

This week's *Parashah* is devoted entirely to the various *Korbanot* / sacrificial offerings. R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; first *Ashkenazic* Chief Rabbi of *Eretz Yisrael*) writes: Many explanations have been given for the very lofty concept of *Korbanot*. On the simplest level, however, we may understand them as follows:

In his work *Sha'arei Teshuvah*, Rabbeinu Yonah Gerondi z"l (1210-1263; Spain) lists twenty components of complete *Teshuvah* / repentance. The ninth of these, Rabbeinu Yonah writes, is for the penitent to recognize that it was his desire for physical and material pleasures that led him to sin; therefore, as a protection against further sins, he should lessen his pursuit of such pleasures--even those that are permitted by *Halachah*. (*Sha'arei Teshuvah* I:30-33)

R' Kook continues, after citing Rabbeinu Yonah: There is a higher level of *Teshuvah* than refraining from excessive physical pleasures--taking the items of pleasure that caused a person to sin and dedicating them for holy purposes: Torah, *Mitzvot*, and fear of G-d. In this way, his sin is converted to a merit. This explains a purpose of *Korbanot*. Of all the pleasures that people pursue, the greatest among them are eating and drinking. And of all the foods and drinks that people crave, meat and wine are foremost. By bringing a *Korban*--an animal and the accompanying wine libations--a penitent dedicates these pleasures to a holy purpose, thus demonstrating that he has conquered his desires. (*Me'orot Ha'Rayah: Yerach Ha'eitanim* p. 135)

Thirty Days Before Pesach . . .

R' Shaul Alter *shlita* (rabbi of Kehilas Pnei Menachem in Yerushalayim; formerly the "Gerrer Rosh Yeshiva") writes: As we prepare for *Pesach*, we must reflect on the nature of the *Ge'ulah* / redemption and *Cherut* / liberation that recur every year in this season. The concept of *Galut* / exile is very confused in our times--perhaps the result of using *Haggadot* as children that contained pictures of Egyptian taskmasters whipping their Jewish slaves. These childhood conceptions, while not factually wrong, must be overcome in order to understand *Pesach* (and the Torah, in general) in a more sophisticated way.

R' Alter continues: The *Ge'ulah* and *Cherut* that recur every year are not physical redemption and liberation. [Indeed, most of us have never experienced physical oppression--another reason that appreciating *Pesach* is a challenge for some.] The primary *Cherut* that is in the air in this season is that of the *Nefesh* / soul.

A person must remember that everyone has a *Nefesh*, and that the Nefesh, not the body, is one's essence. Unfortunately, we often let our bodies obscure our *Nefesh*. But even when an overcoat, hat, scarf and gloves completely hide a human body, no one would mistake them for the actual person that hides beneath them. Similarly, no one should mistake his body for his real self. The soul is the real person.

R' Simcha Bunim of Pshischa z"l (1765-1827; *Chassidic Rebbe* in Poland) was known for his quips that drove straight to the point, with no mincing of words. He said, "Although I am blind, I see millions of people who are born as cats, live as cats, and die as cats." He was alluding, writes

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“When a person among you brings an offering to Hashem . . .” (1:2)

The *Gemara* (*Megillah* 31b) teaches: When *Hashem* told Avraham Avinu that his descendants would attain atonement for their sins by bringing *Korbanot*, Avraham said, “Master of the Universe! That will work when the *Bet Hamikdash* is standing, but what will happen when the *Bet Hamikdash* is not standing?”

Hashem answered: “I have established for them the order of *Korbanot*. As long as they read it, I will consider it as if they have brought the sacrifices, and I will forgive them.” [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R’ Menachem Ha’me’iri z”l (1249-1306; Provence; *Talmud* commentator; known as “the *Me’iri*”) writes: *Hashem* looks at the heart. When there is no sacrificial service, reading about that service takes its place, because it is not the offering itself that brings atonement; it is the *Teshuvah* that the offering inspires that brings atonement. Likewise, when we read about the *Korbanot*, it is not the reading that brings atonement; rather, it is the repentance that the reading inspires that causes atonement. *Tefilah* / prayer can accomplish the same purpose, the *Me’iri* concludes. (*Bet Ha’bechirah*)

In the *Pesach Haggadah*, after recounting the story of the Exodus, we ask *Hashem* to “bring us also to future festivals and holidays in peace, gladdened in the rebuilding of Your city, and joyful at Your service; there we shall eat of the offerings and *Pesach* sacrifices whose blood will reach the sides of Your altar for gracious acceptance.”

Why do we ask specifically that the blood of the *Korbanot* should “reach the sides of [the] altar”? R’ Gedaliah Silverstone z”l (1871-1944; rabbi in Belfast, Ireland and Washington, D.C.) writes: Since our Sages teach that reading about the *Korbanot* is equivalent to offering them, we make clear that, nevertheless, we look forward to offering actual *Korbanot*, whose bloods will, literally, “reach the sides of Your altar.”

(*Haggadah Shel Pesach Korban Pesach* [2d ed.] 1939)

R’ Yosef Chaim z”l (1835-1909; Baghdad, Iraq) writes: Although our Sages list various practices that take the place of sacrificial offerings, including reading the verses that describe the sacrificial service and giving *Tzedakah* / charity, these practices do not bring about complete atonement the way a *Korban* would. This is evident from the *Gemara* (*Shabbat* 12), which relates that the Sage Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha absent-mindedly tilted his oil lamp on *Shabbat*, thus causing the flame to burn brighter. Since feeding a fire is prohibited on *Shabbat*, Rabbi Yishmael wrote in his notebook (after *Shabbat*), “When the *Bet Hamikdash* is rebuilt, I will bring a fat *Korban Chatat* / sin offering.” Certainly, writes R’ Yosef Chaim, Rabbi Yishmael also read the verses relating to the *Korban Chatat* and gave charity for his atonement. Nevertheless, he considered himself obligated to bring a *Korban* when the Temple will be rebuilt. (*She’eilot U’teshuvot Torah Lishmah* No. 120)

“He called to Moshe, and Hashem spoke to him from the Ohel Mo’ed / Tent of Meeting, saying.” (1:1)

R’ Yosef z”l (1601-1696; “*Darshan* of Posen”) asks: What is added by “from the *Ohel Mo’ed*”?

He explains: *Midrash Rabbah* relates a parable about a king who told his servant to build him (the king) a palace. After an appropriate time had passed, the king came to see the construction, and he found that every beam and every brick was stamped, “So the king commanded!” Seeing this, the king exclaimed, “Shall I stand inside and leave my loyal servant standing outside?” Similarly, *Hashem* commanded Moshe to build a *Mishkan*, and everything was done “as *Hashem* commanded” (see, for example, *Shmot* 40:16, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32). *Hashem* said, “Moshe did all this to honor Me! Shall he remain standing outside?” Therefore, He called to Moshe to enter. [Until here from the *Midrash*]

R’ Yosef writes that, in light of this *Midrash*, we may explain our verse as follows: “He called to Moshe, and *Hashem* spoke to him because of the *Ohel Mo’ed* / Tent of Meeting, saying,” *i.e.*, because Moshe kept saying, “Build the *Ohel Mo’ed* exactly as *Hashem* commanded.” (*Yad Yosef*)

“When a person among you brings an offering to Hashem . . .” (1:2)

The *Gemara* (*Nedarim* 10a) teaches: One who dedicates a sacrifice should say, “A *Korban* for *Hashem*” --not, “For *Hashem*, a *Korban*,” lest he be interrupted or die, and then he will have said *Hashem*’s name in vain. [Until here from the *Gemara*]

R’ Eliezer Dan Ralbag z”l (1832-1895; Yerushalayim) asks: Why, then, did Boaz greet his workers (*Ruth* 2:4), “May *Hashem* be with you,” saying *Hashem*’s name at the beginning of the sentence? He answers: Our Sages say that a person who is first to greet his friend will merit long life. And *Hashem* counts a person’s thought of doing good as part of his good deed. Thus, as soon as Boaz thought of greeting his workers, he was assured of long life, and he did not need to fear that he would be unable to finish his greeting. (*Damesek Eliezer*)

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R’ Alter, to King Shlomo’s message (*Kohelet* 3:19), “Man has no superiority over beast, for all is futile.” This is true if man spends his entire life focused on spiritual pleasures, and even if he is a “fine Jew” along the way. The pleasures we pursue are far more sophisticated than those that cats pursue, but in the end, they obscure the soul, which is our true self and what distinguishes us from animals.

Why did *Hashem* create man to desire physical pleasures? R’ Alter answers, citing earlier *Chassidic* works: When a person experiences a strong physical desire, he is meant to realize that the concept of desire was created so that a person could channel it toward desiring a closer connection with *Hashem*. (R’ Alter emphasizes that one should not live in fear of physical desires, which may lead to depression. Rather, one should feel joy and elevation knowing that he has the opportunity to channel his desires toward something truly lofty!)

In this season of *Cherut*, R’ Alter concludes, a person can receive extra Divine assistance to liberate his soul. (*Avra De’dasha: Pesach* p.6)