



GEULAS YISRAEL

RABBI MOSHE TARAGIN
RAM YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
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Korbanot and the Modern Mind

Chazal gave each sefer of the Torah a nickname. The nickname of Sefer Vayikra is Torat Kohanim, as it outlines the laws of the Mikdash, which are administered and supervised by the kohanim.

The sefer opens with two parshiyot that list the laws of korbanot. Sefer Shemot described the construction of the Mishkan, including the two mizbechot. It did not describe the korbanot themselves. Parashat Vayikra and Parashat Tzav introduce the various korbanot and the ceremonies through which they are brought.

KORBANOT BEFORE VAYIKRA

Although korbanot first appear in detail in Sefer Vayikra, they are deeply woven into Jewish identity and Jewish history. The covenant that shaped Jewish history at the Brit

Bein HaBetarim was sealed through several korbanot. According to Chazal, one of the messages conveyed that night was that Jewish history would be redeemed through the merit of korbanot.

Of course, Avraham's most iconic moment occurred when he was commanded to offer his son upon a mizbeiach on Har HaMoriah. Stopped at the final moment, he instead offered a ram as a korban. Yitzchak and Yaakov also brought korbanot, and korbanot were presented at Har Sinai even before they became formal mitzvot. The world of korbanot lies at the heart of Jewish history and Jewish identity.

MODERN DISCOMFORT WITH KORBANOT

The modern world chafes at the thought of korbanot. Rituals involving blood and animal parts feel ancient and even unsettling, far removed from modern sensibilities. We do not typically express reverence by sacrificing animals or by performing rituals with their blood and organs. Much of the imagery surrounding the Mikdash can feel foreign to contemporary instincts. Descriptions in Chazal of the Mikdash courtyard as a "river of blood," meant to convey the intensity and grandeur of the avodah, stand sharply at odds with modern cultural instincts.

Some have attempted to contextualize the world of korbanot. In a famous and very controversial claim, the Rambam argued that korbanot were instituted to redirect ancient man's instinct for sacrifice away from idolatry and toward the worship of Hashem. The debacle of the egel demonstrated how powerful

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and seductive sacrificial worship was to the ancient imagination and how easily it could slide into idolatry. For that reason, the Torah established a different and carefully structured system of korbanot, allowing those generations to express reverence through korbanot, but directing that impulse exclusively toward Hashem.

HISTORICAL APPROACH TO MITZVOT

This approach reflects the Rambam's broader tendency to explain mitzvot within their historical context. For example, he suggests that the prohibitions of sha'atnez and of removing the pe'ot were meant to distance us from contemporary pagan practices. Certain religious sects wore garments of mixed wool and linen or shaved the corners of their heads as part of their rituals. The Torah therefore prohibited these practices to separate Jewish life from those pagan rites.

What made the Rambam's position controversial is the implication that once the socio-cultural context disappears, the mitzvah might no longer be necessary. For religious Jews who view the word of Hashem as eternal and transcending specific cultural moments, this is unimaginable. Explaining mitzvot primarily through historical circumstances can make them seem temporary and can reduce them from expressions of divine command to responses to social conditions.

A similar discomfort surrounds the Rambam's view of korbanot. By presenting them as a redirection of ancient sacrificial impulses, his approach appears to diminish their divine character and raises the unsettling possibility that, at some stage of religious development, they might become obsolete.

Making explicit what the Rambam only suggested implicitly, Rav Kook also wondered whether in the future animal korbanot might

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no longer be necessary. He did not state this categorically but merely raised the possibility that if humanity rises to a higher spiritual state, the service of the Mikdash might take a different form.

His position, however, remains a minority view, in part because it is so difficult to imagine halacha without korbanot.

A DIFFICULT IMAGINATION

It is difficult to imagine that such a central feature of the Torah and of halachic life would simply disappear. Korbanot stand at the heart of the Torah and are woven into our daily tefillah and the rhythm of the chagim. We pray constantly for the rebuilding of the Mikdash and for the restoration of the avodah. To suggest that these hopes are merely metaphorical, that we long for a rebuilt Mikdash but without korbanot, edges toward intellectual dishonesty.

Yet if we are honest with ourselves, we must



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also ask whether we can realistically imagine the return of blood sacrifices.

A REVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Evidently, though we cannot imagine ourselves drawn to korbanot, our imagination may simply be limited by the contours of our current worldview. At present we inhabit a cultural and moral space that recoils from the imagery of blood ritual. It feels distant from our religious instincts and jars against our sensibilities.

Yet redemption may transform not only the world around us but also the human mind itself. When the presence of Hashem becomes manifest, human consciousness will expand and categories that now feel foreign may assume entirely different meaning.

INNER TRANSFORMATION

There is much debate about whether the arrival of Moshiach will unfold through an apocalyptic upheaval that reshapes the existing order, or whether the world will continue largely as it is, with history adjusted through renewed Jewish sovereignty and our return to Yerushalayim. The Rambam famously adopted the latter position, insisting that *olam k'minhago noheg*, the world will continue to function much as it does now. Others envisioned a far more dramatic and transformative messianic era, one that overturns the familiar structures of history.

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Yet regardless of how one imagines the changes in the world around us, the arrival of Moshiach will undoubtedly transform the world within us. A reality in which the presence of Hashem is unmistakable will inevitably alter the texture of human experience. Living in a world where divine providence is visible, where history unfolds with a clarity we have never known, will reshape the way we interpret events and understand our place within them.

The restoration of prophecy will also reshape the delicate balance between divine guidance and human autonomy. And the manifest presence of Hashem may spark a profound revolution of consciousness, allowing us to move beyond the limits of our current imagination. Ceremonies of the Mikdash that today feel distant or difficult to comprehend may one day appear meaningful and compelling, experienced in ways far richer and more resonant than we can presently envision.

The appearance of Hashem in our world will be so dramatic and so revolutionary that it will recalibrate the way we experience *avodat Hashem*. What now feels alien may one day appear radiant with meaning. We may yet discover a beauty in *korbanot* that presently lies beyond the reach of our imagination.

FRAGILE ASSUMPTIONS

Even within ordinary history we occasionally experience moments that force us to rethink what once felt unimaginable.

It is often challenging to step outside our current assumptions and imagine a reality different from the one we inhabit. Human nature inclines us to believe that the structures of our present world will remain stable and enduring into the future. We live within familiar frameworks and assume that they will

continue unchanged.

Yet the past several years have confronted us with moments that shattered these assumptions. Only five years ago, the coronavirus pandemic overturned our basic expectations about health, society, and daily life. None of us could have imagined the year that awaited us. We could not picture ourselves davening outside of shul. We could not foresee the sweeping disruption to nearly every aspect of ordinary life.

Three years later our assumptions were shattered again. We believed we had established security and deterrence along our southern border. The savage attack of Hamas on October 7, 2023 overturned that confidence and thrust us into a new and painful reality. Those six dark hours carved themselves into our national memory, permanently altering the way we view our security and our vulnerability.

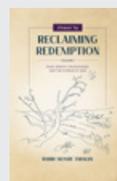
Over the past two and a half years our outlook has continued to shift. For years we understood ourselves to be surrounded by hostile forces, all bent on our destruction. One by one, however, many of those forces have collapsed or been sharply degraded in their ability to threaten us. Only after dismantling large parts of their terror infrastructure did we fully grasp the magnitude of the danger that had encircled us. Even as we remain locked in a

second confrontation with the murderous regime in Iran, it has become increasingly apparent that our security landscape, though still precarious, is significantly stronger than it was before October 7.

If the past six years have taught us anything, it is that events far beyond the scale of ordinary human expectation can suddenly break into our world. They reshape our consciousness and force us to see reality in ways we could never have imagined beforehand.

The return of Hashem's Shechinah to this world in an open and unmistakable manner will far surpass any of these events. It will not merely change the world around us; it will reshape our consciousness itself. In such a world our spiritual imagination may expand beyond its current limits.

Will that transformation allow us to appreciate korbanot in ways we cannot presently grasp? It is entirely possible that what now feels distant from our sensibilities will one day appear natural, meaningful, and even beautiful within a world suffused with the presence of Hashem. ■



Rabbi Moshe Taragin's latest sefer entitled: **Reclaiming Redemption, Vol. II: Faith, Identity, Peoplehood, and the Storms of War**, is available at: mtaraginbooks.com.

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