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Parshat Vayikra

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TRICKLE DOWN THEORY

By Rabbi Mordechai Kamenetzky

The process of sinning and repenting ascends to a different level in this week's portion. In addition to the regular steps of penitence, the Torah commands that the sinner must bring a *korban*, an animal sacrifice to atone for his sin. This ritual encompasses many deep philosophical and psychological ramifications that are discussed in detail by the great thinkers of the 12th century, among them Rambam, Ramban, and Ibn Ezra. After all, the concept of sacrificing living things is quite difficult to understand, especially in the context of a Torah that is so demanding regarding the treatment of animals that it prohibits humans to eat a meal *before* their animals have been fed!

Yet the laws of sacrifice are not limited to simple sinners. The law applies to the rich and poor, the weak and the mighty, and even to the *Kohen Gadol* (High Priest) himself.

The Torah tells us that when the *Kohen Gadol* sins, he too must bring an offering. Although the Torah is detailing the ramifications of the *Kohen Gadol's* individual transgression, it mentions the sin of the nation too: "If the anointed *Kohen Gadol* will sin, bringing guilt upon the people" (*Leviticus* 4:3).

Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Sforno, three of the most famous Torah commentators, all comment on the strange juxtaposition of the nation and the *Kohen Gadol*. "After all," they ask, "what connection do the people have to the *Kohen Gadol's* sin?" Why is *his* sin considered "bringing guilt upon the people"?

Dr. George Fordyce Story, was a prominent English physician in the latter part of the 18th Century. Despite his medical skills, he unfortunately possessed a major flaw – he was a heavy drinker. During a dinner at which he was quite inebriated, Dr. Fordyce was urgently summoned to tend to a distinguished person who had taken ill with unspecified symptoms. Far from sober, Dr. Story had great difficulty locating the patient's pulse or even counting the beats. Frustrated and realizing his own condition, he muttered to himself, "Drunk, by golly!" and then proceeded to write a prescription. The next morning Dr. Story received an official looking letter from his patient. He expected it to contain a stern rebuke for his inadequate doctoring the preceding night. It did not. Inside was a short note: "I, too, am aware of the sorry state I was found in yesterday evening – I am sure that you will keep your evaluation confidential."

Enclosed was a 100 pound sterling note.

Perhaps the Torah is teaching the *Kohen* and us a lesson in human nature. When the people see the *Kohen* bringing a *korban*, they may feel that *they* too have sinned. A sense of guilt will fall upon the entire nation. And when he says the words of repentance, albeit quietly unto himself, the feeling of the people will be that they too are at fault. It is important for good leaders to know that their deeds affect the standard of their community. When they rise, so does their flock. Moreover, when, Heaven forbid, they fall, the nation falls with them. It is their duty to understand that they do not operate in a vacuum. Whatever they do, or whatever they say, trickles down to the people.

Listen Closely

By Rabbi Berel Wein

With the beginning of the reading of the book of Vayikra this Shabbat in the synagogue, the title of the book itself calls out to us for understanding what is meant when the Torah tells us that God called out to Moshe. Moshe experiences a special and unique method of Godly revelation. The Torah testifies to this by describing that God, so to speak, talks to Moshe ‘face to face.’

The prophets of Israel receive Godly communication while in a dreamlike trance. But the thrust of Jewish tradition is that even though there is no longer any type of Godly prophecy present in our world, God still communicates with humans. But, He does so in very subtle means – in reflections of human behavior and world events themselves.

Free will allows humans to behave as they will, yet there is a guiding heavenly hand in world affairs visible to those who wish to see it. A few decades ago two scientists won a Nobel Prize for proving their ability to yet hear the echo of the sounds of the original birth of the universe at the moment of its creation. We all know that human hearing is possible only within a limited range of wave frequencies. Judaism preaches that good deeds, moral behavior, Torah observance and loyalty to traditional Jewish values help expand our hearing ability – and this enables us to tune into heavenly sound frequencies which were originally blocked to us.

The auxiliary message of Vayikra, when God called out to Moshe, is that Moshe’s hearing is so perfectly attuned to heavenly communication, he is always ‘face to face’ with his Creator. That is the true indication of the greatness of Moshe and makes him the most unique of all the world’s prophets, teachers and leaders.

The word Vayikra, as written in the Torah, contains a miniature letter ‘aleph.’ This indicates to us that God’s message to us is subtle, quiet, and easy to ignore temporarily, but persistent and ongoing. As the Lord told the prophet Elijah, ‘I do not appear in the great wind or in earthquakes or other terrifying natural phenomena, but rather in a small, still voice.’ Listening to a still, small voice requires good hearing acumen and intense concentration. Casual hearing will not suffice.

In our times, the small ‘alef’ requires us to really listen and pay attention to what transpires in our personal and national lives. Oftentimes, we, like the prophet Yonah, attempt to flee from the still small voice that continually echoes within us. But it remains persistent, and waits patiently for our hearing ability to improve in our everyday lives.

The Bible teaches us that Shimshon began his career as the savior and Judge of Israel when he was able to hear the spirit of the Lord beating within his heart. In our busy and noisy lives, with so much incessant sound exploding all around us constantly, we really have little time or ability to listen to our true selves – those small voices that are always speaking to us. Our inner voice is the medium that Judaism uses to teach us that the Lord calls out for our attention, to give us moral and courageous guidance. But it can only be of value if we listen – and that requires concentration, thought and commitment.

A great sage once remarked that when a Jew prays to God he or she is talking to God. But, when a Jew studies Torah then God, so to speak, is talking to him or her. That is one of the reasons that Judaism places such a great emphasis on Torah study. As the Talmud says: ‘the study of Torah outweighs all other commandments.’ It is the proven method for attuning to the spiritual frequencies that beat within us. Our Creator constantly calls out to us, and we have to make every effort to improve our hearing and our listening.

The Superiority of The Poor Man

By Rabbi Yissocher Frand

The Torah writes in this week’s parsha regarding the offering of the Korban Mincha: “*When a soul (nefesh) will bring a meal-offering to Hashem, his offering shall be of fine flour; he shall pour oil on it and place frankincense on it*” [Vayikra 2:1]. This is in contradistinction to the expression used at the start of the parsha in connection with the animal offerings: “*When a person (adam) from among you will bring an offering to Hashem from the animals...*” [Vayikra 1:2].

Rashi comments that by the Mincha flour offering, which is the least expensive of all sacrifices, the Torah uses the expression “*when a soul will bring*”. This, Rashi says, is the only offering by which the Torah refers to the one who brings the korban as a nefesh (soul). Rashi explains that typically poor people bring flour offerings in lieu of more expensive animal sacrifices. The Almighty therefore emphasizes: “I give him credit as if he offered his soul.”

A rich person pays \$1500 for an ox and slaughters it for the Mizbayach [altar]. The Torah says “very nice”, but it is not the same as the flour offering of a poor person who may have paid \$3.50 for the combination of a little flour and a little oil. The poor person’s offering is treated with greater respect, so to speak. Why is that?

Rav Elya Meir Bloch says the simple interpretation is that the \$1500 for the rich person may be a smaller percentage of his net worth or his disposable income than the much smaller amount spent by the poor person is, as a total of the latter's net worth or disposable income. Relatively speaking, the poor person made a larger contribution of his wealth than the rich person. But, says Rav Elya Meir, this is not the correct way to interpret these pasukim [verses]. Rav Elya Meir sees a deeper interpretation.

The Ramban writes that when a person offers an animal sacrifice, he is really supposed to think that the slaughtered animal on the mizbayach should really be him. As it is with so many Mitzvos, the Torah desires one's heart, not just the hollow act of bringing a sacrifice. The Torah wants the intent of what he is doing to penetrate into the deepest recesses of a person's personality. The Torah is interested in the person achieving the feeling of what bringing a korban is supposed to be about.

When a wealthy person plunks down his \$1500 for his offering, he has the attitude that "I certainly did my share. This animal cost me 1500 bucks! What more do You want?" Therefore, he lacks the requisite humility appropriate for one who is supposed to be seeking atonement. But the poor man knows that all he is bringing is a minimal korban – a little flour, a little oil. He knows that he does not earn atonement for \$3.50. He understands that his offering is just symbolic and is supposed to represent a deeper emotion that emerges from the recesses of his soul. He puts his heart and soul into the offering because he clearly realizes that it is not the flour and the oil that will gain him atonement. When a person is poor and cannot afford to buy his way out of his iniquity, the only thing he has going for him is his nefesh – his soul. Therefore, he puts his heart and soul into the offering. The Torah highlights this idea by the use of the word nefesh in connection with the flour offering.

Levites Make A Positive Choice to Serve in Beis HaMikdash

The pasuk [verse] says, "The rest of the meal offering shall belong to Aharon and his sons..." [VaYikra 2:3]. The Medrash connects this verse with one in Psalms [Tehillim 17:14], interpreting the pasuk in Psalms as follows: "There are mighty people, who took their portion from Your hand." The Medrash identifies these mighty people who took their portion from G-d's hand as the Tribe of Levi. This tribe was so strong, the Medrash says, that they declined to take their portion in the Land of Israel, but instead, took their portion directly from G-d.

The Ateres Mordechai, by Rav Mordechai Rogov, zt"l, offers a beautiful interpretation of this Medrash, which teaches us a great moral lesson for our time. The Ateres Mordechai says that a person could perhaps think that Leviim, who historically were employed in the Beis HaMikdash and who were the teachers of the children of the Jewish people, were a tribe of 'nebachs'. [Nebach is a Yiddish descriptive phrase for someone who is to be pitied; also used as "What a pity."] Yaakov Avinu had 12 sons. Thank G-d, eleven of them were successful and talented children; one was a 'lemech'. [Lemech is a Yiddish descriptive phrase for someone who is not too bright.] So what does one do with a son who is unfortunately a little awkward?

That son stays in the Beis HaMikdash; he becomes a teacher; he becomes a Rebbe. There is an expression in the secular world "Those who can, do, those who can't, teach." This means that one who has any brain in his head and any head on his shoulder will go out and become a doctor or a lawyer or an accountant or computer analyst — something important! At least work for the government! But, 'nebach', if you can't do anything else, then, and only then, you teach. The Medrash is telling us that this was far from the case concerning the Tribe of Levi. Do not imagine for a minute that the Tribe of Levi were a bunch of nebachs. The Tribe of Levi was mighty. They were talented and capable. They could have done anything. They could have had the job of Zevulun or Naftali or any other tribe. But they were mighty. They made a conscious decision not to take a portion in the Land. They gave up the transitory and temporal world, for the sake of a lasting world that is 'chai v'kayam' [living and permanent].

What is the proof that they were happy with their decision? A doctor usually wants his son to go into medicine. A businessman wants his son to take over the business. If one is pleased with what he is doing, he wants his son to follow in his footsteps. But one who is not pleased with what he is doing, chas v'shkolom, does not want his child to continue in his profession. "I had it rough, I could not go to school. But you? You are going to have something decent in life." The Medrash is telling us that the Tribe of Levi was not a cop-out. They did not do what they did because they had no other choice. Rather, they made a positive decision and were attracted to the spirituality of the job for themselves and for their children. The Tribe of Levi did not choose to teach because they had nothing else to do. They chose to teach because they knew which profession had true value.

“And He called to Moshe, and Hashem spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying” (1:1)

The Midrash says that Moshe had ten names, yet Hashem only called him by the name “Moshe,” the name that was given to him by the daughter of Pharaoh. What is it about this name that led Hashem to use it exclusively? It does not even describe anything about him?! R’ Chaim Shmuelevitz answers that the daughter of Pharaoh ignored her father's decree to kill all Jewish boys in order to save Moshe Rabbeinu when she pulled him out of the water. Moshe thus became a beneficiary of “mesiras nefesh,” a tremendous personal sacrifice on the part of the daughter of Pharaoh. As a result, this characteristic became ingrained in him and personal sacrifice became a part of his life. This value is what drove Moshe to kill the Mitzri who was hitting a fellow Jew and to ask Hashem to erase his name from the Torah if He would destroy the Jewish nation. This characteristic was the best description of Moshe Rabbeinu and that is why Hashem used this name over all the others.

“Any meal-offering that you offer to Hashem shall not be prepared leavened, for you shall not cause to go up in smoke from any leavening or any honey as a fire-offering to Hashem” (2:11)

The Baal HaTurim comments that chametz is a symbol of the evil inclination because it expands and puffs itself up like an arrogant person who is controlled by his evil inclination. Honey also symbolizes the perceived sweetness of temptation. The Torah forbids the inclusion of these ingredients in korbanos because the point of an offering is to earn forgiveness and, in order to achieve that, one must subdue his evil inclination. When we clean our houses during this time of year and rid ourselves of all the chametz that we own, we are symbolically removing the spiritual deficiencies that we have and character flaws that could use improvement. To truly do that requires hard internal work, but that must also be done in tandem with our cleaning efforts. The plans of the evil inclination are in conflict with the messages of freedom that we will absorb over the Yom Tov of Pesach, so the first step in preparation for the holiday is removing all the chametz and, by extension, removing ourselves from the grasp of the yetzer hara.

“And you shall salt every one of your meal offering sacrifices with salt, and you shall not omit the salt of your G-d’s covenant from upon your meal offerings. You shall offer salt on all your sacrifices” (2:13)

Rabbeinu Bachya cites a Midrash which discusses why salt was placed on every korban. On the second day of creation, Hashem separated the upper waters and the lower waters. The lower waters are also called “the crying waters” because the waters cried over the fact that the other waters were closer to their Creator. As a result of their yearning to be closer to Hashem, they were given the consolation prize of having salt, a byproduct of the lower waters, designated to accompany all korbanos and having water poured on the mizbeiach on Sukkos. R’ Dovid Feinstein explains the reason for the mitzvah to add salt based on its use as a preservative. When one places salt on the altar, one is expressing his wish that his repentance that results from this offering should be preserved, even long after the korban is burnt up. It is easy for one to be inspired during the times when he is bringing a korban, but to maintain that inspiration and take it with him from that point forward is more difficult. The salt expresses the desire that this inspiration should be preserved for a long time to come.

“If the anointed Kohen will sin, bringing guilt upon the people; for his sin that he committed he shall offer a young bull, unblemished, to Hashem as a sin-offering” (4:3)

R’ Yaakov MiLisa, the author of Nesivos HaMishpat (a famous commentary on Choshen Mishpat), writes that when the Kohen Gadol sins, even unintentionally, it brings guilt upon all the people because he is a leader who is looked up to. When the people see what he does, they assume that they can do the same and this leads them to sin intentionally and sink to a lower level. Such a person has to be doubly careful not to stumble in sin and to be extra mindful even of sinning accidentally. This applies to all those who bear the name of Hashem. Anyone who is looked at as a religious person has to realize that others are constantly looking at him and learning from his behavior. We have to be aware of the influence that we have on others and go out of our way to be sure not to adversely influence others through our actions and our manner of speech. As much power as we have to be a good influence on others, we can also easily cause people to become even worse with just one misstep. It is a tremendous responsibility that we have to be aware of at all times.

by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

Say "When" "If" You Please

By Sheldon Stern

Verse 2:14 begins, "If (Im) a man will bring a meal offering of the first fruits to Hashem." Rashi notes that the Posuk is speaking about an obligatory Mincha, the Korban Omer, which comes from barley and so the word "Im" should be understood as "When." So we ask why the Torah didn't simply "Say when."

In 1971, The Partridge Family scored a hit with "I'll Meet You Halfway." "I'll meet you halfway, that's better than no way, there must be some way to get it together." The premise of the song is that a relationship needs both sides to compromise and intersect, approximately, in the middle. Interestingly, this rule doesn't apply in our dealings with Hashem. The Mishna in Avos 5:26 succinctly states, "Lifum Tzara Agra" the reward for a Mitzvoh is commensurate with the effort one exerts. So now we can explain why "Im" replaced "Ki." People will naturally perform something that's commanded, but they'll be less inclined if they think it's optional. Therefore, we can suggest that the Torah characterized the Omer offering as voluntary so that when it's brought, the people will receive a greater reward. Exodus 34:7 states that G-d pays off for 2,000 generations but only punishes for four. This teaches us that G-d's attribute of Chesed far outstrips His trait of chastisement. Therefore, at all times, He's devising and developing strategies that work to our benefit. It follows then that the circuitous language in our verse is but one example of His essential goodness. As a counterpoint to the sentiment of the Partridges, we have Chazal, "Open for me an opening the size of the eye of a needle and I'll open for you an opening the size of the Ulam (antechamber of the Temple.) All Hashem wants from us is some minimal expression of our desire to come close to Him. If we do so we can be certain that He will far more than reciprocate. Rabbi Yisroel Salanter has an interesting post-script to this subject. When I was going to college and dental school I lived right across the street from the Bialystoker Synagogue. As I rushed out of the house to catch public transportation I couldn't imagine how people had the discipline to attend minyan in the morning. Now, I wouldn't think of missing a Minyan. The founder of the Modern Mussar Movement noted that one receives the same Schar for a Mitzvah that he originally found challenging even though it's no longer difficult for him. So this is another illustration of G-d's all-encompassing Middah of Chesed.

But we must never forget that the Torah is infinite, and so there's no limit as to what can be gleaned from each word. There's a story, perhaps apocryphal, about a shtetl Rabbi who was close to the local alderman. One morning, on the way to shul, the Rabbi was greeted with, "Where are you going?" He responded, "I don't know." Thinking that his friend was distracted, the gendarme asked again and received the same response. After this was repeated a third time, the Rabbi was put in the klink to cool his heels. At the end of the day, the official asked the Rabbi to explain his impertinence. He didn't blink, "You asked me where I was going and I truthfully answered that I didn't know. I planned to go to Shul, but as you see, I ended up in jail. John Lennon expressed this thought beautifully in a song he wrote just months before he was murdered, "Life is what happens when you're busy making other plans." So this can also be derived from our verse. We have plans, short-term and long-term, but the operative principle is, "Menschen tracht, und Gott lacht." Therefore it says "If" instead of "When" to remind us that even if we're determined to do something, at the end of the day G-d will decide whether or not it happens. Hemingway wrote, "All true stories end in death." Of course, I'm referring to the horrific tragedy which occurred last Shabbos. Far be it from me or anyone to explain, but some things can be said. The reader will recall that before Oct 7th, the atmosphere in Israel was highly contentious. Presently, two issues are garnering attention in Jewish websites: the WZO elections, and the establishment of a gay club at YU. Not surprisingly, calumny is the order of the day. This is Chilul Hashem of the highest order as it's directed against Rabbis with impeccable and unimpeachable credentials and qualities. It's not unfair to say that the deaths of those pure souls were intended to stop the vitriol. Sadly, that hasn't been the case, and that's not hard to fathom. When we look to sully other people's legitimate Torah views, we ask Satan to attend our "Seder" and he gladly accepts the invitation. Are there times when it's appropriate to stand firm for one's convictions? Yes, but they're few and far between and one must act with the decorum demanded by the Torah. As Paul McCartney wrote, "Life is very short and there's no time for fussing and fighting my friend." About ten years ago I wrote a song called Celestial.

When the world is at war
There's no peace any more
And no one even knows
What they're fighting for

The Leader's Repentance

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

Vayikra, 4:22: When a ruler sins, and commits one from among all the commandments of Hashem, his God, that may not be done – unintentionally – and becomes guilty.

Rashi, Vayikra, 4:22: sv: When (asher) a ruler sins: The language used is [akin to 'ashrei'] – [this comes to teach that] fortunate is the generation whose ruler seeks atonement for his unintentional sins...

The Torah discusses the sacrifices that are required to atone for various sins. When the Torah specifies the Nasi's process of atonement, it deviates from its normal language for the phrase, 'when he will sin' – in the other three passages in the Chapter, the Torah uses the word, 've'im' to mean, 'and if', but here it expresses the same idea with the word, 'asher'. Rashi, quoting the Gemara¹ explains that this alludes to the word, 'ashrei' which means fortunate, and it comes to teach us that the generation whose Nasi seeks atonement for his sins is fortunate. The commentaries ask that it is easy to understand why the Nasi himself is fortunate that he atones for his sins, but why is the generation fortunate because of this?!

One answer given is based on an important idea – the conduct of a leader in his personal life should be intrinsically connected to his actions in the public arena in his role as a representative of the people. It is common in non-Torah society that leaders do not demonstrate the best character traits. For example, he may act immorally in his relationships, or his integrity in his business conduct may not be exemplary. Such a leader may argue that how he acts in his personal life should have no impact on how he leads his people. However, the Torah views this issue in a very different manner. One's personal conduct reflects his moral standing, and if it is found lacking, then it demonstrates that he is not fitting to lead the nation in the correct way.

One vital area where this idea is relevant is having the humility to admit one's errors in his personal life. Nobody is expected to be perfect – indeed the Prophets tell us that there is no man who never sins.² However, one indication of a person's level is his willingness to take responsibility for his mistakes and sins. If a leader is able to acknowledge, and strive to rectify, his personal failings, then his subjects can be confident that he will bring this admirable trait to the public realm. In his role as leader, it is essential that he be prepared to admit when he has made a misjudgment or acted improperly. A leader that does not have the ability to objectively assess his behavior and repent from his mistakes is seriously flawed in his leadership.

This is what the Sages mean when they say that the generation whose leader atones for his sins, is fortunate. If the people know that their leader is willing to stand up and admit his sins in his private life, then they can be confident that he will bring that humility to his role as leader, and will strive to rectify any mistakes he makes in leading the people. The principle that a leader's conduct in his private life is connected to his deeds that effect the masses, is not restricted to an ability to admit one's errors. If a leader cannot be trusted to act ethically in his private life, then there is considerable reason to fear that he will act accordingly in his public role. Accordingly, it has always been expected that Torah leaders lead exemplary private lives.

The exalted level that our leaders reached in their private lives is epitomized in the following story: The Alter of Kelm was one of the leading teachers of the movement that focused on Torah growth known as the Mussar movement.³ He used to travel in order to raise money for his Torah institutions: The institution paid his expenses during his trips. Upon returning, he would give the treasurers a complete report of funds raised and of his expenses. On one occasion, he presented them with a bundle of money and half a cigarette⁴. Since he had only smoked half of it during his mission, he now returned the other half!⁵ A person who is so careful in such seemingly minor matters, can surely be trusted to act with total integrity in his role as a leader. May we all merit to live ethical lives in the private and public spheres.