**SALT | Vayikra 5783 / 2023**

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Dedicated to Rachel Roytberg z"l,   
whose yahrzeit falls on the first of Nissan,  
by Family Rueff.

Motzaei Shabbat

The Torah in Parashat Vayikra (2:13) establishes the obligation to add salt to all sacrifices – “*al kol korbankha takriv melach*” (“you shall offer salt with all your sacrifices”). The Rambam lists this obligation as one of the Torah’s 245 affirmative command (*asei* 62), and lists also a Biblical prohibition forbidding offering a sacrifice without salt (*lo ta’aseh* 99).

The Gemara in Masekhet Menachot (21b) teaches that the salt added to sacrifices is purchased with public funds. Even when an individual brings a private, personal sacrifice, he does not bring the salt, and the sacrifice is rather salted with salt bought by the Temple treasury. The Gemara draws a connection in this regard between the salt added to sacrifices and the firewood placed on the altar which sustains the fire. Both are supplied by the public, and an individual may not bring his own firewood or salt for his personal sacrifice.

Symbolically, this *halakha* perhaps reflects the notion of the public’s responsibility to assist individuals in their quest to grow and improve. Needless to say, a person who requires or wishes to bring a sacrifice for atonement must purchase the sacrifice himself. Atonement is not possible without personal effort and self-sacrifice. One who seeks to improve must take responsibility for himself, and cannot assign this task to others. At the same time, however, the community is called upon to provide support and assistance to those seeking to grow. When a person comes forward with his “sacrifice,” determined to put in the effort to improve, the people around him are expected to take part in the process. Although the individual himself must bring the “sacrifice,” the community must supply the “firewood” and the “salt,” a support system to enable the person to undergo a successful process of change. While each person bears personal responsibility for his or her growth, we must all join together to help one another and provide opportunities for those seeking to advance and improve themselves.

Sunday

Yesterday, we noted the command introduced in Parashat Vayikra (2:13) to add salt to every sacrifice. The Rambam, in *Hilkhot Issurei Mizbei’ach* (5:11), writes that sacrificial meat should be thoroughly salted, the same way that meat is thoroughly salted before being roasted for consumption. Nevertheless, the Rambam adds, even if one, for whatever reason, added just one grain of salt to the sacrifice, he has fulfilled his obligation.

Rav Pinchas Menachem Yustman of Piltz, in *Siftei Tzadik*, raises the question of whether the Rambam refers to a single grain of salt placed on the entire sacrifice, or one grain placed on each part of the sacrifice. The carcass of an animal sacrifice is separated into pieces before being placed on the altar (*nitu’ach*), and the question thus arises as to whether the minimum standard of this *mitzva* requires just one grain of salt on the entire sacrifice, or a grain on each portion of the carcass.

The *Siftei Tzadik* creatively suggests hinging this issue on a debate among the *Tanna’im* in Masekhet Bekhorot (3a) concerning an entirely different matter. The Gemara there addresses the situation where a Jew and a gentile arrange that the Jew will care for the gentile’s animal in exchange for the right to keep half of the animal’s offspring. If the animal has a firstborn male child, the question arises whether the newborn animal has the status of a *bekhor* – a firstborn animal that must be given to a *kohen*. Rabbi Yehuda maintains that in such a case, the Jew must pay half the value of the newborn animal to a *kohen*, as he in essence owns half the animal. The majority view among the *Tanna’im*, however, disagrees, and rules that the obligation of *bekhor* applies only when a Jew enjoys full ownership over the animal. The Gemara explains that the debate revolves around the question of how to interpret the phrase “*kol bekhor*” (“every firstborn”) used by the Torah in reference to this command (Shemot 13:2). The majority of *Tana’im* understand the word “*kol*” (“all,” or “every”) as implying that the obligation takes effect only if a Jew owns the entirety of the animal. In their view, the world “*kol*” refers to the totality of the item under discussion, and thus, in this context, it speaks of an animal owned fully by a Jew. Rabbi Yehuda, however, felt that the word “*kol*” means “any,” and not “all,” and thus the expression “*kol bekhor*” instructs thateven partial ownership suffices for the *bekhor* obligation to take effect.

Perhaps, the *Siftei Tzadik* writes, this debate regarding the phrase “*kol bekhor*” can be applied also to the command to offer salt “*al* ***kol*** *korbankha*” – “with **all** your sacrifices.” According to the majority opinion, the word “*kol*” connotes the entirety of the item in question, and thus the command “*al* ***kol*** *korbankha* *takriv melach*” requires adding salt to the entire sacrifice. Hence, we might assume that salt must be placed on each portion of the sacrifice that is offered on the altar. According to Rabbi Yehuda, however, the word “*kol*” implies “any,” such that he might deem it sufficient to add salt to only one piece of the sacrifice.

Monday

Parashat Vayikra begins with God calling to Moshe and for the first time speaking to him from inside the newly-constructed *Mishkan*. Rashi, commenting on the opening verse of this *parasha*, cites *Torat Kohanim*’s discussion of the significance of the word “*va-yikra*” (“called”), noting that whereas this word is used in reference to God’s prophecies to Moshe, God’s prophecies to Bilam, a gentile prophet, are referred to with the word “*va-yikar*” (Bamidbar 23:4). The term “*va-yikra*,” Rashi writes, is an expression of endearment, and an expression used by the angels in heaven when they invite one another to sing praise to God (“*Ve-kara zeh el zeh*” – Yeshayahu 6:3). By contrast, the word “*va-yikar*,” which is derived from the term “*mikreh*” – happenstance – connotes an encounter that was chanced upon, which occurred randomly, without having been planned or wanted.

Rav David Frand, in *Kol Dodi*, elaborates on the distinction between “*va-yikra*” and “*va-yikar*.” The difference, he explains, lies in the way we respond to the circumstances that we experience. One way to respond is to view as them as “*mikreh*,” coincidental and random, situations that we simply need to manage, but nothing more. The righteous, however, view their circumstances as a calling, as opportunities, as missions to embrace. When something happens, whatever it is, they treat it not as a random occurrence, but rather as though God calls to them and summons them. Every situation that arises should be embraced as an opportunity for achievement. Every time we meet another person, we have an opportunity to spread joy and kindness. Every time we find ourselves challenged, we have an opportunity to develop new skills and strengthen our resilience. Every time we hear something new, we have an opportunity to learn and grow. The difference between “*va-yikra*” and “*va-yikar*,” then, has less to do with the way God calls to different people than with the different ways that people respond to His call.

Tradition teaches that the *alef* at the end of the word “*va-yikra*” in this verse is written smaller than the rest of the text in the Torah. Many have noted that this letter is what changes the word “*va-yikar*” into “*va-yikra*.” Rav Frand explains that the *alef* here is small to allude that the difference between a random occurrence and a calling is often inconspicuous. Just as we must read the word very carefully to discern the *alef*, so that we read “*va-yikra*” instead of “*va-yikar*,” we similarly need to look beneath the surface to find the opportunities in every situation. What outwardly appears to us as “*va-yikar*,” some random event, is in fact “*va-yikra*,” a mission for us to fulfill. The small *alef* challenges us to seek and find the opportunities latent within every situation that we encounter, and to seize these opportunities to the best of our ability.

Tuesday

Parashat Vayikra outlines the various forms of voluntary sacrifices which an individual may choose to offer. This section begins with the phrase, “*Adam ki yakriv mi-kem korban l-Hashem*” – “A person among you who offers a sacrifice to the Lord…” (1:2).

Rashi, commenting on this verse, famously cites the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabba* 2:7) as suggesting that the Torah’s use of the word “*adam*” (“person”) in this verse alludes to Adam, the first human being. The Midrash teaches that Adam offered a sacrifice to God, and his sacrifice serves as a model that future sacrifices should follow. In the Midrash’s words, “Just as Adam did not sacrifice from stolen [property], for everything belonged to him, you, too, shall not sacrifice from stolen [property].” As Adam owned the entire world, there was no possibility of him offering a stolen animal as a sacrifice. The Torah here speaks of a person offering a sacrifice with the term “*adam*” to allude that we must follow Adam’s example, and bring as sacrifices only that which we own. We cannot expect to earn God’s favor by stealing from our fellow and then bringing some of the stolen property as an offering.

Rav Yehoshua Schwartzberg, in *Divrei Yehoshua*, suggests reading the Midrash’s comments as referring not merely to actual theft, but also to attempts to “steal” other people’s religious practices. Our service of God must be authentic, in line with our individual strengths, talents and capabilities, and not “stolen” from others. Of course, there are basic halachic obligations that we all share in common. However, when it comes to extending beyond our shared requirements – similar to the voluntary sacrifices discussed in the opening chapters of Parashat Vayikra – we are to chart our unique course, rather than mimicking our fellow. Blindly embracing and following other people’s religious personas is akin to offering another person’s animal as a sacrifice to God; we in essence bring somebody else’s work as a sacrifice, instead of doing our own work. The “sacrifices” we “offer” must be authentic, the product of our own individual work and effort, and an expression of the unique, singular abilities and nature with which God has endowed each and every one of us.

Wednesday

Yesterday, we noted the comment of the Midrash (*Vayikra Rabba* 2:7), cited by Rashi, regarding the word “*adam*” in the second verse of Parashat Vayikra. The Torah introduces the laws concerning voluntary sacrifices with the phrase, “***Adam*** *ki yakriv mi-kem korban l-Hashem*” – “**A person** among you who offers a sacrifice to the Lord…” The Midrash writes that the word “*adam*” here alludes to the first human being – Adam – who offered a voluntary sacrifice to God. The Torah here indicates that just as Adam could not offer a stolen animal as a sacrifice – because, after all, he owned the entire earth – we, too, must not seek to earn God’s favor by offering stolen property.

Rav Yaakov Kantrowitz, in *Hegyonot Ha-Gri*, suggests that the Midrash here refers not merely to actually stealing an animal and offering it as a sacrifice, but also to “theft” in the broader sense of the term – bringing an offering at the expense of one’s fellow’s honor and dignity. Rav Kantrowitz mentions the specific examples of large donations to religious institutions in an inappropriately public manner, eyeing fame and glory, and charitable donations given in a condescending fashion, causing the recipient shame and humiliation. Even if one does not directly steal an animal from his fellow and offer it as sacrifice, it is possible to “steal” in the process of bringing an offering by compromising people’s honor and dignity, giving in an arrogant, competitive, or self-aggrandizing manner, with the intent of promoting oneself and belittling others.

We might add that the Midrash’s comment perhaps includes also those who inflict harm on others ostensibly for the purpose of bringing an “offering” to God. People sometimes assume that they show devotion to God, as though presenting Him with a gift, by insulting, maligning and hurting individuals of whose conduct they disapprove. They cause their fellow shame and embarrassment and then bring this “achievement” before God as a “sacrifice,” priding themselves for having given an “offering” to God. The Midrash here teaches that God does not want “offerings” that entail “theft,” that require hurting and compromising the dignity of other people. When we sacrifice to God, we must make a true sacrifice, sacrificing our own time, comfort or resources, giving of ourselves as an expression of submission and devotion. Inflicting harm on other people, even those whose conduct deserves to be opposed and criticized, does not qualify as an “offering” to God. The sacrifices we choose to bring must be genuine expressions of humble submission, and not acts of self-promotion or hostility clothed in a veneer of religious devotion.

Thursday

As we’ve discussed earlier this week, the Torah in the beginning of Parashat Vayikra (1:2) refers to a person who offers a voluntary sacrifice with the word “*adam*” (“a person”), and the Midrash, cited by Rashi, sees this word as an allusion to Adam, the first human being. Just as Adam could not possibly have offered a stolen animal as a sacrifice, as he owned the entire world, we, too, are not to steal another person’s animal and offer it as a sacrifice.

Many writers noted that the Gemara, in Masekhet Bava Kama (66b), infers this law from the next verse, where the Torah refers to a person’s voluntary sacrifice with the term “*korbano*” – “his sacrifice,” implying that the animal legally belongs to him. The Torah emphasizes the individual’s rightful ownership over the sacrifice in order to indicate that stolen property may not be brought as a sacrifice. The question thus arises as to what the Midrash adds with its comment that a person’s sacrifice should resemble that brought by Adam, which could not possibly have been a stolen animal.

Rav Yitzchak Reitbord, in his *Kehilat Yitzchak*, cites a colleague who boldly suggests that the Midrash refers to property to which one’s rights were unsuccessfully contested in court. The Gemara in Masekhet Chulin (37b) comments that the prophet Yechezkel observed a special measure of piety, refraining from meat whose kosher status had been called into question. Even if a scholar ruled that the meat was permissible, Yechezkel would nevertheless not partake of it, as an extra precaution, lest the rabbi’s ruling was issued in error. By the same token, the Midrash perhaps urges those who wish to offer a voluntary sacrifice to ensure beyond a shadow of a doubt that the animal which they bring rightfully belongs to them. If money was in dispute, the person in whose favor the court ruled is told not to use this money for a voluntary sacrifice, because a sacrifice must be purely and unquestionably legitimate, without any lingering doubts about its legality. Therefore, the Midrash teaches that a voluntary sacrifice must resemble the sacrifice offered by Adam – regarding which there was not even any question that he was the rightful owner.

Rav Reitbord suggests that this might explain the sequence of Rashi’s comments to this verse. Before citing the Midrash’s association between the word “*adam*” and Adam, Rashi explains that this verse – “A person among you who offers a sacrifice” – refers specifically to the offering of a *korban nedava*, a voluntary sacrifice. It is likely that Rashi’s remarks regarding the implication of the word “*adam*” relate to his previous comment, emphasizing that this section deals with voluntary sacrifices, as opposed to obligatory sacrifices. Rav Reitbord explains that in a situation where one is obligated to bring a sacrifice, then even if all the money he has available is money that he won in court, he must use this money to bring his mandatory sacrifice. Since he bears a halakhic requirement to offer a sacrifice, any money that legally belongs to him must be used for this purpose. It is only with regard to voluntary sacrifices, which one chooses to offer as an extra measure of piety and expression of devotion and subservience to God, that one should avoid using money that was at the center of a legal battle. When we seek to extend beyond our strict obligations, we need to adhere to especially strict standards of morality, and avoid even the remote possibility of using money to which one is not fully entitled. Although money awarded to a person in court is legally his, and may be used for the purchase of a mandatory sacrifices, such money should not be used for the purchase of a voluntary sacrifice, which demands a stricter standard.

Friday

Parashat Vayikra discusses various situations in which one is required to bring a sacrifice to atone for a misdeed. The final situation discussed is that of a “*kofer be-fikadon*” – one who falsely denies on oath owing something to his fellow. The Torah gives several cases, such as that of a person who was entrusted his fellow’s item and then denied receiving it, who stole something but denied it, an employer who denied owing wages to the worker, and someone who found his fellow’s lost item but denied it (5:21-22). If the person falsely swore that he did not owe the object or money in question, and then confessed his wrongdoing, he must pay the victim what he owes as well as a penalty (5:23-24), and must also bring a sacrifice known as *asham gezeilot* (5:25-26).

The *Or Ha-chayim* (5:21), in analyzing the Torah’s formulation of these forms of wrongdoing, makes a number of observations, including the formulation the Torah uses in reference to the culprit’s denial – “*ve-kichesh ba-amito*” (5:21), which literally means, “he denied his fellow.” The object of the verb “*kichesh*” (“deny”) is not the money being claimed, but rather the person making the claim. Notably, in the final situation addressed – that of one who falsely denies finding his fellow’s lost item – the Torah says, “*ve-kichesh* ***bah***” – that the finder falsely denied possessing the item in question. In this context, the item under dispute is the object of denial, whereas in regard to the previous cases of false denial, the Torah speaks of the culprit denying his fellow, not denying his fellow’s claim.

The *Or Ha-chayim* explains that the phrase “*ve-kichesh ba-amito*” alludes to a particular aspect of the crime of falsely denying a claim. When a person approaches his fellow to claim money or property which he rightfully deserves, and the other party falsely denies owing it, then the liar is guilty not only of theft, but also of turning the other person into a villain. A false denial is also a false accusation, charging that the claimant dishonestly demanded something to which he is not entitled. Therefore, the Torah speaks of the false denial with the expression “*ve-kichesh ba-amito*,” implying that the culprit “denies” his fellow, falsely dismissing him as a liar. The *Or Ha-chayim* writes that the liar is guilty not only of theft, but also of wrongly depicting the victim as a thief.

For this reason, the *Or Ha-chayim* writes, this formulation is not used in reference to the final case discussed – that of an *aveida* (lost object). A person who lost something cannot definitively claim that his fellow found it, because he did not see this happen. This is in contrast to the other situations, such as of property which was lent or entrusted, or owed wages, where the aggrieved party knows with certainty that he is owed the money or property. Therefore, in the case of an *aveida*, since no definitive claim is made, the false denial does not amount to an accusation against the claimant. And so in regard to this situation, the Torah says “*ve-kichesh bah*” – that the culprit denies the claim, and not that he impugns the claimant.

The *Or Ha-chayim*’s analysis of these verses perhaps reminds us of the severity of falsely accusing our fellow, of unfairly impugning people’s character. Just as it is a crime to steal people’s property, so it is a crime to steal people’s dignity, image and reputation through false, imprecise or questionable allegations. We must avoid baseless judgments of our fellow’s conduct and character, and must instead give the benefit of the doubt and judge others favorably until we have a compelling reason not to. According to the *Or Ha-chayim*’s reading of the text, the Torah makes a point of emphasizing that one who falsely denies a claim is guilty both of theft and of impugning the claimant’s character – teaching us that both are grievous crimes, that we must respect not only our fellow’s property, but also his dignity.