

NEFESH SHIMSHON



DIVREI TORAH ON THE WEEKLY PARSHA AND HOLIDAYS FROM
THE TEACHINGS OF RABBEINU SHIMSHON DOVID PINCUS ZT"l

THIS PUBLICATION IS DEDICATED TO THE HATZLACHAH AND ZECHUS OF נחמה ויעקב בן רחל נחמה
MAY THEY GROW TO BE TALMIDEI CHACHAMIM AND OVDEI HASHEM.

PEARLS OF WISDOM FROM THE PARSHAH

A Soul Offering

וּנְפֶשׁ פִּי תִקְרִיב קֶרְבַּן מִנְחָה לַיהוָה. (ויקרא ב, א)

When a soul brings a grain offering to Hashem. (Vayikra 2:1)

Among all the voluntary offerings, it says the word “soul” only in the grain offering. Who usually brings a voluntary offering of grain? A poor person. Hakadosh Baruch Hu says: I consider it as if he offered his soul. (Rashi)

Let's say we would see a wealthy man coming to *Beis Hamikdash* with a big, well-fattened bull to offer as a *korban* to Hashem. Think about how much a steer like that costs. Then we see a poor man coming in with a bag of flour that costs just a couple dollars, to offer as his *korban*. His offering looks pretty miserable compared to that of the first man.

But Hashem doesn't see it that way. He looks deeper and sees what stands behind the offering. On the contrary, this little bit of flour which was hard to bring and entailed *mesirus nefesh* is so significant to Hashem that He considers it as if the poor man offered his very life on the *Mizbe'ach*. And that is indeed how it is. This poor man brought the last



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הרב זונדל יעקב בן מרדכי ע"ה
for the day of his yahrzeit which falls this week.



pennies he has to his name and purchased with them fine flour to be used as a *korban minchah* to Hashem out of love.

Nowadays we don't have *korbanos* anymore. But we can still express our love of Hashem in various ways.

The most beautiful way to express love of Hashem is by learning His Torah. This is more important to Him than all the *korbanos*. And here, too, we have the "rich man's offering" and the "poor man's offering."

What is the "poor man's offering" in Torah learning?

Let's say a man comes into *shul* after a long day's work, and participates in the evening *shiur*. He is exerting his last remaining strength just to be there and keep awake. He is trying to concentrate on the *shiur*, he is trying to keep his eyes open and make

sure he understands it as best he can.

To us it may not look like much. We just see someone with droopy eyes and a blank expression sitting in a seat. It surely doesn't look like the most qualitative Torah learning we ever saw. But Hashem sees it differently. To Him, it is considered as if this man offered his very life. And so it really is. This man is giving his last ounce of strength for Torah, for love of Hashem.

The same can be said about a *talmid chacham* who learns at night when he is already tired out. Nevertheless he learns more and more, with *mesirus nefesh*, and this learning that came at great effort can surely be considered as if he poured out his blood and fat on the *Mizbe'ach*. This brings tremendous *nachas ruach* to Hashem, and opens the gates of Heaven to bring down blessings for the entire Jewish people. ●



Why a Korban Atones

אָדָם כִּי יִקְרִיב מִמֶּם קֶרְבָּן לַה'. (ויקרא א, ב)

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

The *Ohr Hachayim* writes¹ that *Adam Harishon* did not succeed in attaining atonement for his sin by means of a *korban*. Yet, the Torah clearly says that

korbanos have the power to atone for sin.

Why didn't it work for *Adam Harishon*?

They asked Wisdom, "What is the punishment of a sinner?"

1 In the section beginning with the word ובמדרש.



Wisdom answered, “Evil will pursue sinners.”²

They asked Prophecy, “What is the punishment of a sinner?”

Prophecy answered, “The soul that sins shall die.”³

They asked the Torah, “What is the punishment of a sinner?”

The Torah answered, “He shall bring a guilt offering, and it will atone for him.”

They asked *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, “What is the punishment of a sinner?”

Hakadosh Baruch Hu answered, “He shall do *teshuvah* and it will atone for him.”⁴

Here we have four different answers to the same question, depending on whom was asked. First, “Wisdom” was asked. What does “Wisdom” mean in this context? Who is “Wisdom”?

Wisdom means recognizing reality for what it is, seeing the facts as they are. There are a lot of entities in the world. [And each has its own nature, its own rules by which it functions. For instance, there is the entity of fire, which has the nature of rising. There is the entity of water, which has the nature of flowing downward.] One of the entities in the world is that of sin. It, too, has certain “rules” by which it functions.

When sin takes hold of a person, this entity pursues him forever and ever. This is because the severity of sinning against another is measured according to the status of the injured party. The greater and more eminent the offended party is, the more severe it is to injure him. So if a person acts injuriously toward *Hashem*, this act is infinitely severe and causes infinite damage. Ostensibly, there is no way to fix such damage. It is thus only natural that “Evil will pursue sinners”

forever and ever.

That was Wisdom’s answer to the question. As far as Wisdom is concerned, the punishment is inescapable and endless, because that is the nature of sinning against G-d.

Prophecy, however, did offer a solution to the problem. “The soul that sins shall die.” There is no way to eradicate a sin in this world, but if the sinner leaves this world, by dying, he can be reborn. He can return to his source, and from there, he can come back to this world as a new creation.

In this way he can escape the ostensibly endless punishment that sin engenders. Because now he is a new person. A person who never sinned.

The Torah offered a different and amazing solution to the problem of sin. When there was a *Beis Hamikdash*, a person could bring an offering and thereby attain atonement. The Ramban describes the feelings a person should have when he brings a *korban*. He should feel that the acts done to the animal should have been done to himself.⁵ Thus a person can attain atonement not by actually dying but by an act of virtual death.

By virtue of *korbanos*, a person can escape the ostensibly endless punishment of sin, without needing to die and be reborn. He just needs to “experience” his own death by means of the animal’s death on his behalf.

This brings us to the point. We asked before why *Adam Harishon* did not succeed in attaining atonement for his sin by bringing *korbanos*. Now the answer is simple. The power of *korbanos* to atone was innovated by the Torah. Wisdom did not suggest *korbanos* as a way to atone for sin. Neither did Prophecy. Before the Torah was given, offerings did not have this power. This is why *Adam Harishon*, who lived before the Torah was given, was not able to attain atonement for his sin by means of *korbanos*. The power of *korbanos* depends on the power of Torah. ●

² *Mishlei* 13:21.

³ *Yechezkel* 18:20.

⁴ *Yalkut Shimoni*, *Yechezkel* 358.

⁵ Commentary of Ramban on *Vayikra* 1:9.

אָדָם כִּי יִקְרִיב מִכֶּם קֶרְבָּן לַה' מִן הַבְּהֵמָה מִן הַבְּקָר וּמִן הַצֹּאן תִּקְרִיבוּ אֶת קֶרְבַּנְכֶם:
(ויקרא א, ב)

When a person brings from you an offering to Hashem, from the cattle and from the flocks you shall bring your offering. (Vayikra 1:2)

Right In The Middle

There is a reason why *Sefer Vayikra*, which is all about *korbanos*, is the middle book of the Torah. It is written:

מְעֵיו עֵשֶׂת שָׁן – His innards are like a trunk of ivory.¹

Chazal explain that this is an allusion to *Sefer Vayikra*, which is in the middle of the Five Books of the *Chumash*, like the innards are in the middle of the body.²

It is written further:

בְּטֶנֶךָ עֲרַמַת חֲטִיִּים – Your stomach is like a stack of wheat.³

This, too, refers to *Sefer Vayikra*. The stomach is in the middle, with the heart above and the legs below. So it is with *Sefer Vayikra*; there are two Books on either side, and it is in the middle.⁴

Vayikra is placed where it is because the *korbanos* are the heart of the Torah.

The *Rishonim* debated the meaning of *korbanos*. They are indeed a very deep subject and the reason

for them is not spelled out anywhere.

Once someone came up to me to ask about this. He said, “We are modern people living in an enlightened and progressive world. What significance do sacrifices have for us?” Then he went on to ask, “The Torah speaks so much about sacrifices. It goes into all the different kinds with all their details. What is the reason for this? Why do we take animals, slaughter them and offer them as sacrifices?”

I answered him that there are really two points that we need to talk about. The first is to explain the nature and meaning of *korbanos*, which are a very big and important part of *avodas Hashem*. The second is to explain why people don’t understand such an important and basic matter.

There is a rule of thumb that very well-known Torah matters are for everyone and accessible to everyone. Matters that are rarer, that are not right out there in the front and center, usually have a deeper meaning that not everyone can comprehend. Which category do *korbanos* fall into? We recite the order of *korbanos* every morning, and we repeat them in some form three times a day. We speak about them so much! We would thus expect *korbanos* to be for everyone and accessible to everyone. How can something so basic be so hard to understand?

In truth, *korbanos* are a profound matter, despite their ubiquity. It says in *Sefer Nefesh Hachayim*,⁵

1 Shir Hashirim 5:16.

2 Shir Hashirim Rabbah 5:14.

3 Shir Hashirim 7:3.

4 Shir Hashirim Rabbah 7:7.

5 2:9, in the addendum.

citing the *Zohar*, that the spiritual effect of *korbanos* reaches the highest possible point. Out of all the *mitzvos*, the one that rectifies the highest point of all is *korbanos*. Such a sublime *deveikus* could only exist when the Jewish people lived in *Eretz Yisrael* with all the *sheleimus* they had at that time.

We can't touch that level anymore. But *Hashem* was so kind as to give us a *Seder Tefilah* that allows us to verbally offer *korbanos*.

וְנִשְׁלַחַם פְּרִים שְׁפָתֵינוּ – We shall offer bulls through our lips.⁶

This was established at *Bris Bein Habesarim*, when *Hashem* told Avraham:

קָחָה לִּי עֵגְלָה מְשֻׁלֶּשֶׁת וְעִז מְשֻׁלֶּשֶׁת וְאַיִל מְשֻׁלֶּשֶׁת וְתֵר וְגֹזֵל – Take for Me three calves, three goats and three rams, and a turtledove and a young dove.⁷

This covenant insured that there will always be *korbanos* in some form.

Besides reciting the Torah passages of *korbanos*, there is another way we can connect to them. That is by learning the tractates of *Seder Kodoshim*. The Chofetz Chaim worked hard to encourage people to study these *masechtos*.

In ancient times, people would learn the entire Torah. In the period of the *Ge'onim*, someone who knew four *sedarim* was considered a *talmid chacham*, someone who knew five was called a *Rav* and someone who knew all six was called a *Ga'on*. (The word *גאון* has the *gematriya* of sixty; someone who knows all the sixty tractates of *Shas* is called a *Ga'on*.⁸) But every *talmid chacham* knew four *sedarim*, which are: *Mo'ed*, *Nezikin*, *Nashim* and *Kodoshim*. These *sedarim* treat matters of practical significance. *Kodoshim*, too, is practical, because by reciting *korbanos* it is considered as if we actually offered them.⁹

6 Hoshea 14:3.

7 Bereishis 15:9.

8 *Shem Hagedolim*, "Ga'on."

9 See *Bava Metzia* 114b, *Rashi* s.v. בארבעה.

Now we will talk about what it means to offer a *korban*.

The Korban Is You

As mentioned earlier, the *Rishonim* had great differences of opinions regarding the significance of *Korbanos*. The Rambam presents a novel approach in *Moreh Nevuchim*.¹⁰ The Ramban¹¹ explains *Korbanos* on the levels of *Remez* and *Sod*.

This is the Ramban's well-known explanation of *Korbanos* on the level of *Remez*:

The deeds of human beings are composed of thought, speech and action. *Hashem* therefore commanded that when a person sins he should bring a *korban*, lean on it with his hands (corresponding to "action"), verbally confess his sins (corresponding to "speech") and burn in fire its innards and kidneys (which are the organs of thought and physical desire) and the legs (which correspond to a person's hands and feet, which perform his work), and cast the blood on the Altar (corresponding to the person's life blood).

This is so the person will think, as he does all this, that he sinned against G-d with his body and his soul, and it is fitting that his blood should be spilled and his body burnt – if not for the Creator's kindness, that He accepts from him a replacement. The *korban* atones, as its blood is in place of his blood, its life is in place of his life. The chief organs of the *korban* are in place of his chief organs.

And portions of its meat go to sustain the [*kobanim* who are] teachers of the Torah, so they will pray for him. And the *Tamid*, the daily offering, is brought because the public constantly has people who sin.¹²

10 3:46.

11 *Vayikra* 1:9.

12 *Ibid*.

We will explain what the Ramban meant by all this. But first there are a few points that need to be understood.

Being Human

The simplest and most basic definition of a human being is a creature that knows *Hashem* exists and is thereby connected to Him. Without this, without living in such a connection and such an awareness, we are like a walking chunk of flesh and blood. We are not essentially different from animals. This is true even if we do *tzedakah* and *chesed*, even if we support *yeshivos*, even if we busy ourselves with saving Jewish lives.

On a deeper level, lack of connection to *Hashem* does not just deprive us of our humanity. It deprives us of any true existence at all. This is because *Hashem* is the only true existence, the only true reality. To the extent that we recognize Him and connect to Him, we exist.

This is a basic principle that everyone needs to know. The Rambam writes:

Until a person gains intellect and knowledge, he is considered like an animal. Human beings are different from other kinds of living creatures only because of thought. A human is a living being that possesses the power of thought. Thought means the ability to conceptualize non-physical ideas. The most distinguished of non-physical ideas is conceptualize *Hashem's* Oneness and all the Divine matters that accompany it....

When a person pursues physical desires, and places sensory matters over that which his mind conceives, and directs his intellect

to physical desires, he becomes like an animal, which thinks only of eating and drinking. Then the Divine element, which is the intellect, does not show itself in him, and he is like a simple creature swimming in a sea of *היולי*. "Sea of *היולי*" means *תהו*.¹³

היולי is matter without form. We have no way to understand what matter without form is, because all the matter that we know has a certain form to it. If it has no form, we can't comprehend it. But in the beginning of the world's creation, matter was formless. It was *היולי*. Its existence had not yet actualized.

The Rambam says that a person without intellect is "swimming in a sea of *היולי*." Intellect enables us to think about *Hashem*, Who is not a physical object. G-d is not something that animals think about. They cannot conceptualize non-physical ideas. To the extent that we think about *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, to the extent that we know He is here, and feel His presence and absolute existence, we ourselves have a hold on existence.

The above applies to all human beings. It is not unique to Jews. A person's existence depends on his faith in the Creator. In fact, everything that *Hashem* created, everything in the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms, sings praises to *Hashem* through its essential nature, because it, too, needs to be connected to *Hashem*. Otherwise it can't exist.

So what is a Jew? A creature that has a relationship of love with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. And the most powerful expression of this relationship of love is offering *korbanos*. ●

13 Introduction to *Peirush Hamishnayos*.