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# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS**

## Covenant & Conversation

Why sacrifices? To be sure, they have not been part of the life of Judaism since the destruction of the Second Temple, almost 2,000 years ago. But why, if they are a means to an end, did G-d choose this end? This is, of course, one of the deepest questions in Judaism, and there are many answers. Here I want explore just one, first given by the early fifteenth century Jewish thinker, R. Joseph Albo, in his Sefer ha-Ikkarim (The Book of Principles, 1425).[1]

Albo's theory took as its starting point, not sacrifices but two other intriguing questions. The first: Why, after the flood, did G-d permit human beings to eat meat? (Gen. 9: 3-5). Initially, neither human beings nor animals had been meat-eaters (Gen. 1: 29-30). What caused G-d, as it were, to change His mind? The second: What was wrong with the first act of sacrifice -- Cain's offering of "some of the fruits of the soil" (Gen. 4:3-5). G-d's rejection of that offering led directly to the first murder, when Cain killed Abel. What was at stake in the difference between Cain and Abel as to how to bring a gift to G-d?

Albo's theory is this. Killing animals for food is inherently wrong. It involves taking the life of a sentient being to satisfy our needs. Cain knew this. He believed there was a strong kinship between man and the animals. That is why he offered, not an animal sacrifice, but a vegetable one (his error, according to Albo, is that he should have brought fruit, not vegetables – the highest, not the lowest, of non-meat produce). Abel, by contrast, believed that there was a qualitative difference between man and the animals. Had G-d not told the first humans: "Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves in the ground"? That is why he brought an animal sacrifice. Once Cain saw that Abel's sacrifice had been accepted while his own was not, he reasoned thus. If G-d (who forbids us to kill animals for food) permits and even favours killing an animal as a sacrifice, and if (as Cain believed) there is no ultimate difference between human beings and animals, then I shall offer the very highest living being as a sacrifice to G-d, namely my brother Abel. Cain killed Abel as a human sacrifice.

That is why G-d permitted meat-eating after the flood. Before the flood, the world had been "filled with violence". Perhaps violence is an inherent part of human nature. If there were to be a humanity at all, G-d would have to lower his demands of mankind. Let them kill animals, He said, rather than kill human beings – the one form of life that is not only G-d's creation but also G-d's image. Hence the otherwise almost unintelligible sequence of verses after Noah and his family emerge on dry land: Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart, "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood . . .Then G-d blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them . . .Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything . . .Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of G-d, has G-d made man." (Gen. 8: 29 – 9: 6)

According to Albo the logic of the passage is



[1] Rabbi Joseph Albo, Sefer HaIkkarim III:15.

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clear. Noah offers an animal sacrifice in thanksgiving for having survived the flood. G-d sees that human beings need this way of expressing themselves. They are genetically predisposed to violence ("every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood"). If, therefore, society is to survive, human beings need to be able to direct their violence toward non-human animals, whether as food or sacrificial offering. The crucial ethical line to be drawn is between human and non-human. The permission to kill animals is accompanied by an absolute prohibition against killing human beings ("for in the image of G-d, has G-d made man").

It is not that G-d approves of killing animals, whether for sacrifice or food, but that to forbid this to human beings, given their genetic predisposition to violence, is utopian. It is not for now but for the end of days. In the meanwhile, the least bad solution is to let people kill animals rather than murder their fellow humans. Animal sacrifices are a concession to human nature (on why G-d never chooses to change human nature.[2] Sacrifices are a substitute for violence directed against mankind.

The contemporary thinker who has done most to revive this understanding (without, however, referring to Albo or the Jewish tradition) is René Girard, in such books as Violence and the Sacred, The Scapegoat, and Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World. The common denominator in sacrifices, he argues, is: . . . internal violence – all the dissensions, rivalries, jealousies, and quarrels within the community that the sacrifices are designed to suppress. The purpose of the sacrifice is to restore harmony to the community, to reinforce the social fabric. Everything else derives from that.[3]

The worst form of violence within and between societies is vengeance, "an interminable, infinitely repetitive process". Hillel (whom Girard also does not quote) said, on seeing a human skull floating on water, "Because you drowned others, they drowned you, and those who drowned you will in the end themselves be drowned" (Avot 2: 7).

Sacrifices are one way of diverting the destructive energy of revenge. Why then do modern societies not practice sacrifice? Because, argues Girard, there is another way of displacing vengeance: Vengeance is a vicious circle whose effect on primitive societies can only be surmised. For us the circle has been broken. We owe our good fortune to one of our social institutions above all: our judicial system, which serves to deflect the menace of vengeance. The system does not suppress vengeance; rather, it effectively limits itself to a single act of reprisal, enacted by a sovereign authority specializing in this particular function. The decisions of the judiciary are invariably presented as the final word on vengeance.[4]

Not only does Girard's theory re-affirm the view of Albo. It also helps us understand the profound insight of the prophets and of Judaism as a whole. Sacrifices are not ends in themselves, but part of the Torah's programme to construct a world redeemed from the otherwise interminable cycle of revenge. The other part of that programme, and G-d's greatest desire, is a world governed by justice. That, we recall, was His first charge to Abraham, to "instruct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just" (Gen. 18: 19).

Have we therefore moved beyond that stage in human history in which animal sacrifices have a point? Has justice become a powerful enough reality that we no longer need religious rituals to divert the violence between human beings? Would that it were so. In his book The Warrior's Honour (1997), Michael Ignatieff tries to understand the wave of ethnic conflict and violence (Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, Rwanda) that has scarred the face of humanity since the end of the Cold War. What happened to the liberal dream of "the end of history"? His words go the very heart of the new world disorder: The chief moral obstacle in the path of reconciliation is the desire for revenge. Now, revenge is commonly regarded as a low and unworthy emotion, and because it is regarded as such, its deep moral hold on people is rarely understood. But revenge – morally considered – is a desire to keep faith with the dead, to honour their memory by taking up their cause where they left off. Revenge keeps faith between generations . . .This cycle of intergenerational recrimination has no logical end . . . But it is the very impossibility of intergenerational vengeance that locks communities into the compulsion to repeat . . .Reconciliation has no chance against vengeance unless it respects the emotions that sustain vengeance, unless it can replace the respect entailed in vengeance with rituals in which communities once at war learn to mourn their dead together.[5]

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[2] On why G-d never chooses to change human nature, see Maimonides, Guide for the Perplexed, Book III, ch. 32.
[3] René Girard, Violence and the Sacred, 8.
[4] Ibid., 15.
[5] Michael Ignatieff, The Warrior's Honour: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience, 188-190.

Far from speaking to an age long gone and forgotten, the laws of sacrifice tell us three things as important now as then: first, violence is still part of human nature, never more dangerous than when combined with an ethic of revenge; second, rather than denying its existence, we must find ways of redirecting it so that it does not claim yet more human sacrifices; third, that the only ultimate alternative to sacrifices, animal or human, is the one first propounded millennia ago by the prophets of ancient Israel. No one put it better than Amos:

Even though you bring Me burnt offerings and offerings of grain,
I will not accept them . . .
But let justice roll down like a river,
And righteousness like a never-failing stream (Amos 5: 23-24) 

**RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

# Shabbat Shalom

"And [Moses] brought near the second ram, the consecration-inauguration ram, and Aaron and his sons leaned their hands upon the head of the ram. And [Moses] slaughtered it" (Leviticus 8:22-23). The second part of our portion of Tzav deals with the seven-day induction ceremony of Aaron and his sons as the priests-kohanim of the Sanctuary. Moses the Prophet conducts the proceedings: First he "invests" them, dressing them in their unique priestly garb, father and sons; and then he slaughters the second ram, the consecration-inauguration ram, "which fills and completes the function of the priests [father and sons] within their priesthood" (Rashi ad loc).

I would submit that the seemingly insignificant phrase "and [Moses] slaughtered it" in the introductory text to our commentary, is one of the most poignant and moving phrases of the entire Bible which also illuminates the purpose of the priest-kohen in contrast to the prophet.

And both of these nuances of interpretation emanate from a rare cantillation "trope" - the shalshelet - which appears above the letter "het" in the Hebrew word vayishhat ("and he slaughtered.") The cantillation tropes provide the musical notation to the words of the Bible, telling the Torah reader when to pause (as in a comma), when to stop (at the end of a verse), when to sound decisive and when to strike a high note. None of the tropes are as distinctive, or as lengthy, as is the shalshelet; it appears only four times in the Bible, usually connoting the drama of confused hesitancy and deep apprehension.

For example, when Joseph is alone with Mrs. Potiphar, and she attempts to seduce him, he refuses - "vayi'ma'en," (Genesis 39:8). Remember he is lonely and alone, a stranger in a strange land, feeling rejected by his family and needy for even a fleeting moment of warmth and physical connection. He is mindful of how his father would view such an act of adultery, and yet apprehensive that a refusal could cause this powerful woman to destroy him. The lengthy and meandering shalshelet atop the alef of vayi'ma'en suggests all of the conflicting complexities within Joseph's refusal.

But what is complex about slaughtering a ram? Why does the evocative and dramatic shalshelet appear in our verse describing the consecration of Aaron and his sons? In order to understand this, we must realize that the initial plan was for Moses to have received the Kehuna- priesthood, the hereditary leadership function in Israel.

However, when the Almighty suggests to Moses that he be His emissary to Pharaoh to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Moses demurs, again and again refusing the mantle of leadership (Exodus 3:10-4:17) declaring himself to be unworthy. At length, "the Lord became angry with Moses, and He said, 'Is there not Aaron your brother, the Levite? He will surely speak....he will be your mouthpiece, and you will provide for him [the words] of G-d.'" In this context, G-d initially refers to Aaron as the Levite, not as the kohen-priest; But when Moses keeps refusing to be the emissary, G-d removes the dynastic priesthood from Moses and bestows it upon Aaron (Rashi ad loc).

And I believe that this switch in role was much more than a result of G-d's anger; it rather had to do with the different functions of priest and prophet and the different personalities of Aaron and Moses.

Moses was a man of G-d (Deut. 33:1); his active intellect actually "kissed" the active intellect of the Divine, and so Moses was able by dint of the almost super human qualities of mind and soul to communicate G-d's Torah on earth. Hence Moses must communicate to his brother the Divine will. Moses describes himself as "heavy of speech"; he had little patience for small talk, for human fellowship, he breaks the tablets, he hits the rock, or even for family relationships or obligations (he divorces his wife; he even neglects to circumcise his son Eliezer (Exodus 4:24-25).

He seeks only Divine fellowship and Divine Torah talk, and such endowments of intellect and spirit cannot be passed down as an inheritance to the next generation; they are sui generis, limited to rare, charismatic individuals, blessed with unique abilities.

Aaron, on the other hand, was a man of the people, who loved making peace between individuals.

He loved all of humanity and through loving acts and words, brought everyone close to Torah (Avot 1: 13).

Moses acquired the Torah intellectually, but Aaron taught it to the masses with love. And acts of loving- kindness can be passed down from parent to child, from generation to generation; to speak loving words and to do loving deeds can be learned and

bequeathed.

Nevertheless, Moses the human being would have loved to see his sons assume religious leadership positions in Israel; but they do not. And when he is thrust in the position of directing the investiture of Aaron and his sons, and especially when he slaughters the consecration-inauguration ram expressing the dynastic aspect of the priesthood, Moses cannot help but hesitate to give vent to feelings of loss, frustration and even a little jealousy, as well as apprehension as to his own continuity within his own family line. Moses, who gave himself over completely to G-d and nation, understands at this pivotal moment the personal sacrifice it had cost, the loss of family closeness and continuity it had engendered. This, I believe, is the message of the shalshelet. 

**RABBI BEREL WEIN**

# Wein Online

The entire book of Vayikra is described in rabbinic literature as Torat Kohanim – the laws, instructions, rituals and duties of Aharon and his sons, the founders of the priestly family of Israel. In this week's Torah reading, Moshe is instructed to command Aharon regarding the daily sacrifices to be offered in the Mishkan/Tabernacle and the keeping of eternal fire that always was to be present on the holy altar.

Aharon and his sons were chosen for special status and dutiful service on behalf of Israel and the Creator. The question arises, why was Aharon, his family and descendants so chosen? We will find later in the Torah that Moshe will be accused of nepotism regarding the choice of his brother and nephews for the priestly clan of Israel.

The Torah itself advances no explanation for the role of the priests in Jewish life and Temple service. It also does not disclose any reason or motive for the choice of Aharon and his family to serve in an exclusive fashion as these priests and officiants in the services of the Mishkan/Tabernacle and later in the Temple in Jerusalem.

However, almost in a passing note in his commentary to the Torah reading of Tetzaveh, Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra states that Aharon was chosen, not so much for his own merit, so to speak, but rather because he married Elisheva, the sister of Nachshon and thus became part of that family. And, the merits of that family were absorbed by him and made him the most fitting candidate for becoming the High Priest of Israel.

Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra never disappoints in his original and intuitive interpretations of the Torah. Nachshon is the symbol of personal risk and sacrifice on behalf of the survival of the Jewish people. Tradition has him jumping into Yam Suf before the waters split in order to enable the Jewish people to escape the slavery of Pharaoh and their ultimate annihilation.

Nachshon will be the leader of the tribe of Judah, arguably the most important of the tribes of Israel and he will be the first of the leaders of the tribes to bring a voluntary offering and gift to the Mishkan/Tabernacle on the day of its dedication and consecration. It is this trait of sacrifice and public service that is most obviously necessary for the role of being the High Priest of Israel and safeguarding the Temple service for all generations.

Aharon requires the example and influence of Nachshon in order to fulfill his own vital role in Jewish life. Moshe is able to command Aharon as to the obligations incumbent upon him in the performance of his duties as the High Priest of Israel, due to the spirit of public sacrifice imbued within him by the merit of being part of the family of Nachshon.

This is truly a remarkable insight and teaches us how important apparently extraneous issues and matters such as family relations are to our lives and to the roles that the Lord has chosen for us to fulfill in Jewish public life. We should never minimize the importance of our influence, even in an indirect fashion, upon others and upon the course of Jewish society. 

**RABBI AVI WEISS**

# Shabbat Forshpeis

Our parsha informs us that the priests' first task of the day was to remove the ashes from the offering sacrificed the previous day. (Leviticus 6:3) Is there any significance to this being the priests first order of business with which to start the day?

Samson Raphael Hirsch suggests that this mandate serves as a constant reminder that service of the new day is connected to the service of the previous day. After all, it was the ashes from the remains of yesterday's sacrifice that had to be removed. In one word: even as we move forward in time and deal with new situations and conditions it is crucial to remember that all that is being done is anchored in a past steeped with religious significance and commitment.

Another theme comes to mind. Just as a small portion of every food grown in Israel must be given to the priest (terumah), so is the priest responsible to remove the last remains of the sacrificial service (terumat ha-deshen). Thus, the entire eating and sacrificial experience is sanctified through a beginning or ending ritual. Terumah elevates the food as we give its first portion to the priest; terumat ha-deshen elevates the sacrifice as the kohen maintains contact even with the remains of the sacrificial parts. Not coincidentally, the portion given to the priest and the ashes removed

by the priest are given similar names-terumah and terumat ha-deshen-as the word terumah comes from the word ruum, to lift.

One last thought. The priest begins the day by removing the ashes to illustrate the importance of his remaining involved with the mundane. Too often, those who rise to important lofty positions, separate themselves from the people and withdraw from the everyday menial tasks. The Torah through the laws of terumat ha-deshen insists it shouldn't be this way.

A story reflects this point. A few years ago a husband and wife appeared before Rabbi Gifter, Rosh Yeshiva of Tels, asking him to rule on a family dispute. The husband, a member of Rabbi Gifter's kollel (an all day Torah learning program) felt that as one who studied Torah it was beneath his dignity to take out the garbage. His wife felt otherwise. Rabbi Gifter concluded that while the husband should in fact help his wife he had not religio-legal obligation to remove the refuse.

The next morning, before the early services, the Rosh Yeshiva knocked at the door of the young couple. Startled, the young man asked Rabbi Gifter in. No, responded Rabbi Gifter, I've not come to socialize but to take out your garbage. You may believe it's beneath your dignity, but it's not beneath mine.

And that may be the deepest message of terumat ha-deshen.  *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*

**RABBI MORDECHAI KAMENETZKY**

# Fitting Work

It is not a glamorous job, but somebody has to do it. And so the Torah begins this week's portion by telling us the mitzvah of terumas hadeshen, removing the ashes that accumulate from the burnt-offerings upon the altar. The Torah teaches us: "The Kohen shall don his fitted linen tunic, and he shall don linen breeches on his flesh; he shall separate the ash of what the fire consumed of the elevation-offering on the Altar, and place it next to the Altar" (Leviticus 7:3).

What is simply derived from the verse is that the service of ash-removal is done with the priestly tunic. What is noticeable to the Talmudic mind is the seemingly innocuous adjective "fitted." Rashi quotes the derivation that applies to all the priestly garments: they must be fitted. They cannot be too long, nor can they be too short. They must be tailored to fit each individual Kohen according to his physical measurements.

The question is simple. The sartorial details of the bigdei kehuna (priestly vestments) were discussed way back in the portion of Tezaveh, which we read five weeks ago. Shouldn't the directive of precise-fitting garments have been mentioned in conjunction with the laws of tailoring? Further, if the Torah waits to teach us those requisites in conjunction with any service, why not choose a more distinguished act, such as an anointment or sacrifice? Why choose sweeping ashes?

My dear friend, and the editor of the Parsha Parables series, Dr. Abby Mendelson, was, in a former life, a beat writer for the Pittsburgh Pirates baseball club. In the years that we learned Torah together, he would recount amusing anecdotes and baseball minutia. Some of his stories have retained an impact on me years after I heard them. This is one of them.

Roberto Clemente was an amazing athlete who played the game of baseball with utmost dedication. One day, late in the 1968 season, he was playing outfield against the Houston team. The Pirates were no longer contenders, and the game had no statistical meaning. A ball was hit deep toward the outfield wall. As Clemente raced back, it seemed that the ball was going to hit the wall way over his head. With superhuman strength he propelled himself like a projectile toward the wall. Speeding at a forty-five degree angle he collided with the wall at the same time that the ball hit it, two feet above his head. Strictly adhering to the laws of nature, both Clemente and the baseball rebounded from the wall, the former's return to earth much less graceful than the latter's. While the white sphere gently bounced to the playing surface and rolled toward the infield, the much larger uniformed and spiked entity came crashing after it with a resounding thud. Bruised and embarrassed, Clemente clamored after the elusive orb and finally threw it to a less traumatized member of his team who completed the hapless mission.

In the post-game interview an innocent reporter asked Clemente, "Roberto, your team is out of contention. There are three games left. Why in the world did you try so hard to make that play? Was it worth bruising yourself?"

Clemente was puzzled. In a few short sentences he explained his actions. "I am not paid to win pennants. My job is to catch the ball. I tried to catch the ball. I was trying to do my job."

When the Torah tells us that the clothes have to fit perfectly for a particular service it is telling us that the job is exactly right for the man who is doing it. The ash-cleaner is not doing another Kohen's job, wearing an ill-fitted garment as if it were thrown upon him as he entered for the early morning shift. What seems to be the most trivial of jobs is the job that must be done! That is the job of the hour, and that is exactly what the Kohen is designated to do. And for the job or service that is tailor-made for the individual the clothes must also be tailor-made for the job as well!

I once asked a high-level administrator of a major institution what was his job. He answered in all seriousness, "I do whatever has to be done to get the job done and that becomes my job."

Whatever we do, and however we do it, we

must realize that the end can only come through the menials. Whatever it takes to get to the goal is as integral as the goal itself. It requires devotion and commitment, and it requires self-sacrifice.

If you dress with dignity to collect the ash, if you approach every task with both with sartorial and personal pride and grace, then you are certainly up to any task. 

**RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY**

# TorahWeb

Kashering utensils has always been an integral part of Pesach preparation. As we prepare our kitchens for the upcoming celebration of Pesach, the deeper lessons behind these intricate laws can guide us in our service of Hashem throughout the year. These halachos are derived from parshas Matos and parshas Tzav. It is not coincidental that we read the pesukim about kashering the Shabbos before Pesach; it is a time to delve into the halachic and hashkafic messages of this area of pre-Pesach preparation.

Chazal derive that there are two fundamentally different ways to kasher, one known as hagala and the other as libun.Hagala is the kashering through boiling water, whereas libun uses an actual flame. We are taught inMaseches Avodah Zara that the appropriate method to use depends upon how the non-kosher or chametz food initially entered into the utensil. The halachic principles of k'bowl'o kach polto -- how it was absorbed is how it can be removed -- governs the laws of kashering. For example, a utensil such as a grill which absorbed taste through use with a direct flame cannot be removed of this absorption by mere boiling water.

The imagery of applying different degrees of heat to remove non-kosher or chametz can be applied in a similar way to the process of teshuva. When negative actions and thoughts become a part of ones being,teshuva requires a similar degree of effort to remove them and thereby "kasher" ones soul. Sins that were committed with less enthusiasm and thereby didn't penetrate as deeply into ones being can be atoned for by a teshuva process commensurate with the original actions. These which entered with more intensity require a greater degree of "heat" to be removed; as powerful as the sin was, so must the teshuva to be effective.

In parshas Tzav we are taught that a kli cheres -- an earthenware vessel -- cannot be kasher ed. Earthenware is so porous that once a taste has absorbed into its walls it can never be totally removed. However, this limitation only applies to kashering by hagala, but libun is effective even on earthenware. Tosfos (Pesachim 30b) explain that although taste absorbed in earthenware can never completely be removed, the process of libun is equivalent to remaking the utensil. Since these vessels are originally formed in a furnace, the libun process mimics this and therefore suffices to kasher earthenware.

The remaking of a vessel that is permeated with non-kosher taste serves as a model for teshuva.Chazal speak of a person changing his name when doing teshuva, since by doing so he demonstrates that he is a new person. When teshuva for specific sins is not sufficient, an entire transformation is necessary. Tosfos describes libun as, "na'aseh kli chadash -- a new utensil has been made." A complete teshuva requires an entirely new outlook on life.

When one purchases utensils from a non-Jew, in addition to kashering those which were previously used one must immerse them in a mikva. Just as utensils undergo a process of purification in a physical mikva before being usable, a soul must be immersed in the symbolic water of Torah. The halachic details of tevila which require a complete immersion and necessitate removal of chatzitzos -- barriers that separate between the utensil and the water of the mikva -- are similarly present in a symbolic way in the tevila in the waters of Torah. A total immersion in Torah study without any barriers completes the process of purification of one's soul.

As we clean and kasher our homes for Pesach, let us look inward and prepare our hearts and souls in sanctity and purity. 

**RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER**

# Weekly Dvar

Our Parsha, Tzav, informs us that the priests' first task of the day was to remove the ashes from the offering sacrificed the previous day (Leviticus 6:3). Is there any significance to this being the priests' first order of business with which to start the day?

Rabbi Avi Weiss explains that the priest begins the day by removing the ashes to illustrate the importance of his remaining involved with the mundane. Too often, those who rise to important positions separate themselves from the people and abandon the everyday menial tasks. By starting the day with ash-cleaning, the Torah insists it shouldn't be this way.

A few years ago a couple appeared before Rabbi Gifter, asking him to rule on a family dispute. The husband, a member of Rabbi Gifter's kollel (an all day Torah learning program) felt that, as one who studied Torah, it was beneath his dignity to take out the garbage. His wife felt otherwise. Rabbi Gifter concluded that while the husband should in fact help his wife he had no legal religious obligation to remove the trash. The next morning, before the early services, Rabbi Gifter knocked at the door of the young couple. Startled, the young man asked Rabbi Gifter in. No, responded Rabbi Gifter, I've not come to socialize but to take out your garbage. You may believe it's beneath

your dignity, but it's not beneath mine. This message comes to us courtesy of the sacrificial ashes. 

**RABBI KALMAN PACKOUZ**

# Shabbat Shalom Weekly

The Torah states: "And the Lord spoke to Moshe saying: Speak to Aharon and his sons, saying: 'This is the Law of the Transgression Offering, in the place where the Burnt Offering is slaughtered shall the Transgression Offering be slaughtered before the Lord; it is most holy' " (Leviticus 6:17-18).

Why does the Torah emphasize that the Transgression Offering must be made in the exact same place as the Burnt Offering?

The Talmud (Yerushalmi Yevomot 8:3) explains that they were offered in the same place in the Sanctuary to save from embarrassment those people bringing a sin offering; anyone witnessing the event could assume that the offering was brought as a Burnt Offering (which is not a sin offering) and not necessarily as an atonement for one's transgression.

Our lesson: We must be very careful not to cause someone embarrassment or discomfort because of past misdeeds. *Based on Love Your Neighbor by Rabbi Zelig Pliskin.* 

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

# Taking a Closer Look

"And the Kohain shall burn the fats on the altar, and the breast shall be for Aharon and his sons" (Vayikra 7:31). Our sages, of blessed memory (Toras Kohanim, Tzav, 16:4) learn from here that the Kohanim do not get their portions from the offerings until after the fats have been placed on the altar to burn. After telling us that there are exceptions (if the innards are lost or become ritually impure, and can no longer be put on the altar), a reference is made to the sons of Eili, who demanded that they be given their portion even before the fats were burned (Sh'muel I 2:15). One of the issues discussed by the commentators (on Toras Kohanim) is why the exceptions are taught in between the law that the Kohain doesn't get his portions until the fats are burned and what the sons of Eili did, since it was this law that they transgressed. But there are other, perhaps larger, issues to contend with.

For one thing, there are three transgressions that Eili's sons were described as having committed; they took more meat than the Torah says belongs to the Kohanim (2:13:14), they took it before putting the fats on the altar (2:15), and they slept with the women who gathered at the entrance of the Temple's sanctuary (2:22). Yet when the Talmud (Shabbos 55b) maintains that they didn't sin, only the third transgression is discussed. What about the first two? It can't be that the Talmud only discussed the third one because of the gravity of that sin (which was similar to the "sins" of R'uvein and Dovid) compared to the other two, as the second one, which amounted to theft, was similar to the "sin" of the sons of Sh'muel, which the Talmud also discusses. Why would the Talmud explain how the third accusation was not what it seemed (as it was considered as if they slept with the women because they delayed their being able to return to their husbands, not that they actually slept with them) without even trying to explain the other two? Additionally, both Rashi and Tosfos point out that the Talmud is only discussing the third sin, but would agree that Eili's sons belittled the sanctity of the offerings. How could they describe their sin as only "belittling the offerings" if they broke the law by taking their portion (and more than their rightful portion at that) before burning the fats?

Korbon Aharon says that the mistake the sons of Eili made was thinking that since they can eat their portion when the fats can't be burned (when they're missing or ritually impure), they can also eat their portion before the fats were burned even when they can be (and will be) burned. This, he explains, is why Toras Kohanim interrupts the prohibition against doing so and the mention of Eili's sons with the exceptions, as it was the exceptions that led to their mistake. However, the Talmud often does not apply the same rabbinic prohibitions to Kohanim as it does (or would) for the general population based on Kohanim being much more knowledgeable and therefore not prone to making the same mistakes as others. If the sons of Eili could have made such a mistake, it is hard to imagine that Kohanim in later generations couldn't make similar mistakes, and prohibitions to protect against such mistakes would have been applied to Kohanim as well.

Malbim makes a similar suggestion, saying that the exceptions prove that even if the Kohanim did eat their portion before burning the fats, the offering need not be brought again. However, even if this is true, doing so would still violate the law (making it more than just "belittling"), an issue that applies to Korbon Aharon's approach as well.

Ezras Kohanim, in his second commentary on Toras Kohanim ("Tosfos Ha'Azarah"), suggests that Eili's sons never took their portion before the fats were burned; they took their portion only when the fats couldn't be burned, without telling anyone that this was the case. This seems like a stretch, for several reasons. First of all, the verse and Toras Kohanim, strongly imply that there were still fats that could be burned when they took their portions. Secondly, if they normally didn't take their portion until after the fats were burned, why would anyone have suspected that the fats from their offering hadn't already been put on the altar? And if everything was being done properly, why didn't they explain why they hadn't burned the fats? What did they have to gain by misleading anyone?

When Rashi explains the verse, he does not quote Toras Kohanim word for word, telling us instead that the prohibition is against eating the meat of the offering before the fats are burned, whereas Toras Kohanim just says it doesn't belong to the Kohanim until after the fats are burned. (Ra'avad explains Toras Kohanim to mean this as well.) The commentators explain why the Kohanim can't eat their portion until the fats are burned; the meat they eat is supposed to be given to them from "G-d's table" (as it were) rather than from the person who brought the offering. This can only be said if the parts that are offered to G-d have already been given to Him, by putting them on the altar (as opposed to when nothing can be put on the altar, whereby the Kohanim eating it doesn't indicate that it wasn't from "G-d's table"). Therefore, as long as Eili's sons didn't eat their portion before the fats were burned, there was no "sin."

We are told that "the law of the Kohanim with the nation" included the Kohain taking a three pronged pitchfork and stabbing the meat in the pot, taking whatever meats came up with it (2:13). Was this a real law? Obviously not, as the Kohain was only supposed to get certain cuts of meat, not whatever the pitchfork grabbed. What does it mean that it was this law was "with the nation"? Did "the nation" have a say in this "law"? If the Kohanim just made their own rules, why would it be called "with the nation"? It would therefore seem that this was an agreement between the Kohanim and those who brought offerings, that the Kohanim would be allowed to take a pitchfork and keep whatever stuck to the pitchfork. If it was an agreement between the two parties, the Kohanim taking more than the portion the Torah says belonged to them was no longer "theft," and the Talmud would have no reason to have to explain this sin; the implication of the verse itself indicates that this meat wasn't being stolen, but was part of a previously made arrangement. The question becomes why the nation agreed to such an arrangement.

Until now we've discussed when the Kohanim can eat their portion. What about the person who brings a "sh'lamim," who gets some of the meat of the offering (and shares it with others)? Rambam (Hilchos P'sulay Ha'Mukdashin 18:7, see also Mishneh L'Melech, Hilchos Ma'asaeh Ha'Karbanos 11:4) tells us that he can't eat his portion of the meat until after the innards are put onto the altar either. Which means that everyone who brought an offering (and the offerings discussed in Sh'muel were "sh'lamim") had a vested interest in the sons of Eili burning the fats, as they couldn't eat their meat either until the fats were put onto the altar. Knowing this, Eili's sons used their leverage to get more meat out of "the nation." They delayed putting the fats on the altar, leaving those who brought the offerings wondering why. Weren't the sons of Eili in the same predicament they were in, not being able to eat their meat until the fats were burned? As with every negotiation, there was a game of chicken to see who would blink first. Would the sons of Eili finally burn the fats so that they could eat their meat or would the nation agree to give the Kohanim more meat in exchange for burning the fats?

There was one more trick up their Priestly sleeves; in order to make the nation think that they wouldn't burn the fats, they led them to believe that they didn't think they had to. They couldn't bluff them by saying they would break the law, but they could bluff them by making them think that they didn't think they would be breaking the law. Whether the sons of Eili explicitly referenced the exceptions to mislead the nation into thinking they believed the meat could be eaten even before the fats were burned or the nation talked themselves into believing that's what the sons of Eili thought is irrelevant; the point is that the exceptions played a part in the dynamic that led to the agreement, and the sons of Eili did nothing to correct the misperception that they would eat their meat before the fats were burned. Even after the arrangement had been set, there was concern that the sons of Eili wouldn't burn the fats (see 2:16), something that had to be maintained for the nation to continue to be willing to hand over more meat than was otherwise required. [The women waited by the entrance of the sanctuary because they were also concerned that the fats from their offering wouldn't be burned, or wouldn't be burned right away. Since they wouldn't become ritually pure, and be able to return to their husbands, until this happened, it caused them to delay their return home.]

Was this an abuse of power? Absolutely. Did it turn what should have been a holy experience into an exercise that seemed to focus on gluttony? Unfortunately, for many (especially for the sons of Eili), it did. Did the sons of Eili belittle the sanctity of the offerings by doing so? As Rashi and Tosfos point out, they most certainly did. But they did so while abusing the law, not breaking it. They never ate their portion before the fats were burned, so there was no need for the Talmud to explain how they weren't breaking the law. And since the misperception that they were willing to eat their portion before the fats were burned was based on the exceptions, Toras Kohanim taught us about the exceptions before referencing what they did.




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