



RABBI SHALOM

ROSNER

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Sacrificing With An Eye Toward the Future

Parshat Vayikra transitions us into the third of the five books of the Torah. Whereas Sefer Bereshit and Shemot provide historical background with respect to the formation of our nation, Sefer Vayikra discloses the intricacies of the *korbanot*. Although at times it may seem a bit technical, there are many lessons to be derived from the details of the *korbanot*. Prior to taking a deep dive into the world of *korbanot*, let us first seek to understand the purpose of the *korbanot*.

Rambam – Counter Idolatry

There are many explanations offered by the commentaries as to the reason for *korbanot*. The Rambam suggests that the Egyptians and other ancient neighbors of Israel worshipped different types of animals (particularly cattle, sheep, and goats), so these animals were singled out to be used to worship Hashem. We offer to Hashem the animals that other nations offered to *avoda zara* (idolatry).

Ramban; Rabbeinu Bechaya – Bring us Closer to Hashem

The Ramban rejects this explanation.

How could it be, the Ramban asks, that all the greatness of the notion of *korbanot* is just to counteract *avoda zara* and disprove the other nations? *Avoda* is one of the pillars upon which the world stands, and offering *korbanot* is the primary form of *avoda*. Could all of that be just to counteract *avoda zara*? After all, the Torah describes the offering of *korbanot* as “a beautiful, sweet-smelling aroma to Hashem” (*rei’ah niho’ah laShem*).

Rabbeinu Bechaya suggests, all these individuals brought *korbanot* in order to get close (from the root “*karov*”) to Hashem. In fact, the different elements of a *korban* correspond to the different components of atonement. Transgressions occur in deed, speech, and thought. *Korbanot* offered to Hashem in order to atone for sin (as many *korbanot* do) begin with an act (placing one’s hands on the *korban*), continue with speech (the confession recited over the *korban*), and culminate with an atonement for one’s desires and inner thoughts (the burning of the insides of the *korban*).

Korbanot- Future Prevention of Transgression

Rav Benzion Firer (Hegyona Shel Torah) offers some insight into the purpose of *korbanot*. He posits that a *korban* is not only offered to obtain forgiveness for a transgression, but it is also to help **prevent a future transgression** from transpiring. A *korban* offered after a transgression is meaningless absent *teshuva* (Rambam Hilchot Teshuva

1:1). The main ingredient in *teshuva* is an undertaking not to repeat a transgression. The *Korban* is meant to influence the individual who offers it to improve upon himself in the future. It should not be viewed simply as a “penalty” for a past act, but rather as a collateral so that the sinful act will not recur.

Consider for a moment what the individual who offers a sacrifice had to experience. There were several stages that were necessary prior to the actual sacrifice. First, one had to travel to Jerusalem, likely meeting people on his way and having to explain that he is on his way to offer a *korban*. Then he may have had to inquire which type of sacrifice was required to be offered. Then he had to pay for the sacrifice. At each of these stages the individual would likely have verbally admitted his transgression, so the proper sacrifice was obtained. Then the process in which he engages as highlighted above (placing one’s hands on the animal, verbal admission and slaughtering of the animal), likely leads one to want to avoid having to undergo this procedure again.

First Sacrifice – Lacked Sincerity

The first sacrifice was offered by Kayin and Hevel. It was not brought after any sinful act. Why was Hevel’s sacrifice accepted and Kayin’s sacrifice rejected? The answer is not explicitly revealed in the Torah, although some have suggested that Kayin’s offering was not from the most worthy fruit. Perhaps the reason Kayin’s sacrifice was not accepted can be understood by what immediately follows. Kayin kills Hevel. If Kayin had the proper *kavana* (intention) when he offered his sacrifice – he would not have committed this heinous act. When offering a sacrifice one is to consider not just one’s

past, but rather to focus on how to improve one’s future. Kayin did not have that intent. God, who knows our inner thoughts, recognized Kayin’s lack of sincerity and accordingly rejected his “meaningless” sacrifice. From Kayin’s reaction (murder), it becomes obvious that Kayin did not contemplate improving upon himself when offering his sacrifice.

When we read Vaikra and learn about the *korbanot* and when we engage in prayer that is in place of the *korbanot*, we should contemplate the lesson offered by Rabbi Firer. More important than asking forgiveness for a prior error, we are to consider how to improve upon ourselves so that our mistakes do not repeat. Then we can be assured that God accepts our *korbanot* and *tefillot* and they will indeed bring us “closer” to Hashem. ■

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