

Answering the Call

By Rabbanit Sally Mayer

A *korban* manual. That's what's in the first seven chapters of *Sefer Vayikra*. To the modern ear, animal sacrifice sounds outdated. Bring a male sheep for this, a female one for that. Burn it completely on the *mizbe'ach* (altar), or sometimes you also eat some of it. How are we meant to understand this system?

Rambam famously writes that animal sacrifice was what the Jews were used to at the time of the giving of the Torah, so Hashem commands us to use that same system to worship Him, even though from His perspective, it is not the highest level of service. The Ramban, however, attaches deep symbolism to the sacrifices, an idea we can apply today, even in modern times.

The Ramban points out that there are times when we want to give of ourselves to G-d – to say we are sorry, to say thank you, or even just to give a gift to show our love and devotion. We want to give of ourselves. How do we do this? The Ramban suggests that the animals we are offering are representative of ourselves, which is why we lean on the animal before offering it (*smichat korbanot*), as if to put ourselves into this sacrifice. Sometimes it's an *olah*, a full gift, all to Hashem, just to show Him our love and devotion. Sometimes it's a *chatat*, to say sorry for doing something wrong. When we sin, we have chipped away at our relationship with Hashem; we want to repair that relationship and rededicate ourselves to serving Him as we should. Sometimes it's a *shlamim*, where we want to celebrate with Hashem and say thank you, and we join the party as well by eating part of it. The Korban Pesach is an example of this – we celebrate with G-d, thanking Him for taking us out of Egypt and choosing us as His special nation.

Sometimes in our lives today we are called upon to sacrifice, and each person sacrifices in his or her way. During the current war with our worst enemies, intent upon our destruction, examples abound. Some leave their families to risk their lives on the front lines to save *Am Yisrael*, including into Gaza to rescue hostages and remove the threat of future attacks; some fly sorties over Tehran to remove the threat of missiles from the homes of their fellow citizens; others are deep in Lebanon to root out Hezbollah. Some go deep underground to process intelligence, others operate the Iron Dome, under great stress to intercept rockets and save innocent lives. Some cook and bake for families in need, or babysit for children whose parents are essential workers. Some donate money to help the effort, others listen to the fears and challenges of running to a shelter.

Parshat Vayikra begins literally with “calling” – calling to Moshe to teach *Am Yisrael* about the different ways to offer a sacrifice to Hashem. We stand in awe of the sacrifices of our neighbors, our friends, and our children. May Hashem see these sacrifices and to grant us success and safety for *Am Yisrael*, in Israel and around the world, and may we merit to bring a *Korban Toda* (thanksgiving sacrifice) to thank Hashem for His miracles.

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