**PARASHAT HASHAVUA**

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**PARASHAT VAYIKRA**

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Dedicated by Mr. and Mrs. Leon Brum for the Refua Sheleima of

Dana Petrover (Batsheva bat Gittel Aidel Leba)

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**“If the Anointed Priest Shall Sin So As To Bring Guilt on the People”[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**Rav Gad Eldad**

In our *parasha*, we are informed about the sin-offering, and we learn that there are several types of this sacrifice, depending on the identity of the person bringing it. The verse opens with a general heading:

And the Lord spoke to Moshe, saying: Speak to the children of Israel, saying: If any one shall sin through error, in any of the things which the Lord has commanded not to be done, and shall do any one of them. (*Vayikra* 4:1-2)

In this framework, the Torah lists four possibilities in the following order: the sin-offering of the anointed priest (i.e. the high priest, who is installed with the Anointing Oil if it is available), the sin-offering of the congregation as a whole, the sin-offering of a ruler (i.e. a Jewish king), and the sin-offering of an individual commoner.

At first glance, we notice a discrepancy in the text. The heading relates to the sin-offering of an individual, but the chapter opens with the sin-offering of the anointed priest. One might have expected that the Torah would finish the remaining sin-offerings of individuals, namely, that of a ruler and that of a commoner, and only afterwards discuss the sin-offering of the congregation as a whole; but the Torah does not do this. After the sin-offering of the anointed priest, it describes the sin-offering of the congregation, which quite naturally is formulated in the plural:

And if the whole congregation of Israel shall err, the thing being hid from the eyes of the assembly, and do any of the things which the Lord has commanded not to be done, and are guilty: when the sin wherein they have sinned is known, then the assembly shall offer a young bullock for a sin-offering, and bring it before the tent of meeting. (*Vayikra* 4:13-14)

Another matter also requires examination. It we compare the wording used for the various offerings, we notice that the Torah tries to maintain a unified framework for the different offerings, in the style of the opening and closing words. It is precisely from this comparison that we find a notable exception in the formulation of the section dealing with the sin-offering of the anointed priest, which stands out in both its opening and closing words. For this purpose, let us review the various offerings (emphasis mine, as with all the bolded text throughout this *shiur*):

1. The sin-offering of the anointed priest (4:3-12):

If the anointed priest shall sin so **as to bring guilt on the people,** then let him offer for his sin, which he has sinned, a young bullock without blemish to the Lord for a sin-offering…

Even the whole bullock shall he carry forth without the camp to a clean place, where the ashes are poured out, and burn it on wood with fire; where the ashes are poured out shall it be burnt.

2. The sin-offering of the congregation (4:13-21):

And if the whole congregation of Israel shall err, the thing being hid from the eyes of the assembly, **and do any of the things which the Lord has commanded not to be done, and are guilty:** when the sin wherein they have sinned is known…

Thus shall he do with the bullock; as he did with the bullock of the sin-offering, so shall he do with this; **and the priest shall make atonement for them, and they shall be forgiven.** And he shall carry forth the bullock without the camp, and burn it as he burned the first bullock; it is the sin-offering for the assembly.

3. The sin-offering of a ruler (4:22-26):

When a ruler sins, and **does through error any one of all the things which the Lord his God has commanded not to be done, and is guilty:** if his sin, wherein he has sinned, be known to him…

And all the fat thereof shall he make smoke upon the altar, as the fat of the sacrifice of peace-offerings; **and the priest shall make atonement for him as concerning his sin, and he shall be forgiven.**

4. The sin-offering of a commoner (4:27-35):

And if any one of the commoners sin through error, **in doing any of the things which the Lord has commanded not to be done, and be guilty:** if his sin, which he has sinned, be known to him…

And the priest shall make them smoke on the altar, upon the offerings of the Lord made by fire; **and the priest shall make atonement for his sin** **that he has sinned, and he shall be forgiven.**

In the last three cases, the passage opens with a description of the sin, and concludes by noting that the offering achieves its purpose and the sinner is forgiven. These details are, however, missing in the account of the sin-offering of the anointed priest. We will begin our study with the difference in the conclusions of the various passages.

"and the priest shall make atonement for his sin that he has sinned, and he shall be forgiven"

The absence of this phrase at the conclusion of the description of the sin-offering of the anointed priest is addressed in various ways by the commenters.

The Ramban (v. 2) offers the following explanation:

Regarding the sin-offering of the anointed priest, there is no mention of: "And [he] shall make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven," as this is mentioned with the other sinners — the congregation, the ruler and the commoner. Perhaps, owing to his elevated stature, **he does not achieve atonement, and he is not entirely forgiven until he prays and pleads before God, because he is the angel of the God of hosts,** and he must be clean and pure.

This approach is taken to a further extreme in the words of Rav Chayim ben Paltiel (v. 3):

One may ask: Why is there forgiveness for the congregation, the ruler, and the commoner, but not for the high priest? It may be suggested that since the high priest has sinned, God's name is profaned, for people say: If the head of all of Israel and the Sanhedrin did such-and-such, certainly I can do so. And **as it were, there is no forgiveness for this.** From here the Sages learn that there is no difference between inadvertent and deliberate sinning when there is a profanation of God's name, and also that which the Sages say that an inadvertent error in study amounts to presumption.

In their opinion, forgiveness is not mentioned, because the process is not yet complete. Owing to the standing of the high priest, the offering cannot erase the sin as if it has never happened, and another action on the part of the priest is required in order to complete the process.

### "And the priest shall make atonement for them, and they shall be forgiven"

Abravanel disagrees with this approach (Chapter 4, in the answer to Question #20):

Now it does not say: "And [he] shall make atonement for him, and he shall be forgiven," with regard to the anointed priest, as it says concerning the congregation, a ruler and a commoner. This is not because owing to his high stature he does not achieve atonement so that he is forgiven, as the Ramban writes, **for nothing stands before repentance.**

Rather, it is because these two bullocks, of the high priest and of the Sanhedrin [for the entire nation], come with a single intent, **and therefore God wanted to mix the two and mention one forgiveness for the two of them.** Therefore it says regarding the bullock of the congregation: "Thus shall he do with the bullock; as he did with the bullock of the sin-offering, so shall he do with this; and the priest shall make atonement for them, and they shall be forgiven." The word "they" refers not to all those included in the congregation, but rather to the high priest and to the congregation in the two passages, that the priest shall make atonement for them and they shall be forgiven — each one of them among us.

In his opinion, forgiveness is indeed achieved through the offering, even though this is not stated immediately, but only at the end of the passage relating to the congregation; the forgiveness mentioned there applies also to the sin-offering of the anointed priest.

Truth be told, the Torah itself points to the similarity between the sin-offering of the congregation and the sin-offering of the anointed priest. Abravanel himself lists five points of similarity (in the answer to Question #18):

See that the law of the anointed priest and his offering when he sins is the same as the law of the congregation when it sins. For in the case of the high priest, the offering must be a bullock sin-offering, its blood must be brought insideto be sprinkled seven times before the Lord, in front of the Veil, and also on the horns of the Incense Altar inside the Tent of Meeting, and all the rest of the blood must be poured out at the base of the Burnt-offering Altar, and the fats must be made to smoke on the Altar, and the meat and the skin of the offering must be burned outside the camp. **This very law applies to the sin-offering of the congregation.**

Therefore, over and beyond the question with which we began our discussion, regarding the absence of one phrase or another, we must try to understand the comparison to which the Torah directs us between the sin-offering of the anointed priest and the sin-offering of the congregation.

### "And the anointed priest shall take of the blood of the bullock, and bring it to the tent of meeting"

Another point is omitted from Abravanel's list, namely, the fact that the Torah notes the involvement of the high priest in the offering of these sacrifices. Regarding the sin-offering of the anointed priest it is stated:

**And the anointed priest** shall take of the blood of the bullock, and bring it to the tent of meeting. **And the priest shall dip** his finger in the blood, and sprinkle of the blood seven times before the Lord, in front of the veil of the sanctuary. **And the priest shall put** of the blood upon the horns of the altar of sweet incense before the Lord, which is in the tent of meeting… (4:5-7)

Similarly, regarding the sin-offering of the congregation, we read:

And the elders of the congregation shall lay their hands upon the head of the bullock before the Lord; and the bullock shall be killed before the Lord. **And the anointed priest shall bring** of the blood of the bullock to the tent of meeting. **And the priest shall dip** his finger in the blood, and sprinkle it seven times before the Lord, in front of the veil. And he shall put of the blood upon the horns of the altar which is before the Lord, that is in the tent of meeting… (4:15-18)

Although the text is inconsistent in its mention of the high priest, and from this *Chazal* derive in the *Sifra* that his participation in the process is not indispensable, nevertheless, since the Torah takes the trouble to mention him, it follows that ideally it is he who should do the service (*Sifra, Vayikra, Chova* 3:3):

"And the anointed priest shall take" (v. 5) — I know only the priest who is anointed with the anointing oil.

From where do I know the priest who is [only] invested with the additional garments? Therefore the verse states: "And the priest" (v. 6).

If in the end we include a different priest, why does the verse state: "And the anointed priest shall take"? **Rather, there is a *mitzva* that the anointed priest shall receive [the blood], but if a different priest received [it], his service is valid.**

### "If the anointed priest shall sin so as to bring guilt on the people"

Let us try now to connect all the data we have seen. Already at the beginning of the passage dealing with the sin-offering of the anointed priest, the Torah connects it to the sin-offering of the congregation with the obscure expression, "as to bring guilt on the people," cited in the heading to this section. The commentators suggest several explanations,[[2]](#footnote-2) the common denominator being that the expression itself teaches that the sin of the anointed priest impacts upon the state of the people.

Rashi ad loc. expresses this as follows:

Its literal sense is according to the aggadic explanation: when the high priest sins this is the guilt of the people, because they are dependent on him to effect atonement for them and to pray on their behalf, and now he himself has become degenerate.

Whether or not we can point to the guilt of the people, Rashi points to the fact that when the anointed priest sins, this has a critical impact on the relationship between the nation and their God, as it is the high priest who is responsible for maintaining their integrity.

It is possible that the mechanism works in the way that Rashi describes it, but it is possible that it works in a different manner. The people are not guilty of the priest's sin, but the very fact that the priest has sinned works to the discredit of the people. With his sin, the priest creates liability for the people, and the people suffer harm as a result, so that in the end the priest's sin rolls into the people’s yard. This fact makes it worse for the high priest and exacerbates his sin.

I, however, wish to argue that this fact can also serve as a basis for showing him leniency and thus work to his benefit.

### "And if the whole congregation of Israel shall err, the thing being hid from the eyes of the assembly"

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We have already noted the striking exception made in the very inclusion of the sin-offering of the congregation in a section the heading of which is directed exclusively at individuals: "If any one shall sin through error, in any of the things which the Lord has commanded not to be done, and shall do any one of them" (4:2). We will now try to suggest a solution for this difficulty.

It seems that the inclusion of the sin-offering of the congregation comes not to teach about itself, but rather to highlight the essential nature of the atonement effected by the high priest. We have already noted that the Torah emphasizes that the sin-offering of the congregation should ideally be brought by the high priest. This very detail indicates that the high priest ought to be fit to achieve atonement for the people. Thus, it follows that the atonement of the high priest is critical for the atonement of the people, since their atonement depends upon him.

If we have correctly understood the Torah's intention regarding the order of the sin-offerings, then we can also understand why it is not necessary for the verse to mention that the anointed priest "shall be forgiven," as the section that follows proves that the high priest has achieved forgiveness, as if it were not so, he would not be fit to atone for the people.[[3]](#footnote-3) The verse notes the forgiveness for wrongdoing in order to calm the sinner, whose heart is filled with dread and tension until atonement has been confirmed. In the case of the anointed priest, however, this is unnecessary, as his very service in the *Mishkan* proves his atonement, for in the absence of atonement, his attempt to achieve atonement for others would be in vain.

Now we understand why the two sin-offerings are interrelated, for the one teaches about the other. The possibility of activating the mechanism of the sin-offering of the congregation is the sin-offering of the anointed priest, whereas the sin-offering of the congregation is the proof of the effectiveness of the sin-offering of the anointed priest.

While it is true that it is not at all necessary that the sin-offering of the anointed priest and the sin-offering of the congregation occur at the same time, the very fact that the role of the high priest requires that he be at all times available to atone for the entire congregation compels his atonement.

### "And the anointed priest that shall be in his stead from among his sons shall offer it, it is a due forever"

This idea may echo in another context:

And the Lord spoke to Moshe, saying: This is the offering of Aharon and of his sons, which they shall offer to the Lord in the day on which he is anointed: the tenth part of an *eifa* of fine flour for a meal-offering perpetually, half of it in the morning, and half thereof in the evening. On a griddle it shall be made with oil; when it is soaked, you shall bring it in; in broken pieces shall you offer the meal-offering for a sweet savor to the Lord. And the anointed priest that shall be in his stead from among his sons shall offer it, it is a due forever; it shall be wholly made to smoke to the Lord. And every meal-offering of the priest shall be wholly made to smoke; it shall not be eaten. (6:12-16)

Every priest is called to offer a meal-offering **"in the day on which he is anointed,"** while at the end of the passage, we are informed that **"the anointed priest** that shall be in his stead from among his sons shall offer it, it is **a due forever."[[4]](#footnote-4)** There are priests about whom we can define a particular moment or day on which they are anointed, whereas there is a priest regarding whom this moment lasts forever. The verse does not explain the daily requirement of the anointed priest to bring his meal-offering, but in view of the point that we have uncovered, it may be possible to shine a new light on its vital nature. Let us note that the format brings to mind the daily-offering of the people:

Concerning the meal-offering of the anointed priest, we read:

The tenth part of an *eifa* of fine flour for a meal-offering **perpetually**, half of it **in the morning**, and half thereof **in the evening**. On a griddle it shall be made with oil; when it is soaked, you shall bring it in; in broken pieces shall you offer the meal-offering for **a sweet savor to the Lord**.

Concerning the daily-offering, we read:

And you shall say to them: This is the offering made by fire which you shall bring to the Lord: he-lambs of the first year without blemish, **two day by day, for a continual burnt-offering**. The one lamb **shall you offer in the morning**, and the other lamb **shall you offer at dusk**; and the tenth part of an *eifa* of fine flour for a meal-offering, mingled with the fourth part of a hin of beaten oil. It is **a continual burnt-offering**, which was offered in Mount Sinai, for **a sweet savor, an offering made by fire to the Lord**. (*Bamidbar* 28:3-6)

In both cases we are dealing with a daily-offering that is brought up to the altar in two parts, at the two ends of the workday. Thus we have before us another parallel between the Temple processes required of the people and of the high priest.

The meaning of the offering may be the same in both cases. It is necessary to demonstrate the fitness and maturity of the connection between the people and their God every day, and for this purpose a duty is imposed on the people to bring a daily-offering, in order to show the people and the world that the communal offerings are continually accepted with sweet savor by God.

At the same time, it is necessary to demonstrate this also with regard to the one in charge of those entrusted to maintain the constant connection between the people and their God. He too, therefore, is commanded to bring a meal-offering, by way of which it is clarified before the people and the world that he is fit in the eyes of God to maintain the connection between the people and their God. Therefore, it is necessary to show that his meal-offering as well is accepted every day as a sweet savor before God.

Thus, the two processes are conducted simultaneously, and in this way the Temple succeeds in fulfilling its purpose.

(Translated by David Strauss)

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1. Regarding this matter, see the remarks of Prof. Y. Grossman on the VBM website (*Torat Ha-korbanot* 25). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Some have suggested that the priest with his erroneous ruling brings the people to sin, thereby bringing guilt upon them (ibn Ezra, Rashbam, Chizkuni). However, the plain sense of the text does not support this explanation. If the priest's sin-offering depended on that of the people, it should be mentioned that his ruling brings the people to sin, and the wording should shift to the plural, as with the sin-offering of the congregation, in v. 13. If it is not necessary that the people actually sin, and the priest's sin is that he could have caused them to sin, then he should be liable for his erroneous ruling, even if he himself does not actually sin. However, we do not find even with regard to the sin-offering of the congregation that a sin-offering is brought merely for an erroneous ruling. On the other hand, there are commentators who explain in the opposite manner, that if the anointed priest sins, this occurs in the wake of the sins of the people, for by himself, it is nigh-inconceivable that he would be capable of sinning, even inadvertently (Rashi, second explanation of Ibn Ezra; Y. Grossman [supra n. 1] prefers this understanding). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. A certain proof to this can be adduced from the offerings brought on the eighth day of the consecration of the *Mishkan*, when Aharon is consecrated for service there(*Vayikra* 9:7): "And Moshe said to Aharon: Draw near to the altar, and offer your sin-offering, and your burnt-offering, **and make atonement for yourself, and for the people**; and present the offering of the people, **and make atonement for them; as the Lord commanded.**" See commentaries ad loc. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. To understand the unique structure of this passage, see the remarks of Rav Elchanan Samet, on the VBM website; and the remarks of Y. Grossman, ibid. *Torat Ha-korbanot* 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)