



RABBI SHALOM

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Sacrifice and Integrity

In his posthumously published work *I Believe*, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks returns to a theme that we have encountered in several contexts, yet one that deserves continual revisiting. Reflecting on the concept of *korbanot* (sacrifices), Rabbi Sacks notes a striking tension within Tanach itself. On the one hand, Sefer Vayikra opens with painstaking detail devoted to the laws of sacrifice. On the other hand, some of the most forceful prophetic passages appear to reject sacrifices altogether.

Shmuel HaNavi declares to Shaul: וַיֹּאמֶר שְׁמוּאֵל הֲחִפְּץ לֵה' בְּעֹלוֹת וּזְבָחִים כְּשֹׁמֵעַ בְּקוֹל ה'? הִנֵּה שֹׁמֵעַ מִזְבַּח טוֹב, לְהַקְשִׁיב מִחֻלָּב אֵילִים.

“Does Hashem desire burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as obedience to His voice? Behold, obedience is better than sacrifice; attentiveness than the fat of rams.” (I Shmuel 15:22)

Amos echoes this rebuke:

In loving memory of my father
אברהם אבא בן
מנחם מנדל ז"ל
I miss you so much
Meni Koslowsky
May the learning in this issue be
לעילוי נשמתו

כִּי אִם-תְּעַלּוּ-לִי עֹלוֹת וּמִנְחֹתֵיכֶם לֹא אֲרַצֶּה...
“Even if you offer Me burnt offerings and meal offerings, I will not accept them.” (Amos 5:22)

Hoshea states the principle even more succinctly:

כִּי חֶסֶד חִפְצָתִי וְלֹא-זָבַח, וְדַעַת אֱלֹהִים יַעֲלוֹת.
“For I desire kindness, not sacrifice; knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.” (Hoshea 6:6)

Perhaps the most searing critique appears at the opening of Sefer Yeshayahu, read on Shabbat Chazon:

לְמַה-לִּי רַב-זְבָחֵיכֶם? יֹאמַר ה'... וְדָם פְּרִים וּכְבָשִׁים וְעֵתוּדִים לֹא חִפְצָתִי.

“Of what use are your many sacrifices to Me? says Hashem... the blood of bulls, sheep, and goats I do not desire.” (Yeshayahu 1:11)

These prophets were not addressing a nation that had abandoned ritual observance. On the contrary, the people were offering sacrifices precisely as commanded. Yet God rejected them. Why?

The answer is consistent throughout Tanach: ritual devotion divorced from moral responsibility is not divine service. One cannot stand before God while trampling on the dignity of others. It is therefore no coincidence that the commandment of לְרַעֲוֶה “וְאַהֲבַת לְרַעֲוֶה” appears in Sefer Vayikra alongside the laws of *korbanot*. The two are inseparable.

This dual responsibility is embedded in the very structure of the Luchot. One tablet contains mitzvot *bein adam laMakom* - between man and God - while the other contains mitzvot *bein adam laChavero*—between man and his fellow

man. A God-fearing life demands loyalty to both.

THE MEIRI: MIRRORING THE TWO TABLETS

The Meiri, in his introduction to Shas, preserves a fascinating tradition regarding the layout of the Ten Commandments. According to this view, the commandments on the right tablet correspond directly to those opposite them on the left: the first aligns with the sixth, the second with the seventh, the third with the eighth, and so on. These pairings reveal deep thematic connections between religious devotion and ethical behavior.

The pairing most relevant to our discussion is that of the third and eighth commandments:

“YOU SHALL NOT TAKE THE NAME OF GOD IN VAIN” ↔ “YOU SHALL NOT STEAL.”

At first glance, the connection is puzzling. The Meiri offers a straightforward explanation: theft often leads to false oaths, particularly when one denies wrongdoing in court. But he then proposes a far deeper interpretation.

“Do not take God’s name in vain,” the Meiri explains, means: do not *carry* God’s name falsely. Do not cloak yourself in the external trappings of religiosity while behaving dishonestly. In his striking formulation:

“שלא תתעטף בטליתך והולך וגונב... זהו נשיאת שמו של הקב”ה לשוא.”

“Do not wrap yourself in a tallit and then go and steal... that is bearing the Name of the Holy One in vain.”

Religious hypocrisy, the Meiri teaches, is a double betrayal. It is a theft—of trust, integrity, and moral credibility—and it is a desecration of God’s Name.

AN OFFERING OF THE SELF

Sacrifice, then, is not merely about the animal placed on the altar. It is about the inner posture of the one who brings it. Intention and integrity are as central to *korbanot* as

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they are to interpersonal conduct. To serve God authentically is to serve humanity. To love God is to love His children.

We cannot ask God for forgiveness while withholding it from others. We cannot yearn for spiritual elevation while tolerating moral dissonance. Consistency between *bein adam laMakom* and *bein adam laChavero* is not an ideal, but rather a prerequisite.

As we study the laws of *korbanot* and pray “והשב את העבודה לדביר ביתך”—that God restore the service to His Temple—we must remember that the Mikdash can only be restored when the fractures between us are healed.

When our devotion to God is mirrored by our devotion to one another, when our rituals reflect integrity and compassion, then our service will no longer be symbolic alone, it will be sincere. Only then will our sacrifices (and today our tefilot) once again find favor in His eyes. ■