YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**student summaries of *Sichot* of the Roshei Yeshiva**

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**Parashat Vayikra**

***Sicha* of HarAV YaAkov medan**

**The Place of the Sacrificial Service in Our Lives**

Adapted by Itai Weiss

Translated by David Strauss

*Parashat Pekudei*,which we read but a week ago, ends with an amazing set of verses:

Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle. 

And Moshe was not able to enter into the Tent of Meeting, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle.

And whenever the cloud was taken up from over the Tabernacle, the Israelites went onward, throughout all their journeys. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they journeyed not till the day that it was taken up. 

For the cloud of the Lord was upon the Tabernacle by day, and there was fire therein by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys. (*Shemot* 40:34-38)

These utopian verses state the purpose of the *Mishkan* as it is presented in the Book of *Shemot*: to serve as a seat for the *Shekhina,* the Divine Presence. The Tabernacle is the place that expresses more than anything else our constant and daily connection with God. This is the House of Godfor which we yearn.

At the beginning of the Book of *Vayikra*, on the other hand, we encounter a different Tabernacle:

And the Lord called to Moshe, and spoke to him out of the Tent of Meeting, saying: Speak to the Israelites, and say to them: When any man of you brings an offering to the Lord, you shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd or of the flock. If his offering be a burnt-offering of the herd, he shall offer it a male without blemish; he shall bring it to the door of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD. And he shall lay his hand upon the head of the burnt-offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him. And he shall kill the bullock before the LORD; and Aaron’s sons, the priests, shall present the blood, and dash the blood round about against the altar…

And the priest shall bring [the bird] to the altar, and pinch off its head, and make it smoke on the altar; and the blood thereof shall be drained out on the side of the altar. And he shall take away its crop with the feathers thereof, and cast it beside the altar on the east part, in the place of the ashes. And he shall rend it by the wings thereof… )*Vayikra* 1:1-5, 15-17)

The *Mishkan* of the Book of *Vayikra* is an abattoir of offerings, a slaughterhouse. It is much more difficult for us to connect to thisTabernacle: who among us has ever wanted to kill an animal in order to atone for his or her actions?

Nevertheless, as we pray for the restoration of the Temple, we also ask for a renewal of the sacrificial service. It is impossible to separate between the two. While Rav David Kohen used Rav Avraham Yitzchak Ha-Kohen Kook's essays to compose his “Vision of Vegetarianism and Peace,” this conceptualization refers only to a much more advanced stage in history, the period of the resurrection, as Rav Kook himself makes clear in *Iggerot Ha-Re’aya*, No. 994, that the sacrificing of animals will be restored in the Third Temple: “For in the matter of the sacrifices, it is more correct to believe that everything shall be restored to its former state.”

Therefore, I am convinced that a necessary condition for the rebuilding of the Temple is our ability to identify with these concepts and draw them closer to us.

The sacrificial service, then, presents us with a difficult challenge, a life mission, the complexity of which, of course, I cannot solve in a few sentences. Seeing, however, that we are not exempt from dealing with the issue, I wish to clarify two important principles relating to the sacrificial service, which may serve as an opening for engaging with this formidable question.

First, the sacrificial service is never the sole manner by way of which we serve God.

The prophets are aware of the problems arising from a situation in which a person brings a sacrifice to the Temple and automatically that individual’s sins are pardoned. Therefore, they repeatedly emphasize that a sacrifice is only part of a person's comprehensive personal service.

Here are several examples:

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Add your burnt-offerings to your sacrifices, and eat you flesh. For I spoke not to your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings or sacrifices; but this matter I commanded them, saying: Hearken to My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people; and walk you in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you. (*Yirmeyahu* 7:21-23)

It is not Yirmeyahu's intention to abolish the sacrificial service, but rather to focus in God’s service on doing His will, while the sacrifices accompany that performance of His will.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Yeshayahu formulates this idea in similar language:

To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me? says the Lord; I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats.

When you come to appear before Me, who has required this at your hand, to trample My courts? Bring no more vain oblations; it is an offering of abomination to Me; new moon and sabbath, the holding of convocations, I cannot endure iniquity along with the solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed seasons My soul hates; they are a burden to Me; I am weary to bear them.

And when you spread forth your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even, when you make many prayers, I will not hear; your hands are full of blood. (*Yeshayahu* 1:11-15)

It seems to me that the words "your hands are full of blood" refer not to human blood, but to the blood of the sacrifices. During the time of Chizkiyahu, the people's hands are not full of human blood, but of the blood of sacrifices which God does not want when they come alone — without prayer, repentance and introspection.

Having put the sacrificial service in its proper place as a means that does not stand alone, but rather accompanies one's own personal worship of God, let us try to invest it with some meaning.

In my opinion, the sacrificial service is not something pleasant, nor do I ever think it will be so. We must recognize that the sacrificial service is intended to be service of God in a manner which makes us uneasy. As a rule, the Divine service is certainly supposed to be pleasant and comfortable, but all this is true when our hands are clean of sin. It is possible to prove from the plain sense of the verses that all sacrifices come to atone for transgressions. When we sin, we are not worthy of the loftiest mode of service, and there is room in our lives for the element of Divine service that makes us uncomfortable.

The root of all sacrifices lies in the *Akeida* story, the Binding of Yitzchak. After the angel of God commands Avraham not to slaughter Yitzchak, it is stated as follows:

And Avraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in the thicket by it horns. And Avraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt-offering instead of his son. (*Bereishit* 22:13)

The ram is thus sacrificed in place of Yitzchak.

Let us consider the matter: A person raises a lamb at home, feeds it, gives it a name, connects to it emotionally; and then all of a sudden, the owner must take it to Jerusalem. The lamb glances at the owner with an innocent look, not comprehending where they are going. When they reach the Temple, it falls upon the owner to slaughter the lamb personally (according to the plain sense of the text). The owner hears its final bleat and sees the last look in its eyes.

I confess my sins today. In my old age, I can say that I have inadvertently desecrated Shabbat on more than one occasion, if only for reasons of my advanced years. I believe with all my heart that had I been required to carry out the procedure that I have described, it is very possible that I would have been more careful the next time, and that I would not have had to bring another sacrifice in the future.

As we long for the rebuilding of the Temple, we need to address these questions and bring the concepts relating to the Temple closer to our mindsets. Only then will we merit the return of the *Shekhina* to within our midst, and a deepening of our timeless connection to God.

[This *sicha* was delivered on *leil Shabbat* *Parashat Vayikra* 5778 (2018).]

1. The verses should be understood as follows: "For I spoke not to your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings or sacrifices"—at the time of the exodus from Egypt I did not command **only** about burnt-offerings and sacrifices; "but” — at the same time that I ordained the sacrifical service — “this matter I commanded them, saying: Hearken to My voice, and I will be your God…." [↑](#footnote-ref-1)