



PROBING

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THE PROPHETS

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This opening parasha of Sefer Vayikra serves as a logical continuation of the final parshiyot of Sefer Shmot that we read last week. After detailing the precise construction of the Mishkan the Torah now describes for us the service that was to take place there. To the modern-day mind, the world of, animal sacrifice, seems quite foreign and difficult to comprehend. Nonetheless, the sacrificial rite is the focus of the Torah for the bulk of Sefer Vayikra and is also a topic often discussed by our nevi'im. However, it was essential for the people to understand that the ritual offerings were, primarily, means to an end-not an end in themselves.

For this reason, the haftarah read on Shabbat VaYikra, the parasha that introduces the laws of korbanot, is a critique leveled by Yishayahu against Israel who deviated from the essence of the sacrificial rite and regarded it instead as a simple act that would erase all their sins. For this reason, the navi opens his message with the words: “Am zu

yatzarti li”, “I, [G-d] fashioned this people”, “tehillati y’sapeiru”, “SO THAT they will tell My praise.” The very purpose of choosing Israel and redeeming them time and time again, was so that they would spread His praise by teaching the world of G-d’s greatness *through* their service to Him. The prophets understood that the sacrificial rite would be a means to educate a pagan world of the need to worship One G-d. Making offerings to a non-corporeal divinity – and ONLY this non-corporeal divinity – was a unique enough practice in ancient times to have other nations take notice and learn.

It was through the korbanot, therefore, that the Jewish nation would be able to fulfill the mission it was created for: to spread the belief of the One G-d to all nations. Indeed, this was the request made by Shlomo HaMelach at the inauguration of the First Temple (Sefer M’lachim A: 8; 41-43), i.e. to have foreigners come to the Bet HaMikdash and bring sacrifices to G-d. The people failed to regard their offerings as a *means* to draw closer to Hashem (and, thereby, receive His atonement), AS WELL AS a tool to educate the idolatrous populations. Instead, Israel saw the ritual simply as an *end* – a ritual that would automatically have their own iniquities erased, and, by doing so, the nation undermined the very purpose of offering korbanot - “Am zu yatzarti li, tehillati y’sapeiru”

Given Israel’s misuse of the sacrifices, and,

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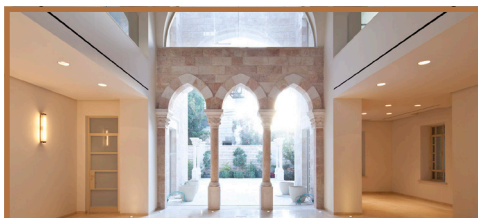
upon Churban Bayit, the resultant termination of the ritual service, we are forced to face the “elephant in the room”: How can we now effect atonement for our sins?

Rav Soloveitchik addresses this very question and, in his usual brilliance, helps us understand how we are forgiven. After quoting R. Akiva’s post-churban statement (Mishna Yoma 8;9) that it is G-d Himself Who purifies us from our sins the Rav comments:

The attainment of kapparah will not be as... complete as when...the High Priest brought man into contact with transcendent and incomprehensible divinity. But we Jews have brought another message of teshuva to Man, that of tahara [purification]. There is nothing transcendent [or] miraculous...about tahara. The performance of tahara is not directed at a transcendent divinity but at G-d, as our father, companion and intimate counselor. For this communion with G-d, man has not been affected by the loss of outward ceremonial rites.

For over 2,000 we have been bereft of sacrifices and offerings, and, as a result, we no longer have the complete kapparah we once had when the Kohen Gadol would follow the Yom Kippur ritual service in the Beit HaMikdash. But, it is also true that, for over 2,000 years, we have been purified by our Father in heaven. Our challenge today, therefore, is to understand the true purpose of korbanot and the proper impact of tefilla.

Only in this way can we see the fulfillment of our three-time daily plea: “v’hashev et ha’avodah l’dvir beitecha” – to have Hashem restore the complete worship to the Holy Temple. For it is only there where “na’vo-decha b’yir’ah”, we can truly worship G-d in complete awe. ■



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