YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**PARASHAT HASHAVUA**

**Rav Yishai Jeselsohn**

**PARASHAT VAYIKRA**

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**Dedicated in memory of Edith Horowitz z"l**

**Esther Bluma bat Elimelech Shimon**

**whose Yahrzeit is 13 Adar Bet**

**by the Horowitz Family**

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**In memory of Rabbi Dr. Joseph I. Singer z"l**

**Rabbi Emeritus of Manhattan Beach Jewish Center**

**and son-in-law of Dr. Chaim Heller z"l  
whose yahrzeit falls on 12 Adar**

**by his daughter, Vivian Singer**

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**"When Any Person of You Brings an Offering"**

**I. "Any person"**

Our *parasha* opens the section of sacrifices with the basic commandment of offering a sacrifice:

Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: When any person [*adam*]of you [*mi-kem*]brings an offering [*yakriv korban*]to the Lord. (*Vayikra* 1:2)

The unusual formulation of this verse, and especially the use of the term *adam*,"person," caught the attention of the Biblical commentators. Some suggested that this wording comes to exclude the possibility of offering human sacrifices:

For this reason the *parasha* dealing with the sacrifices opens with the word "person," to teach that the person is the one who brings a sacrifice, and is not the sacrifice itself. (Rabbeinu Bachya, ad loc.)

As we will see, the *midrashim* offer other interpretations.

**II. Inclusion**

The *Sifra* states:

"Person" – to include proselytes. (*Sifra dibura de-nedava* 2)

Regarding this exposition, the *Or Ha-Chaim* cites a question raised by the *Korban Aharon*:[[1]](#footnote-1)

Why was it necessary to [specifically] include proselytes, when it is established that we accept [sacrifices even] from gentiles [*Menachot* 73b, based on the repeated word *ish*, “man,” in *Vayikra* 22:18]? (*Or Ha-Chaim*, *Vayikra* 1:2)

If we accept sacrifices from gentiles, why should it be necessary to make a point of including proselytes? Surely that is no more of a novelty than gentiles! The *Korban Aharon* answers:

He suggested that one might have thought to exclude them because they have entered the category of Israel, and we find that the verse limits regarding members of Israel, since it is written: "*of* you" [*mi-kem*] – and not all of you. Therefore it was necessary to include… (*Or Ha-Chaim*, ibid.)

However, the *Or Ha-Chaim* then goes on to argue that if there were only one inclusive term in the verses, we would have used it to include proselytes, not gentiles; therefore, two inclusive terms are indeed necessary.

The fact that there is a need to explicitly include proselytes indicates that one might otherwise have thought proselytes cannot bring offerings. It seems that the Torah is aware of this possibility, for it explicitly includes proselytes in the offering of sacrifices in several places. In *Parashat Emor*,it states:

Speak to Aharon, and to his sons, and to all the children of Israel, and say to them: Whoever he be of the house of Israel**, or of the strangers in Israel**, that brings his offering, whether it be any of their vows, or any of their free-will offerings, which are brought to the Lord for a burnt-offering. (*Vayikra* 22:18)

And in *Parashat Shelach*:

**And if a stranger sojourn with you**, or whoever may be among you, throughout your generations, and will offer an offering made by fire, of a sweet savor to the Lord; as you do, so he shall do. (*Bamidbar* 15:14)

Why would one have thought otherwise? We do find regarding several other matters that a proselyte is indeed different from an ordinary Israelite. For example, there is an opinion that “the congregation of proselytes is not called a congregation” (see *Yevamot* 57a, 79a, and elsewhere). From this one might have thought that there could be a difference between Israelites and proselytes with respect to other laws as well. Thus, the Torah came to teach us that regarding this matter, Israelites and proselytes are one.

**III. Distancing oneself from robbery**

We find in many sources that the word "person" [*adam*] in our verse is understood as an allusion to the first human, Adam. In the *Pesikta*, *Chazal* learned a particular law from Adam based on our verse – that sacrifices may not be brought from stolen property:

"When any person of you brings a sacrifice." Why does it say "*adam*"? Rather, the Holy One, blessed be He, said: He who wishes to offer a sacrifice before Me should do like the first human, Adam, who didn't offer a sacrifice from stolen property, because "I hate robbery with iniquity [*be-ola* – alternatively: 'in burnt-offering']" (*Yeshayahu* 61:8). (*Pesikta Zutarta*, ad loc.)

Contrary to what is stated in this *midrash*, the Gemara derives the prohibition to bring a sacrifice from stolen property from a verse in *Malakhi*:

Because it would be a mitzva fulfilled through a transgression [which is forbidden], as it is stated: "And you have brought that which is stolen, and the lame, and the sick" (*Malakhi* 1:13). The stolen is thus compared with the lame; just as the lame can never be rectified, so that which is stolen can never be rectified. (*Sukka* 30a)

The Gemara also mentions our verse, but it is from the words "of you" that it derives that a sacrifice must be owned by the person who brings it. The Gemara understands that this verse refers to a stolen sacrifice before the owner has despaired of recovering it; such a sacrifice does not belong to the person who is bringing it:

Now this is right before despair, since the Torah says: "When any person of you brings an offering," and this is not his. But after despair, surely [the robber] acquired it by virtue of that despair. Rather the reason must be that it is a mitzva fulfilled through a transgression. (Ibid.)

The Gemara understands that even after the owner has despaired of his ownership of the item, the sacrifice is still prohibited, because it is a *mitzva* fulfilled through a transgression; the sacrifice was obtained via a transgression, and therefore it is not desired.

The derivation from the verse in *Malakhi* seems to stem from the comparison of a lame sacrifice to a stolen sacrifice: just as a lame sacrifice has no remedy, because there is a defect in the sacrificial object, so too a stolen sacrifice. One may ask: surely, once the owner has despaired, the stolen sacrifice belongs to the robber; why then is the defect still present in it? It seems that this is precisely the novel idea the Gemara is teaching: the act of robbery is not merely an action that took place in the past; it is still evident in the sacrifice. The sacrifice is disqualified not because of its identity as a sacrifice that belongs to another person, but because of God's dissatisfaction with the way the sacrifice was obtained.

It seems that this point is alluded to by a parable the Gemara brings afterwards. The parable relates to a theological question: If the entire world belongs to God, why is a stolen sacrifice problematic for Him?

Rabbi Yochanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai: What is the meaning of that which is written: "For I the Lord love justice; I hate robbery with iniquity" (*Yeshayahu* 61:8)? This may be likened to a human king who passed through his customhouse and said to his attendants: Pay the tax to the tax-collectors. They said to him: But the whole tax, surely, belongs to you! He answered them: All travelers will learn from me not to evade their payments of tax. So the Holy One, blessed be He, said: "I the Lord hate robbery in iniquity [or: in burnt-offering]"; let My children learn from Me and keep away from robbery. (Ibid.)

The parable teaches us that indeed God does not have a problem in principle with the stolen object, but in order to teach us the right attitude towards money, He treats it as having a defect, as if the object itself is damaged.

**IV. Sinful like Adam**

In *Midrash Tanchuma*, the lesson learned from Adam is taken in a different direction:

Why does it say "*adam*," and not "*ish*"? It wishes to say: If a person sins - like Adam, who was the first to sin – he shall offer a sacrifice. (*Tanchuma Vayikra* 8)

The *Or Ha-Chaim* relates to this *midrash* in his commentary and explains the depth of the novelty in it:

The *midrash* means to say that God came to deal with the people of Israel differently from the way He dealt with Adam. For Adam sinned and was penalized with death and bringing a sacrifice did not help him, but for them, it would help. (*Or Ha-Chaim*, *Vayikra* 1:2)

Indeed, we do not find that Adam was offered the option of atonement*.* This raises a difficult question: Why in fact are we different from Adam? Why didn't Adam merit the option of bringing a sacrifice, but instead was forced to undergo punishment for his sin, while we are given the possibility of achieving atonement?

The *Or Ha-Chaim* answers:

With its saying that Adam was the first to sin, it supplies the reason, why God did not act in similar fashion with Adam: because Adam was the first to sin, and the evil urge had not been there earlier, forcing him to sin. This was not the case with those who came after him and for whom the evil urge had already become an integral part of their souls. The sign of the covenant, the foreskin that God commanded be removed through the act of circumcision, testifies to the difference between us and Adam [who was created without a foreskin]. (*Or Ha-Chaim*,ibid.)

The *Or Ha-Chaim* is consistent here with the position that he has already expressed in many places, according to which a person is comprised of both good and evil, and his sins stem from the evil buried within him. That evil force is a result of Adam's sin, because before that, God had created the entire world with goodness (see *Bereishit* 1). When the world was entirely good, there was no "excuse" for why Adam sinned, and therefore the possibility of atonement by way of a sacrifice was not available to him. This, however, does not apply to us, Adam's descendants; the sign of sin is already sealed in us, and therefore the possibility of achieving atonement was given to us, seeing as we have an "excuse" as to why we sin. The *Or Ha-Chaim* proves this from the covenant of circumcision – that Adam was born without a foreskin, which symbolizes the forces of sin.

**V. An allusion to Moshe**

Taking the interpretive path of *remez* (allusion, or hint), the *Or Ha-Chaim* explains that it is possible to suggest that the "person" referred to in the verse is not Adam, but Moshe. God chose at the beginning of the section dealing with the sacrifices to allude to a very important point connected to Moshe's leadership of the people of Israel:

On the level of allusion, the verse directs us along the following path: Since the people of Israel had seen that God had brought Moshe close to Him, and called out only to him from among all of them, heaping honor and greatness upon him, therefore the Torah says that when a person draws *so* near [*adam ki yakriv*]to the *Shekhina*,it is only because "of you" [*mi-kem*], because of Israel, for it is through them that he drew near. This is as we have already pointed out earlier, that God spoke with Moshe only for the sake of Israel. Consider the fact that during the 38 years during which the people of Israel were in a state of reprimand, the Glory distanced itself from him and God did not speak with him. (*Or Ha-Chaim*,ibid.)

It is related about a certain Chasidic Rebbe that he would engage in very extended prayer, and that every Shabbat morning, after all of his *Chasidim* in the synagogue had already finished their prayers, the Rebbe would continue with his prolonged prayer to God. One Shabbat, the *Chasidim* thought among themselves: "Our Rebbe is a righteous man who engages in lengthy prayer, but as for us, it is a waste of our time to wait for the Rebbe to finish praying. Let us go home, eat a little, rest a little, and then come back to the synagogue and continue with the service after the Rebbe has finished praying." This is what they did. On Shabbat morning, after finishing the *Amida* prayer, they all went home, and then returned after about half an hour. When they returned, to their surprise they saw that their master, the Rebbe, had long since finished his prayer and was sitting in his seat. The *Chasidim* asked: "Master, every Shabbat you pray for about two or three hours! Why today did you finish so quickly?" The Rebbe answered them: "I draw all the power of my prayer from you. The prayer is not only mine but also yours; when you are not here, I cannot pray properly."

The point of this Chasidic story is the very same point being made here by the *Or Ha-Chaim.* The Israelites are going to complain about their leader Moshe that he is assuming honors for himself for personal reasons. This will be the case with Korach, when Korach and his company will argue against Moshe and Aharon, "Why then do you lift yourselves up above the assembly of the Lord?" And this will be the case with Miryam, who, with her brother Aharon, will speak ill of Moshe's separation from his wife. According to the allusion that the *Or Ha-Chaim* finds in the verses, God provided a remedy in advance of the anticipated problem (*hikdim terufa le-maka*), explaining that all the power and authority that was given to Moshe was given to him for the sake of Israel and by their power alone.

The *Or Ha-Chaim* emphasizes this point in other places as well. For example, when Moshe is informed about the sin of the golden calf, God says to him: "Go down," which the *Or Ha-Chaim* explains as follows:

And similarly, it says: "And Moshe went down from the mountain" (*Shemot* 19:14). We must understand the nature of this descent and what it was. Perhaps He informed him that all of his stature was for the sake of Israel, and now that they sinned, he will not reach the level of prophecy that he had attained in the first vision. (*Or Ha-Chaim*, *Shemot* 32:7)

The basis of this profound point is that a true leader of Israel does not lead in order to gratify his own desires, but as a representative of the entire people of Israel. This concept of leadership also arises in the Gemara in *Horayot,* when Rabban Gamliel appoints Rabbi Elazar ben Chasma and Rabbi Yochanan ben Gudgeda as communal leaders and they refuse to come:

When he landed, he sent for them, but they did not come. He sent for them a second time and they came. (*Horayot* 10a)

Rabban Gamaliel understood that their initial refusal stemmed from humility and an unwillingness to derive benefit from a communal position, and therefore he explained to the two *Tannaim* as follows:

He said to them: "Do you imagine that I offer you rulership? It is servitude that I offer you, as it is stated: 'And they spoke to him, saying: If you will be a servant' (I *Melakhim* 12:7)." (Ibid.)

A Jewish leader does not rule over his people, but rather serves them.

It is possible that this idea is already rooted in the beginning of Moshe's leadership of Israel. Moshe, who grew up in Pharoah's palace, goes out to see how his enslaved brothers are faring. When he sees an Egyptian man beating a Hebrew man, he comes to his aid at the cost of his own good and comfortable life. Even after that, when Moshe settles in Midyan and marries the daughter of a Midyanite priest, he renounces his position there and returns to Egypt, where he is wanted for a capital crime, for the sake of his people. Thus, the very beginning of Moshe's leadership was already marked by a renunciation of his own honor for the sake of Israel, and so it is easy to understand how the rest of his leadership of Israel was driven solely by the power of the people.

**VI. Any person in Israel**

In another interpretation on the level of *remez*, the *Or Ha-Chaim* expounds the verse as referring to the drawing near of each member of Israel to his Father in Heaven:

The verse also alludes to a command to men of valor to try and draw the hearts of the people of Israel to the service of God. This is called an "offering [*korban*, ‘that which draws near’] to the Lord," because it is sin that severs the cleaving of Israel to their Father in Heaven, as it is written: "But you that did cleave to the Lord your God" (*Devarim* 4:4). They become separated and distanced from the *Shekhina*, and God is anxious to establish a close bond with Israel and He commanded the elite to rebuke anyone who is distant in order to bring his heart closer to the Lord. (*Or Ha-Chaim*, *Vayikra* 1:2)

The *Or Ha-Chaim* expounds the verse here as referring to the drawing near of the hearts of Israel to God, rather than the offering of a sacrifice. When a person brings other members of Israel closer to God, he is essentially performing the service of a sacrifice – drawing Israel nearer to God. The Ramban in his commentary to our *parasha* explains the names of the offerings brought in the aftermath of sin (*chatat*, "sin-offering," and *asham*, "guilt-offering") as follows:

It appears to me that the term *asham* denotes some serious deeds for which the person who did it deserves to be *shameim* [desolate] and destroyed because of it, in the sense of: "Destroy them [*ha'ashimeim*], O God" (*Tehillim* 5:11); "the pastures of the wilderness waste away"[[2]](#footnote-2)… The word *chatat* denotes something which has turned aside off the way, in the sense of (*Shoftim* 20:16): "every one could sling stones at a hair-breadth, and not miss [*yachti*]." (Ramban, *Vayikra* 5:15)

Both cases involve a deviation from the proper path – either an absolute deviation that requires loss through an *asham* offering, or a slight deviation that requires repair through a *chatat* offering. The sacrifice repairs the distance. Thus, a person who brings the hearts of Israel closer to God performs an action similar to that of an offering. The *Or Ha-Chaim* goes on to explain that there is indeed a connection between the two things, and that one who brings others to righteousness will not need to bring an animal sacrifice:

The verse specifically uses the term "*adam*," which denotes importance, as is stated in the *Zohar* (*Tazria* 48): "When he brings close [*ki yakriv*]," and whom shall he bring close? "Of you (*mi-kem*)," of the lower level among you who have sinned against God and have asked God to move away from them and have distanced themselves from cleaving to Him. These are the people whom he should draw near, and this is why it is called an offering to the Lord, because he draws the offshoots of His holy planting near to their roots. Such a person does not have to bring a free-will offering, nor is there a situation for him to bring a sin-offering or a guilt-offering, in accordance with what *Chazal* said (*Avot* 5:18): "Whoever causes the many to be righteous, sin will not occur through him," and if there is no inadvertent sin, there is no sacrifice. After finishing with that, the Torah describes the bringing of the distinguished offerings, saying: "You shall bring your offering of the cattle" (*Vayikra* 1:2). This refers to ordinary people, because not everybody reaches the level of one who is able to turn the many away from iniquity. (*Or Ha-Chaim*, ibid.)

We can learn from the words of the *Or Ha-Chaim* that even in our time, when there is no sacrificial service in the Temple, there is no reason for despair. We can still create the same act of drawing near to God by drawing those who are distant closer to Him. May we merit to do so.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. Rabbi Aharon ibn Chaim, one of the sages of Morocco in the 16th-17th centuries. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Editor’s note: It is not clear to what verse this refers. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)