

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI NAFTALI REICH

Legacy

It was certainly much easier to expiate a transgression two thousand years ago than it is today. In ancient times, the transgressor would bring a sacrificial offering to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. He would confess his sins, repent and offer up the sacrifice as a symbol of his desire to rededicate himself to his Creator. The sanctity of the place and the sublime spirituality of the process would cleanse his soul and purify his spirit, and he would go home spiritually rejuvenated.

The Torah, while describing the process of the sacrificial service at great length and in exhaustive detail, introduces the topic with a curious statement. "When a man (adam) from among you brings a sacrifice..." The Torah usually refers to a man with the Hebrew word ish, yet here the Torah chooses the unusual word adam, which brings to mind Adam, the first man. What is the point of being reminded of Adam when we bring a sacrifice to atone for a sin?

Furthermore, why does the Torah speak of a man "from among you" that brings a sacrifice? What is added by this seemingly superfluous phrase? Isn't every man "from among you"?

The commentators explain that the purpose of a sacrifice is not only to express contrition for the sin but also to repair the damage that sin caused in the world. A person does not live in a vacuum, an island unto himself. Every sinful act creates a void of the Creator's presence in the spiritual ecosystem, causing the retraction, so to speak, of the Divine Presence and the proliferation of negative energy. A sinful act causes the spiritual level of the world to fall, just as a mitzvah causes it to rise. Therefore, a person committing a sin affects not only himself but also his surroundings, his family, his friends, his community and to a certain extent the entire world.

Adam was the first man in the world, and in his mind, his decision to eat the forbidden fruit was a private decision. He thought it affected no one but him. But he was wrong. His one sinful act had tremendous ramifications for all future generations. It introduced death to the human experience.

This is the lesson we learn from Adam. There are no private decisions. Every act we commit has far-reaching implications for the spiritual condition of our

environment. This is what a person should have in mind when he brings a sacrifice to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. He must realize that, like Adam, he mistakenly considered his sinful act victimless, affecting only himself. But he was really "from among you." His sinful act affected others as well, and it is the purpose of the sacrifice to repair the damage he has wrought.

A young man booked passage on a pleasure cruise ship. He took a cabin on the lowest deck, because those were the least expensive. After a few days, he locked himself in his room and ordered his meals delivered to his door.

The waiter who brought the meal noticed that the passageway was damp, and as he approached the young man's door, he saw water pulsing out from under his door. He bent down to smell it, and to his horror, he discovered that it was seawater. In a panic, he banged on the young man's door, but there was no response.

He ran to get the captain, and in a few minutes, the captain arrived with two crew members carrying axes. They broke down the door and found the young man drilling holes in the side of the ship.

"What are you doing?" screamed the captain. "Do you want to kill all of us? Do you want to sink this ship?"

"What are you talking about?" the young man retorted. "This is my private cabin. I paid for it, and I have the right to do anything I want in it."

In our own lives, we are all living in cabins on the great cruise ship of life. We may sometimes think we are independent individuals, answering only to ourselves. But as the popular saying goes, we are indeed all connected. The things we say or do, a harsh word, a thoughtless act, a spiritual transgression can harm the people around us. On the other hand, a warm smile, an act of kindness, a word of encouragement can touch, move and inspire. Our acts may cause a ripple effect whose extent cannot be measured. And even if we manage to keep certain behaviors in total isolation, they still leave a mark in the spiritual world. We may think we are "Adam," but let us always remember that we are really "from among us." © 2011 Rabbi N. Reich & torah.org

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

The parsha of Vayikra concerns itself with the topic of kodshim-animal sacrifices which constituted the

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core service of the kohanim/priests and the people of Israel in the Mishkan/Tabernacle and later in the Temple in Jerusalem. Much ink has flowed and much human genius has been expended to attempt to explain and rationalize the nature of this type of service and why, somehow, it should be found as being pleasing in the eyes of the Lord.

Regarding the sacrifices of animals on the altar by Abel and Noach in the book of Bereshith, we see that their offerings were received with Divine favor. But the entire issue, as to how killing an animal somehow might expiate a human sin and bring forgiveness to that, is mysterious, especially from the perspective of current Western values. It would be foolish to deal with this issue as far greater people than me have been reticent to go there. Suffice it to say that we must treat this area of kodshim as being on a plane and level of beyond human understanding and appreciation.

But just as in the physical world there are so many things that work and we cannot explain why they should work, so too in this spiritual realm of kodshim we have to accept that animal sacrifices somehow do accomplish their Torah purpose-even though we are unable to understand why this should be true. Judaism is a faith of rational thought and moral values. But, it is also a faith of mystery and other-world spirituality. It is this combination of wisdom and truth that make Judaism so unique.

The Torah presupposes human error and sin to be a constant. Even the most righteous person is not truly free of sin. Yet, Judaism does not foster any idea of "original sin." It believes that we are born with noble souls and enter this world unsullied. Nevertheless, it also recognizes human nature-and that it can become cruel, violent, lustful and sinful even from an early age.

The Torah, of necessity, must provide a mechanism to cleanse one's soul once more if the person has sinned. This mechanism is kodshim/animal sacrifices. With the absence of the Temple that mechanism has morphed into prayer, good deeds, and true repentance for wrongs committed. The goal is the same-to reintroduce into our lives a sense of holiness and higher purpose. It teaches us that we can right wrongs and repair broken hopes and hearts.

The details of kodshim as written in the Torah and, as expounded and expanded in the Mishna and Talmud, are like the mysterious formulae and equations

used by physicists and chemistry professors that are unintelligible to the ordinary man on the street but nevertheless work and accomplish their stated functions and goals. We have to find our way without the Temple being present, without these formulae and equations to help us to cleanse ourselves. The Torah has provided us with an alternate route to arrive at that goal. We should constantly exploit these opportunities-prayer, good deeds, honest repentance, and improvement. Then our lips will truly replace the kodshim that we no longer have. © 2011 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

“When a person shall sin unintentionally...” (Leviticus 4:2). The book of Leviticus begins with the laws of sacrifices in the Sanctuary, the most well-known being the sin offering: "And the Lord spoke to Moses saying, 'Speak to the children of Israel: when a person sins unintentionally breaking any of the commandments of the Lord which should not have been done.'"

The Torah then makes it clear that the term "sinners" can include anyone from the High Priest and the elders of the Sanhedrin representing the entire nation to the King (or Prime Minister) of Israel, or any individual (nefesh) from among the people of the Land - "he shall slaughter the sin offering at the place of the whole burnt offering..." (Lev. 4:1-35).

There are two fascinating aspects involved in such sin offerings: Firstly, the transgression must have been committed unintentionally in order for the sacrifice to bring forgiveness (kappara), and secondly, the transgressor must repent with a confession ("A man or woman who commits any of man's sins... he/she shall confess the sin that he/she committed" (Numbers 5:6)

To a certain extent, every sin is unintentional, the transgressor is rarely aware of the full ramifications of his act when he perpetrates it; were he aware, he probably would not have committed the crime. Technically, however, shogeg (the term for an unintentional crime) is only used when the perpetrator was unaware of his crime, either because he was ignorant of the law or unmindful of what he was doing. Either way, such a lack of awareness reflects a carelessness which is not acceptable in a mature human being.

This seems to be the attitude of the Yom Kippur prayer book, which opens our requests for forgiveness with a general statement: "And it shall be forgiven to the entire assembly of Israel and to the proselyte who sojourns among them, for the entire nation acted unintentionally" (Numbers 15:26). Nevertheless, we all spend the next 25 hours fasting, confessing, repenting

and seeking forgiveness from G-d! After all, unintentional sin is still sin.

The Hebrew word "het", usually translated as sin, really means to "miss the mark" (Judges 20:16), which no one does on purpose. Moreover, repentance, or a returning, probably means a return to one's truest essence (teshuva), while it also shares an etymology with the word for "penalty" or "punishment." How can we see repentance as a penalty?

Maimonides defines the commandment to repent as meaning to confess: "When one does teshuva [repentance... after committing a transgression], he is obligated to confess before the Almighty blessed be He... this confession is the positive commandment [repent]." (Laws of Repentance 1:1)

This confession which Maimonides defines as the essence of repentance may be quite difficult to utter. We have seen over the past few years how many leading personalities in Israeli religious and political life have been found guilty of crimes, and yet how very few - if any - have publicly confessed. Let me try to explain why.

According to Nahmanides, human beings are composite creatures, created from the earth like beasts but elevated by the spirit of G-d which is breathed into us. The daily prayer book teaches us that the essential human being has a divine essence ("My G-d, the soul which You gave me is pure; You created it... and inspirited it within me"). Our bestial skin and instinctual drives are merely an outer shell, masking our truest selves - sometimes even from ourselves.

And humans often wear masks, pretending to be who we are not. Jacob put on an Esau mask to deceive his father Isaac - and almost turned into the aggressive charlatan Esau until he exorcised him during a nocturnal wrestling match within his own psyche.

David, sweet psalm-singer of Israel, who refused to harm Saul even after the mad king tried to take his life, David the great unifier of Israel, suddenly committed adultery and then sent the cuckolded husband to certain death. Only when the prophet Nathan told him the allegory of the poor man's single lamb, and thus demonstrated to David what he had become, did the king step down from his throne and willingly show himself to be naked and ashamed as he wept before the prophet. And only after that could David recapture his divine essence.

The most difficult thing - especially for an individual or group which has achieved an exalted position, is to confess that they have been pretending to be what they were not. They must show that the emperor is without clothes; they must discard the mask covering their bestial nature and - in Temple times - give it as a sacrificial offering, destroying the animal within them which had overtaken the G-dly. Paradoxically, only after the profound penalty of such a confession will they be able to return to their true essence. © 2011 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“**A**nd He (G-d) called to Moshe" (Vayikra 1:1). You may have noticed that the last letter of the word "vayikra" ("and He called") is smaller than the other letters. Numerous reasons are given, but the one most widely known is that of the Ba'al HaTurim: "[Moshe] only wanted to write 'vayikar,' as it says regarding Bilam, [to make it appear] as if G-d only appeared to [Moshe] indirectly ('b'mikre'), [but] G-d told him to also write the aleph (the letter added to 'vayikar' that turns it into 'vayikra'), and he wrote it smaller." The common understanding of this explanation is that Moshe's modesty was the cause of this change (from a regular size aleph to a smaller one);

Moshe was uncomfortable with the communication being described as G-d "calling" to him, implying a very close, special relationship, and asked that it be described the same way the communication between G-d and Bilam is described (Bamidbar 23:4). However, this explanation raises several issues.

First of all, this is not the first time G-d "called" to Moshe. G-d called to him at the burning bush (Shemos 3:4) and on Mt. Sinai, both before (19:3 and 19:20) and after (24:16) the public revelation. Why didn't Moshe protest about this description earlier? Additionally, one of the foundations of our religion is the difference between Moshe's prophecy and all other prophecy. If Moshe's prophecy was comparable to that of any other prophet, the uniqueness of "his" Torah would disappear, and a subsequent prophecy could be considered on the same level as Moshe's and (Cv"Sh) override it. How could Moshe ask that his prophecy be described the way Bilam's was, if that would undermine the authority of the Torah? (Bear in mind that many of the laws Moshe taught the nation were taught to him in the Mishkan, where this "calling" took place.) Also, the way the sequence is described, rather than the small aleph indicating Moshe's humility, it would indicate otherwise. Once G-d told Moshe that he can't write "vayikar" but must write "vayikra," writing it with a small aleph calls our attention to Moshe's (unsuccessful) attempt to be portrayed as having a less-special relationship with G-d. It doesn't tell us anything about the relationship itself, only about Moshe's desire to change how that relationship is described. After all, we only know about Moshe's attempt because of the small aleph. Would a truly humble person leave such a clue about his humility, or would he prefer, after the attempt to be humble failed, that no record of the attempt remain?

The above questions are predicated on the assumption that originally the aleph was its regular size, Moshe requested that it be removed completely, and it ended up being smaller. As I alluded to above, there are other reasons (aside from Moshe's request) that the

aleph is smaller, many of them based on kabbalah. An example of a non-kabbalistic reason why the aleph is smaller is the approach of Kesav Sofer, who suggests that the comparison between Moshe and Bilam was not based on their level of prophecy, but on the preparation needed by each before receiving prophecy. Usually, a prophet needs immense preparation before being able to receive prophecy, including becoming removed from physical matters and achieving the proper state of mind. There were therefore only certain moments, after such preparation, that a prophet could receive prophecy. In a sense, the process was started by the prophet by preparing for it, rather than by G-d. Bilam, on the other hand, never removed himself from the physical world, and if G-d were to communicate with him, it had to be without his preparation. Moshe was at the other extreme, always staying prepared for prophecy. For both, each specific communication between them and G-d was initiated by G-d, and from the perspective of the receiver of the prophecy not fully anticipated. The expression "vayikar" ("and the prophecy happened"), therefore applies to both.

With Moshe, this only applied after the revelation at Sinai; he had to prepare for the prophecy he experienced at the burning bush, and knew to prepare for prophecy at Sinai. Only afterward, when Moshe stayed constantly prepared, did it become appropriate to describe the communication as "vayikar." Since this was not describing a lower level of prophecy (but it being "sudden"), it would not affect the status of Moshe's prophecy compared to everyone else's.

Chasam Sofer (Toras Moshe, based on Ramban's introduction to Beraishis) says that since Moshe copied the Torah word for word from G-d's Torah (which was written in black fire on white fire), the aleph had to have been smaller even in G-d's copy (or they wouldn't match). He suggests that Moshe, because of his humility, may have thought the small aleph he saw there indicated a lower-level relationship with G-d, not that he requested the smaller aleph.

If we are to fit this into the Ba'al HaTurim, Moshe would have seen the small aleph, asked if there could be no aleph at all, and when that request was turned down, wrote the same small aleph he saw in G-d's Torah. However, this is not the most likely way to understand his wording. His father, the Rosh, is explicit that the aleph was made smaller because of Moshe's request that future generations know that he was uncomfortable with the expression "vayikra."

Kli Yakar suggests that the comparison between Moshe's prophecy and Bilam's was based on both achieving a higher level of prophecy than their preparation would normally allow. All prophecy stems from the level the prophet achieved. The level of the prophecy is directly proportional to this; the higher the level of the prophet, the higher the level of prophecy will be. This was not true, though, for Moshe or Bilam. In order to allow the other nations to have a prophet, and

in order to have him bless Israel from a higher level of prophecy, Bilam experienced prophecy on a much higher level than he deserved. (He probably didn't deserve any prophecy.) Although Moshe achieved a level that would bring an extremely high level of prophecy, the level of prophecy he actually received was even higher than that. (Since his level was on behalf of the Children of Israel, it decreased after they sinned-see Rashi on Shemos 32:7.)

According to Kli Yakar, this was why Moshe requested that the word be changed to "vayikar," to indicate that his level of prophecy was disproportional to his own level, and did not result directly from what he had personally accomplished. If so, even after G-d refused his request, making the aleph small would refer to Moshe not deserving the level of prophecy he attained, not to his being humble. (We are taught about his humility through the Midrash quoted by the Ba'al HaTurim, not because that's all the small aleph could indicate.) Since the word "vayikar" wouldn't be referring to the level of Moshe's prophecy, only to whether it was fully deserved, it would not undermine the Torah's status. This lesson wouldn't need to be taught every time G-d called to Moshe; once would suffice. And the later it was taught- after Moshe had more time to grow personally and yet still received prophecy higher than his personal level-the more effective the lesson of the small aleph would be.

Midrash Rabbi Akiva ben Yosef al Osiyos Ketanos v'Ta'ameihen (Batay Midrashos II, pg. 478) explains why the aleph in "vayikra" is small: "in order to differentiate between the calling to angels and the calling to Moshe." If this was the reason Moshe wanted no aleph, and settled for a small aleph, it wouldn't have been to compare his communication with G-d to the way G-d communicated with Bilam (and the status of the Torah would not be undermined). Rather, it was to contrast his relationship with G-d to the relationship between angels (who "call" to each other before praising G-d) and/or the way G-d relates to angels (whom He calls to assign a mission). Angels are "called," Moshe wanted the message to be, I (Moshe) am communicated with less directly. When G-d insisted "vayikar" couldn't be used because that was how communicating with Bilam would be described, Moshe asked if at least a small aleph could be used, so that there would still be a difference between the way he was called and how angels are called.

The small aleph was there because Moshe considered himself less significant than angels, not to show his humility (even though it was there as a result of his humility). This "calling" preceded all of the communications between G-d and Moshe in the Mishkan (see Rashi). Therefore, it was specifically here, where the repeated "calling to Moshe" was an indication of his relationship with G-d, that Moshe wanted it known that he wasn't being called the way angels are

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RABBI DOVID SIEGEL

Haftorah

This week's haftorah displays Hashem's unbelievable compassion for the Jewish people. The prophet Yeshaya begins by characterizing the Jewish people as the nation created to sing the praises of Hashem. Yeshaya continues and says in the name of Hashem, (43:22) "And you didn't even include Me for you were too tired for My service." The Yalkut Shimoni (as loc) explains this passage to refer to our inappropriate attitude towards the service of Hashem.

Chazal (our Sages) say that one exerts enormous energies throughout the day in pursuit of self advancement and yet he is unwilling to exert even minimal energy for the sake of Hashem. One returns home after a long tiresome day at work and neglects attending davening with the "valid" excuse that he's too tired. Hashem says that I wasn't even included in your plans. Energies were available for everything besides My service, the purpose for which you were created.

The prophet continues to reprimand the Jewish people, and says, "You did not bring Me your sheep for burnt offerings and you didn't honor Me with your sacrifices. I didn't overwork you with a meal offering and didn't exhaust you with frankincense spice." Chazal (ibid) elaborated on this passage and explained that all Hashem ever demanded from the Jewish people on a daily basis was the Tamid sacrifice consisting of two sheep. In fact, even the easiest of all offerings, the meal offering was not an obligation but rather a special opportunity to serve Hashem if one so desired. And yet the Jewish people refused to participate in these services. The Radak (ad loc) notes that in the days of King Achaz there were altars in every corner of Yerushalayim for the purpose of idolatry. But the Bais Hamikdash doors were intentionally closed and Hashem was totally excluded from the Jewish services. The Jews were just too tired to serve Hashem although energy was available for every other form of service.

The prophet suddenly shifts gears and begins to address the Jewish people with love and affection. He says, (42:1) "And listen now, My servant Yaakov whom I chose as Yisroel...for as I pour water on the thirsty and flowing waters on the dry land so will I pour My spirit on your children and My blessing on your offspring." Radak (ad loc) explains that the prophet is now speaking to the Jewish people in Babylonia. They had already suffered severe pains of exile and rejection by Hashem and had now reconsidered their previous ways. They thirsted to drink from the long lost waters of prophecy which had ended many years before. Hashem told them that they would once again merit the word of Hashem. Although they had turned their back to Hashem and totally rejected His service Hashem did not

forsake His people. The Jewish people would always remain His chosen nation and Hashem would patiently await their return. Our eternal relationship with Hashem can never be severed or even affected and when the proper moment will arrive Hashem will reestablish direct contact with His beloved people. Even words of prophecy coming directly from Hashem will become a daily experience. Hashem's love for His people extends all bounds. Even after all we have done against Hashem He remains right there waiting for us.

Yeshaya concludes and says (44:22) "As the wind blows away the clouds so will I erase your rebellious acts and unintentional sins, return to me for I have redeemed you." The Malbim (ad loc) shares with us a beautiful insight and explains that as far as Hashem is concerned our redemption already happened. From His perspective everything has been set in motion; all that remains is for us to repent and return. May we merit in this month, the month of redemption, the fulfillment of these beautiful visions.

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CHIEF RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Our parsha, which deals with a variety of sacrifices, devotes an extended section to the chatat, the sin offering, as brought by different individuals: first the High Priest (4:3-12), then the community as a whole (13-21), then a leader (22-26) and finally an ordinary individual (27-35).

The whole passage sounds strange to modern ears, not only because sacrifices have not been offered for almost two millennia since the destruction of the Second Temple, but also because it is hard for us to understand the very concepts of sin and atonement as they are dealt with in the Torah.

The puzzle is that the sins for which an offering had to be brought were those committed inadvertently, be-shogeg. Either the sinner had forgotten the law, or some relevant fact. To give a contemporary example: suppose the phone rings on Shabbat and you answer it. You would only be liable for a sin offering if either you forgot the law that you may not answer a phone on Shabbat, or you forgot the fact that the day was Shabbat. For a moment you thought it was Friday or Sunday.

It's just this kind of act that we don't see as a sin at all. It was a mistake. You forgot. You did not mean to do anything wrong. And when you realise that inadvertently you have broken Shabbat, you are more likely to feel regret than remorse. You feel sorry but not guilty.

We think of a sin as something we did intentionally, yielding to temptation perhaps, or in a moment of rebellion. That is what Jewish law calls be-zadon in biblical Hebrew or be-mezid in rabbinic Hebrew. That is the kind of act we would have thought

calls for a sin offering. But actually such an act cannot be atoned for by an offering at all. So how are we to make sense of the sin offering?

The answer is that there are three dimensions of wrongdoing between us and G-d.

The first is guilt and shame. When we sin deliberately and intentionally, we know inwardly that we have done wrong. Our conscience-the voice of G-d within the human heart-tells us that we have done wrong. That is what happened to Adam and Eve in the Garden after they had sinned. They felt shame.

They tried to hide. For that kind of deliberate, conscious, intentional sin, the only adequate moral response is teshuvah, repentance. This involves (a) remorse, charatah, (b) confession, vidui, and (c) kabbalat he-atid, a resolution never to commit the sin again. The result is selichah umechilah, G-d forgives us. A mere sacrifice is not enough.

However there is a second dimension. Regardless of guilt and responsibility, if we commit a sin we have objectively transgressed a boundary. The word chet means to miss the mark, to stray, to deviate from the proper path. We have committed an act that somehow disturbs the moral balance of the world. To take a secular example, imagine that your car has a faulty speedometer. You are caught driving at 50 miles per hour in a 30 mile an hour zone. You tell the policeman who stops you that you didn't know. Your speedometer was only showing 30 miles per hour. He may sympathise, but you have still broken the law, transgressed the limit, and you will still have to pay the penalty.

That is what a sin offering is. According to R. Shimshon Raphael Hirsch it is a penalty for carelessness. According to the Sefer Ha-Hinnukh it is an educational and preventive measure. Deeds, in Judaism, are the way we train the mind. The fact that you have had to pay the price by bringing a sacrifice will make you take greater care in future.

R. Isaac Arama (Spain, 15th century) says that the difference between an intentional and an unintentional sin is that in the former case, both the body and the soul were at fault. In the case of an unintentional sin only the body was at fault, not the soul. Therefore a physical sacrifice helps since it was only the physical act of the body that was in the wrong. A physical sacrifice cannot atone for a deliberate sin, because it cannot rectify a wrong in the soul.

What the sacrifice achieves is kapparah, not forgiveness as such but a "covering over" or obliteration of the sin. Noah was told to "cover" (ve-chapharta) the surface of the ark with pitch (Gen. 6:14). The cover of the ark in the Tabernacle was called kaporet (Ex. 25:17). Once a sin has been symbolically covered over, it is forgiven, but as the Malbim points out, in such cases the verb for forgiveness, s-l-ch, is always in the passive (venislach: Lev. 4:20,26,31). The forgiveness is

not direct, as it is in the case of repentance, but indirect, a consequence of the sacrifice.

The third dimension of sin is that it defiles. It leaves a stain on your character. Isaiah, in the presence of G-d, feels that he has "unclean lips" (Is. 6:5). King David says to G-d, "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (me-chatati tahareni, Ps. 51:4). About Yom Kippur the Torah says, "On that day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you [letaher etchem]. Then, before the Lord, you will be clean from all your sins" (Lev. 16:30).

Ramban says that this is the logic of the sin offering. All sins, even those committed inadvertently, "leave a stain on the soul and constitute a blemish on it, and the soul is only fit to meet its Maker when it has been cleansed from all sin" (Ramban to Lev. 4:2). The result of the sin offering is tehora, cleansing, purification.

So the sin offering is not about guilt but about other dimensions of transgression. It is one of the stranger features of Western civilization, due in part to Pauline Christianity, and partly to the influence of the philosopher Immanuel Kant, that we tend to think about morality and spirituality as matters almost exclusively to do with the mind and its motives. But our acts leave traces in the world. And even unintentional sins can leave us feeling defiled.

The law of the sin offering reminds us that we can do harm unintentionally, and this can have psychological consequences. The best way of putting things right is to make a sacrifice: to do something that costs us something.

In ancient times, that took the form of a sacrifice offered on the altar at the Temple. Nowadays the best way of doing so is to give money to charity (tzedakah) or perform an act of kindness to others (chesed). The prophet said so long ago: "For I desire loving-kindness, not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6). Charity and kindness are our substitutes for sacrifice and, like the sin offering of old, they help mend what is broken in the world and in our soul. © 2010 Chief Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and torah.org

RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY

Absolute Power

This week we begin the Book of Leviticus, the third Book of the Pentateuch which deals primarily with the laws of the kohanim and the sacrificial service in the holy Sanctuary. Although this weekly bulletin is too brief and cursory to expound upon the deep and difficult significance of sacrifices, there clearly are many lessons that could be garnered from many of the nuances and expressions which the Torah uses to describe the offerings.

It is interesting to note the varied expressions concerning the korban chatas, the sin-offering. The Torah discusses a variety of individuals who

unfortunately sin. They must bring a korban chatas or asham a sin-offering. In describing the unfortunate incidence of sin, the Torah does not use a definitive word to describe the circumstance that caused a need for penitence. Instead it talks about the circumstance in terms of hopeful uncertainty: "If an individual person from among the people of the land shall sin unintentionally" (Leviticus 4:27); "If the anointed Kohen will sin, bringing guilt upon the people" (Leviticus 4:3); "If the entire assembly of Israel shall err, and a matter became obscured from the eyes of the congregation" (Leviticus 4:13).

However when referring to the nasi, the ruler or prince of the nation, the Torah does not choose the tentative words ki or im which denote an uncertainty, rather it uses the definitive, asher. "When a ruler sins, and transgresses one from among all the commandments of Hashem that may not be done unintentionally-and becomes guilty.

Why, when it comes to the ruler, does the Torah use the definitive term, when the ruler sins, yet, when referring to the sins of the common man, kohen, or even the entire assembly, it uses the tentative words, "if they shall sin"? Second, the verse seems to be phrased with a strange syntax. Instead of stating "when a ruler sins, and commits one from among all the commandments of Hashem that may not be done unintentionally and becomes guilty, the Torah should use proper grammar and state: "When a ruler unintentionally sins, and commits one from among all the commandments of Hashem that may not be done and becomes guilty."

From the strange juxtaposition it seems that the ruler transgressed a crime so egregious that people do not even transgress unintentionally. Can that be?

Charles Maurice de Talleyrand, the French foreign minister under Napoleon, led a complex life. Lame as a child, excommunicated by the pope, a supporter of the French revolutionaries, he sought refuge in England and later in the fledgling United States. He finally rose to power when he was appointed French foreign minister in 1797.

After those tumultuous years, one would have expected that the appointment would have prompted caution and humble responsibility. This was not the case. Upon receiving news that he was named minister of foreign affairs he flew into transports of joy. According to Gerald Tomlinson, in his coach he crowed repeatedly to his friend. "I'm now Minister of Foreign Affairs! Minister of Foreign Affairs! I'll make an immense fortune out of it! Truly an immense fortune!"

Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin explains that the Torah makes prescient predictions about a ruler's rise to power. Unfortunately the question all too often is not if a ruler will go wrong, but rather when. And so the Torah uses a definitive expression "when the ruler will sin." And the type of misdeed is also alluded to.

There are certain infractions we may accidentally overlook and there are those that we would not do even under the most dire of circumstances. Yet the Torah tells us that "when the ruler will sin" it is possible that the type of sin will not be a mere infraction of a minor crime, it may also be a sin that is so heinous that it is the type of mistake that "would not (even) be done unintentionally."

And so the Torah clarifies for us that old adage made famous by Britain's Lord Acton who in a letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton, in 1887 stated, "Power tends to corrupt. Absolute power corrupts absolutely!" © 2003 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky and torah.org

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

When beginning this week's parsha, we realize that the very first word of the Book of Leviticus has a letter aleph that is smaller than the others. Why?

Smaller, suggests the Ba'al Turim, because it points to Moshe's (Moses) humility. It teaches an ethical lesson. Moshe preferred the text to read va-yikar without a final aleph, as va-yikar means "by chance." Rather than state that G-d called Moshe (va-yikra) implying a constant close relationship, Moshe, in his modesty, wished the text to read that G-d spoke with him only occasionally (va-yikar). Moshe, of course, adheres to G-d's command that the aleph be included, but does so humbly and writes a small aleph.

A second, more mystical thought comes to mind. Rav Avraham Yitzchak Kook, the first Ashkenazik Chief Rabbi of Israel insists that the soul is made up of different Hebrew letters. When performing a mitzvah (commandment) Rav Kook argues, the letters shine brightly. In other words, whatever the action required for a religious observance, it ought reflect an inner spiritual quest — and, that quest is expressed through the illumination of the inner letters.

Perhaps this teaching explains why the aleph is smaller. The aleph, being the first letter of the alphabet, represents all Hebrew letters, and those letters for Rav Kook mirror the idea of the "soul aglow." A korban (sacrifice) which is the subject of G-d's calling to Moshe (va-yikra) should not remain an external empty gesture. It must be complemented by the human being's inner decision to internalize the mitzvah. Hence, the aleph is distinguished by being written small, as the goal of the sacrifice is to stir the figuratively small, albeit powerful "lights of the soul" drawing one near G-d. No wonder the very word korban comes from the word karov, to come close to G-d.

A final Chassidic thought: Rav Shlomo Carlebach often told the story of the Munkatsha passport. In this story a chassid asked the Munkatsha Rebbe for a passport to travel from Munkatsh to Berlin just before WW II. Considering the climate of the times

Rav Shlomo never explained what the Munkatsha passport meant, but for me it represents infinite love. Hence, the aleph of va-yikra is small to remind us of the importance of approaching G-d with daf aleph, with the Munkatsha passport — symbol of the unconditional love that we ought have for G-d and that G-d has for us and that we should all have for one another. © 2003 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale.

Weekly Dvar

But there's an even more powerful message Moshe is sending us: The one letter he chose to shrink was the Alef, which is the first letter in the Hebrew

Hama'ayan

Of course, G-d's revelation is not as clear today as it was to Moshe; it is heard only through a bat kol or a dream. Therefore the letter "aleph" of the word "vayikra" is small, to indicate that Hashem's call to later "Moshes" will be of a lesser intensity. (Torat Yechiel)
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