend more one-fifth of his assets for the fulfillment of a *mitzva*.) As such, the *Minchat Chinukh* reasons, we could theoretically conceive of a scenario where a thief would be exempt from returning the stolen item because the expense is simply too much to demand for the fulfillment of this Biblical command. However, the Gemara and *Shulchan Arukh* do not seem to qualify this *halakha*, and it seems that if the thief is not local, but far away, then the thief does not have to bring him the stolen item, regardless of whether or not this incurs great expense. The *Minchat Chinukh* raises the question of why this is the case.

Rav Asher Weiss, in [his discussion of this topic](http://www.torahbase.org/%D7%A4%D7%A8%D7%A9%D7%AA-%D7%95%D7%99%D7%A7%D7%A8%D7%90-%D7%94%D7%A9%D7%91%D7%AA-%D7%92%D7%96%D7%99%D7%9C%D7%94/), suggests two answers. First, he proposes that the rules concerning the amount of expense one must be prepared to incur for fulfilling a *mitzva* do not apply to monetary obligations. The rule that one does not have to incur great expense for fulfilling a *mitzva* was said in the context of the obligation of *arba minim* (four species) on Sukkot, which is, quite obviously, not an inherently “financial” *mitzva*. When it comes to *mitzvot* which are, fundamentally, financial obligations, Rav Weiss suggests, the practical requirements are determined solely by the amount of money owed, and not by other factors. There is no maximum limit to one’s obligation – for example, one must repay whatever he stole and compensate for whatever damage he caused, no matter the amount – but there are also no additional requirements that can be imposed beyond the financial liability. A thief’s obligation is what he has to return or repay, but he bears no obligation to go through the trouble of tracking down the victim for this purpose. (In the case of a false denial on oath, however, as the Gemara explains, the thief must see to it that the stolen goods are returned as part of his atonement process.)

Secondly, Rav Weiss suggests that perhaps for all *mitzvot* one is not required to incur an unreasonable expense, and indeed, if the thief can bring or deliver the stolen item to the victim without incurring such an expense, he is required to do so. The exemption perhaps applies only if the victim is very far away, and a major journey would be necessary to bring him the stolen item, but otherwise, if only a minor expense involved, then the thief must, in fact, go through the trouble of returning the item.

Wednesday

The opening section of Parashat Vayikra speaks of the various *korbenot nedava* – voluntary sacrifices that a person has the option to bring (*ola*, *mincha* and *shelamim*). The Torah introduces this section with the phrase, “A person among you who offers a sacrifice to the Lord…” (1:2).

Rashi, citing the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabba* 2:7), famously notes the Torah’s use of the word “*adam*” (“person”) in this verse (as opposed to the more common term, “*ish*”), and explains that the Torah alludes here to Adam Ha-rishon. According to tradition, Adam offered a sacrifice to God after committing the sin of the forbidden tree. The Torah alludes to Adam’s sacrifice in this context, the Midrash comments, to indicate that just as Adam obviously did not bring a stolen animal as a sacrifice – as the entire earth belonged to him, so he was incapable of stealing – likewise, a person who wishes to offer a sacrifice may not offer a stolen animal.

The *Midrash Tanchuma* (Vayikra 8) offers a different explanation for the allusion to Adam in this verse: “It means to say – when a person sins, like Adam Ha-rishon, who was the first to sin, he shall offer a sacrifice.” Normally, a person who brings a voluntary sacrifice seeks atonement for a misdeed, and thus in speaking of such a case, the Torah makes a subtle reference to Adam, the first one to sin and seek atonement through the offering of a sacrifice.

We might wonder, according to the *Midrash Tanchuma*, why this allusion is necessary. Why must we be reminded of Adam’s sin and process of repentance in the context of the voluntary sacrifices?

Rav Yosef Salant, in his *Be’er Yosef*, suggests that this association is made to remind us of the consequences of wrongdoing. Adam’s sin serves as the paradigmatic example of a forbidden action that yielded drastic and catastrophic effects. Mankind forever forfeited the idyllic conditions of *Gan Eden*, and suffering, hardship and death were introduced into the world. The Torah thus alludes to the individual who has acted wrongly and seeks atonement to recognize that every action has consequences. The process of repentance must begin with not only an admission of guilt, but also the realization that somehow, and in some way, every wrongful act we commit and every wrongful word we utter has an effect on ourselves and upon the world. This realization, uncomfortable and unsettling as it is, must accompany our process of repentance and help motivate us to improve.

We might add, however, that the subtle reference to Adam also reminds us that notwithstanding the significant adverse consequences of wrongdoing, we are given the possibility of atonement and recovery. Despite the gravity of Adam’s sin and the gravity of its consequences, he was afforded the opportunity to repent and earn forgiveness. And thus as a person considers offering a sacrifice as a means of atonement, and naturally begins to wonder whether such a process is even possible in light of the seriousness of his misdeeds, he is reminded of the story of Adam. He is shown that indeed, even after the most catastrophic act of sin, we are, indeed, empowered to recover, to repair ourselves and our relationship with God, and to once again earn His favor, as long as we are sincere in our contrition and our desire to grow and improve.

Thursday

The Torah in Parashat Vayikra tells of the various sin-offerings that are required in different situations of wrongdoing. The first sacrifice in this category discussed in this section is the offering known as the *par kohen mashiach* – the bull offered by a *kohen gadol* if he commits a transgression. In introducing this case, the Torah speaks of a *kohen gadol* who commits a sin “*le-ashmat ha-am*” – literally, “for the guilt of the nation” (4:3). This is a very difficult expression to interpret, and has been explained in various different ways by the commentators.

*Torat Kohanim*, as Rashi cites, interprets this verse in halakhic terms, explaining that the phrase “*le-ashmat ha-am*” establishes parity between this sacrifice and the *par hei’aleim davar shel tzibur* – the sacrifice required when the people sin as a result of a mistaken ruling of the *Sanhedrin*. Later in this *parasha*, the Torah requires the *Sanhedrin* to offer an atonement sacrifice if they had issued an erroneous ruling on the basis of which the people inadvertently violated a capital offense (for which one is liable to *kareit*). The words “*le-ashmat ha-am*” establish that the *kohen gadol* brings a sacrifice in a similar case to that which requires the *Sanhedrin* to bring a sacrifice – namely, when the *kohen gadol* mistakenly determines that something is permissible, and acted upon that erroneous decision.

Rashi then cites a different explanation from the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabba* 5:6), which interprets “*le-ashmat ha-am*” to mean that the *kohen gadol*’s misdeeds result in the nation’s “guilt.” As the people depend on the *kohen gadol*’s service in the *Mikdash* for their atonement, his unworthiness directly affects them, and they become “guilty.” In a slightly different vein, Seforno explains that if the *kohen gadol* errs, the people are partly to blame, as the nation receives the leaders it deserves, such that the leaders’ wrongdoing reflects the shortcomings of the nation. Others, including the Rashbam, Ibn Ezra and Chizkuni, explain that the *kohen gadol*’s mistaken halakhic rulings result in “*ashmat ha-am*” – the nation’s guilt, because the people looked to the *kohanim* for religious guidance. Moshe famously proclaimed about the tribe of Levi in blessing the tribe before his death, “*Yoru mishpatekha le-Yaakov ve-toratekha le-Yisrael*” (Devarim 33:10) – that their job (among other things) is to teach the people Torah. Therefore, the *kohen gadol*’s halakhic misjudgment results in the nation’s “guilt,” as they will naturally follow his erroneous ruling.

An entirely different explanation is offered by Rav Simcha Zissel Ziv, the Alter of Kelm, in *Or Rashaz*. He suggests that “*le-ashmat ha-am*” means the people are held responsible for the leader’s wrongdoing if they noticed him acting improperly but failed to hold him to account, thus allowing him to continue. According to the Alter of Kelm, the Torah here speaks of a situation where the people could have protested the *kohen gadol*’s wrongful conduct, but out of respect for him and his position of stature, they remained silent. Hence, they bear a degree of guilt for his sinful behavior. As important as it is to show respect to people in prominent positions, this respect must not lead to an attitude of indifference towards these figures’ misconduct.

Interestingly, Rav Simcha Zissel views this case as an example of a broader concept - the need to balance important ideals and values. Just as the ideal of respecting religious leaders does not override the ideal of objecting to these leaders’ wrongful behavior, similarly, all other religious values are, in certain instances, counterbalanced by other, conflicting concerns. One example noted by the Alter of Kelm in this context is the *halakha* that an employee may not take time which is committed to his employer for prayer. As important as prayer is, it does not justify taking away work time for which one is being paid. All values are subject to limitations, and must occasionally give away to equally important values in situations of conflict. And thus in the case of an important public figure, too, the importance of showing such a figure respect must not overshadow the need to demand high moral and religious standards from our leaders.

Friday

The opening verses of Parashat Vayikra tell of God calling to Moshe from inside the newly-constructed *Mishkan*, and then proceeding to convey to him the instructions regarding the various forms of sacrifices.

*Torat Kohanim*, as cited by Rashi, notes the significance of the fact that God first called out to Moshe before communicating to him His commands. Before each time God spoke to Moshe, Rashi writes, He first called to Moshe. Rashi adds that this demonstrates God’s great love and affection for Moshe, calling him by name as a person calls a close, dear friend, rather than just communicating the message without a “friendly” introduction.

The question arises as to why *Chazal* make this point specifically in this context, at the beginning of Parashat Vayikra. This is not the first time we find God calling out to Moshe. He called to Moshe the very first time He spoke to him, at the burning bush (Shemot 3:4), and also from atop Mount Sinai after *Benei Yisrael* encamped by the mountain (Shemot 19:3). Why is it only in the context of Parashat Vayikra that *Chazal* comment about the significance of God’s calling to Moshe by name, noting how it expressed God’s special love for him?

Rav Kalonymus Kalman Shapiro of Piacezna, in his *Eish Kodesh* (a collection of sermons he delivered in the Warsaw Ghetto), suggested that *Chazal* perhaps seek to emphasize the “affectionate” quality of God’s “calling” even when it comes in the form of a “sacrifice.” The sacrifices represent the need to give of ourselves for the sake of religious observance, how Torah devotion often entails difficult challenges and imposes difficult demands. *Chazal* here teach that even the sacrifices that we are occasionally called upon to make are a “calling” which expresses God’s special and affection for us. The hardships and challenges we sometimes face should be approached as opportunities, as a “calling” to grow. Rather than feel embittered and demoralized, we should instead try to recognize that even life’s challenges are expressions of God’s love for us, to find their hidden blessings and great opportunities, and believe that God is lovingly “calling out” to us every day, summoning us to enter the “*Mishkan*” and serve Him even under trying circumstances. We will then offer each and every “sacrifice” with joy and satisfaction, trusting that each is warmly and lovingly accepted by the Almighty.

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