

The Path To Follow

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The Law of the Burnt-Offering in the Service of G-d

It is written, “Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: ‘Command Aaron and his sons, saying: “This is the law of the burnt-offering: The burnt-offering shall be on the hearth, upon the altar, all night until morning, and the fire of the altar shall be kept burning on it” ’ ” (Vayikra 6:2).

It is difficult to understand why the term *leimor* (saying) is used twice, since the verse could have said: “Hashem spoke to Moshe: ‘Command Aaron and his sons, saying: “This is the law of the burnt offering...” ’ ”

Rashi cites the Midrash in stating, “Scripture especially needs to urge where monetary loss is involved.” The commentators have explained that because the *kohanim* derived no benefit from the burnt-offerings, since they were entirely burned upon the altar for G-d, the Torah said: Perhaps the *kohanim* will not hasten to bring the offerings. Hence it warned them with the term *tzav* (“command”), which is meant to spur them on, teaching them that they must not demonstrate any slack in this regard.

This is surprising! Did the *kohanim* perform all their work in the Temple only for financial gain, such that they had to be encouraged in situations where they would not derive any benefit from an offering?

We also need to understand why the verse mentions the burnt-offering, from which the *kohanim* derived no benefit, before the sin-offering, from which the *kohanim* did benefit. When a king of flesh and blood gives orders to his servants, he usually begins with easier tasks and proceeds to more difficult ones, so as to make it easier for his servants to fulfill his orders. That said, why did Hashem not do the same for the *kohanim*, but instead began with the difficult part – the burnt-offering from which they did not benefit – and only then did He mention the easier offerings, from which they would benefit?

Sanctify Yourself in What is Permitted

We may explain this according to the words of the Ramban, who discusses why Hashem commanded the Children of Israel to bring Him offerings: “A person must realize that he has sinned against his G-d with his body and his soul, and that his blood should really be spilled and his body burned, were it not for the lovingkindness of the Creator, Who took from him a substitute and a ransom, namely this offering, so that its blood should be in place of his blood, its life in place of his life” (Ramban on Vayikra 1:9). Now because of our many sins, the Temple and the altar have been destroyed, so what can procure atonement for man in place of his life? The answer is that when a person sanctifies his senses for Hashem, his thoughts and deeds, Scripture considers him to have brought a burnt-offering in the Temple and sprinkled its blood upon the altar. Such was the goal of the offerings when the Temple stood: To elevate and sanctify the senses, for that is what atones for sin.

The proof is that every person who elevates himself in the service of G-d must offer and sanctify his entire being for Him, including his most inner thoughts. The Torah says in regards to the burnt-offering, “When a man among you brings an offering to Hashem, you shall bring your offering of the cattle, of the herd, and of the flock” (Vayikra 1:2). What does, “When a man among you brings” mean? It teaches us that even when there is no Temple, a person’s sins can be atoned in

the same way as the burnt-offering atoned for him in the Temple. How so? When a person offers himself completely to Hashem, he will grow in Torah and the fear of Heaven, and his sins will be forgiven. Since the Torah states, “When a man among you brings” concerning the burnt-offering, and since the burnt-offering atones for the thoughts of the heart (*Yerushalmi, Yoma* 8:7), it follows that a burnt-offering only effects atonement when accompanied by repentance. Furthermore, a person must even sanctify “the cattle” to Hashem. This refers to the animalistic nature of the human soul, as the Sages have said: “Sanctify yourself in what is permitted” (*Yebamot* 20a), meaning over and above your obligations. When a person does this, he will devote himself entirely to Hashem. His sins will then be atoned and he will be protected from sin, for a person only falls into sin when he contemplates it beforehand, as Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair said: “A man should not indulge in [perverse] thoughts by day, which might lead him to uncleanness by night” (*Ketubot* 46a). We also learn that sinful intentions are even worse than sin itself (*Yoma* 29a). Thus when a person sanctifies his thoughts for G-d, in the manner of a burnt-offering, he will not fall into sin.

This explains why the Torah mentions the burnt-offering before all the other offerings. In fact a person is only protected from sin when he offers and sanctifies himself entirely to Hashem, to the point that he does not turn his thoughts from Him. This is why the burnt-offering is more important than all others, for it is through the burnt-offering that a person can completely devote himself to Hashem. He thus elevates even his physical side by sanctifying himself in what is permitted, over and above his obligations, in order to rise to a very high spiritual level. If he lives at this level, he will not sin or require a burnt-offering.

How does a person know if he has managed to sanctify himself and become a burnt-offering for Hashem? It is when he is constantly putting an effort into elevating himself to a higher level, not being content with what he did on the previous day, but by constantly adding to it. This is what the Torah alludes to by saying, “This is the law of the burnt-offering [*olah*]: The burnt-offering [*olah*],” meaning that the entire nature of the offering is an elevation (*oleh*), which should be an elevation towards Hashem. If a person does not sense a spiritual elevation within himself – and, if rather than asking himself if he has correctly served Hashem yesterday and should add to his service of today, he instead thinks: “Why do I need to sanctify myself more than necessary? Is there no end to this? I pray, study, and I’m careful not to sin. That’s enough!” – such a person should realize that he has not yet become a burnt-offering for Hashem, nor has he offered to Heaven the animalistic part of his soul. In fact if he had become spiritual, it would certainly not have prevented him from elevating himself in the service of Hashem, even in areas that go beyond his obligations. Furthermore, since a person who says this to himself thereby neglects his service of G-d and does not renew it each day, it will become a mere habit to him, and he will never elevate himself in the fear of Heaven. In fact it is impossible to arrive at an elevated level all at once. Incremental steps are required, which is why it is written: “This is the law of the burnt-offering [*olah*]: The burnt offering [*olah*]” – one step (*aliyah*) after another is required, until one reaches the highest spiritual levels.

When the Rebbe of Novominsk, Rabbi Nachum Mordechai *Zatzal*, became old, he was struck with an extremely painful and debilitating condition. He was forced to undergo a very serious abdominal operation, and as a result all food was extremely painful to digest. The Rebbe had to eat in order to survive, and yet at the end of even the lightest meal, he would collapse without energy, so intense was his pain. He had almost no strength to open a Gemara and leaf through it. However once he did open it, he would rouse himself like a lion from its den and begin speaking with emotion. He would raise his voice, stand on his legs, and run to bring a book that he needed to support his viewpoint.

Sometimes the Rebbetzin, who feared for his health, would enter the Beit HaMidrash and beg him to take a break in the middle of his learning so as not to overtax himself. However Rabbi Nachum Mordechai would get upset and quickly tell her, "Do you want to take away my life?"

He Went Back to Learning with the Strength of Youth

The *gaon* Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz *Zatzal*, the Rosh Yeshiva of Mir, also experienced painful health problems. He was born with a hearing problem, and over the course of the years he lost complete hearing in one ear. He was also hard of hearing in the other ear, to the point that he needed a hearing aid. There was a constant beating in his ears, which increased over time until an infernal machine was resonating in his head. His heart weakened, his blood pressure rose greatly, and he suffered from terrible headaches. In addition to all this, he suffered from a condition that produced pain throughout his body. One day, he was struck with paralysis in his throat and mouth, and until his final day he never completely recovered from it.

Yet all this suffering was not enough to divert him from learning. With a love for Torah that burned within him, he took advantage of every instant that his mind could think. His powers of concentration and diligence in learning were ever so great, never waning. Through superhuman effort, he arose like a lion to serve Hashem. Even a person who was not aware of his great weakness and the intensity of his pain was stunned by the physical and spiritual efforts that he put into learning. As for those who were close to him and saw him suffering yet controlling himself, there was no limit to their astonishment.

When he lived in the Diaspora, Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz caught typhus, and for reasons that are easy to understand, he could no longer study. One of his students, who saw him suffering, said as a way to console him: "When someone is constrained, Mercy exempts him." However Rabbi Chaim began to tremble, responding with an impassioned voice: "How can you speak like this about learning?"

One day towards the end of his life, Rabbi Chaim fainted. A doctor was called to his bedside, and he regained consciousness. When he woke up, he remembered that he had to give a class at the yeshiva, but he had been completely prevented. On another occasion, he collapsed and lost consciousness. Almost a half-hour passed from the time that he regained consciousness until he could speak, at which point he said to those around him: "At times like this, when I was unable to speak, I couldn't do anything. That's why I had time to prepare for a class."

Sometimes, due to the effort that he put into learning, he would be completely exhausted. At such times, he would get up from the table and go rest a little in his room. No more than eight minutes would elapse before he was once again seated at the table, his strength renewed, completely radiating with the energy of youth. He would then begin learning again.

The Best Years of My Life

Our teacher, the Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Eliezer Man Shach *Zatzal*, would usually pay a devoted *avrech* to study Gemara with a boy from the yeshiva ketanah in order to help him learn. Nobody knew why he wanted to help that particular

student, until finally they discovered that this boy was the only descendant of a woman who had helped Rav Shach during his youth in the Diaspora. He did it out of gratitude, as he describes it:

"I had only one single shirt, which I had worn for many years. Over the course of time, it became completely full of holes, but I had no other. I would wash it once a week, sometimes in the river, and other times in the washbasin of one of the synagogues. Until it was dry, I would hide myself in a corner to study. One day, as I was going to wash my shirt, a woman standing far away noticed me. She came closer and said, 'I've been watching you for a long time, and I've seen that you go wash your shirt from time to time. But since it's full of holes, how can you wear it?' She hurried to bring me two shirts, one for Shabbat and one for the week!"

His Student's Account

Rabbi Meir Heizler *Shlita*, his student, recounted the following incident: "One afternoon, Rav Shach arrived at the yeshiva completely exhausted, and he immediately collapsed in his chair. I asked him from where he was coming, and he replied that he had just walked back from the funeral of a Jew in Givatayim. I asked him who that Jew was, who had the merit of this particular honor. The answer I got was that he had known him from one of the small towns where he had studied during his youth. I then asked him why he had not taken a bus, to which he replied: 'The deceased merited that I go for him on foot. I will tell you how I knew him.'

"I studied in the Beit HaMidrash during my youth. For many years, I wore the same clothing, and my shoes were worn-out and torn to the point that my toes stuck out. I could forgo food, but at night I was very cold. Boys would sleep near the furnace, but I wasn't used to doing that. I slept in terrible cold on a bench, and if it happened that I found a few pieces of wood on which to rest my head, I was as happy as if I had found a good pillow. One day, a Jew entered the Beit HaMidrash and gave me an old coat with which to cover myself. From then on, my situation began to improve. The cold no longer affected me. Today was the funeral of that marvelous Jew, who indeed merited for me to go by foot to accompany him to his final resting place."

With regards to that era, the Rav wrote in the introduction to his book *Avi Ezri* (5753): "How can I repay Hashem for all His mercies? Starting from the days of my youth, when I went through periods when I had nothing at all. I cannot adequately describe this period from the beginning of the First World War in 5674, when all Jews were exiled from Lithuanian towns and I did not know where my parents were, for I was alone in Slutsk and I had no contact with them. That was how I spent several years, suffering greatly."

Despite the great suffering that was his lot, Rav Shach spoke of this era in the following way: "They were the best years of my life!" On another occasion he added, "That time was the best in my life." He added yet again that he would not have been able to tolerate the difficulties if he had not studied Torah, for nothing would disturb him then. "Without Torah, my delight, I would have been lost in my poverty."

Guard Your Tongue!

Who is Called an Apikoros [Heretic]?

An *apikoros* (one whom it is a *mitzvah* to scorn and humiliate) is a person who denies the laws and prophecies of Israel, whether it be the written law or oral law. Even if he says, "All the Torah is true except for a single verse, a single *kal vachomer*, a single *gezeira shava*, or a single grammatical detail," he is included in this category.

— Chafetz Chaim

The Torah Shall Never Depart

It is written, "Command Aaron and his sons, saying: 'This is the law of the burnt offering: The burnt-offering...'" (*Vayikra* 6:2).

It is a rule: Wherever the term *leimor* ("saying") appears, it is an order to say to others. Thus Moshe received the order to teach three generations: Aaron, his sons, and the sons of his sons.

In the book *Yismach Israel*, Rabbi Yaakov Chaim Sofer *Zatzal* sees in this verse an allusion to a teaching of our Sages on the verse, "They [words of Torah] shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your children, nor from the mouth of your children's children, from now and for all time" (Isaiah 59:21): "He who is himself a Torah scholar, his son is a Torah scholar, and his son's son too, the Torah will never cease from his descendants... From then on, the Torah seeks its home" (*Bava Metzia* 85a).

Hence the verse states: "Command Aaron and his sons" – these being two generations; "saying" – this being the third generation. "This is the law of the burnt-offering" – we teach the laws that relate to the burnt-offering. We will thereby merit "the burnt-offering" – this Torah will always seek its home, and everyone will know it perfectly well.

For the Sake of Heaven

It is written, "This is the law of the burnt offering: The burnt-offering shall be on the hearth, upon the altar" (*Vayikra* 6:2).

The Ben Ish Hai explained this verse by telling the story of a great Torah scholar who entered the Beit HaMidrash and saw many students learning Torah by the method of *pilpul* with razor-sharp concentration. He realized, however, that everyone was learning Torah with an ulterior motive. He said to them, "I see the Beit HaMidrash filled to the brim with Torah." The students rejoiced in his words, for they thought that he was giving them a compliment.

When the Torah scholar saw that they had not understood his words, he said to them: "Know that the breath of learning ascends before Hashem, for the Torah is called 'fire,' and by nature fire rises. However if learning is done for selfish reasons, the breath of the Torah cannot rise, for Heaven pushes it away and it remains in the Beit HaMidrash. That is why I said that I see the Beit HaMidrash filled with Torah."

This is alluded to in the verse, "This is the law [*torat*] of the burnt-offering," meaning that the greatest kind of Torah study – "is the burnt-offering" – which immediately ascends [*oleh*] on high, and is not pushed back below. This only happens when it is "on the hearth, upon the altar" – meaning that Torah learning is done with enthusiasm and for the sake of Heaven alone.

In the Desert of Sinai

It is written, "To bring their offerings to Hashem in the desert of Sinai" (*Vayikra* 7:38).

Why does the verse specifically mention the desert of Sinai? Was there something special about this desert, something did not apply to the other places where they brought offerings?

Noting how peculiar this is, Rabbi Chizkiya ben Manoach (the Chizkuni) explains that the Children of Israel did not bring offerings before having arrived in the desert of Sinai, and that they remained there for an entire year less ten days (they arrived at the desert of Sinai on the first day of Sivan in the first year, and the cloud arose on the twentieth day of the second month in the second year).

Once they left the desert of Sinai, they no longer brought offerings, for the prophet Amos says: "Did you bring offerings and meal-offerings to Me for 40 years in the desert?" (*Amos* 5:25). Even the Pesach offering was only brought in Egypt and in the desert of Sinai, as were the Yom Kippur offerings in the second year.

This is why the verse underlines that they brought "their offerings to Hashem in the desert of Sinai."

In the Light of the Parsha

The Burnt-offering Alludes to Great Sanctity

It is written, "Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: 'Command Aaron and his sons, saying: "This is the law of the burnt-offering: The burnt-offering shall be on the hearth, upon the altar, all night until morning, and the fire of the altar shall be kept burning on it" ' " (*Vayikra* 6:2).

The Torah uses the term *tzav* ("command") because in the Gemara we learn, "Whenever *tzav* is stated, its only purpose is to promote zeal for then and all time" (*Kiddushin* 29a). Yet when does a person become enthusiastic about doing something? Only when it is something he likes, certainly not something that he has grown used to. All the power of the burnt-offering resides in the fact that the *kohanim* were enthusiastic about fulfilling *mitzvot*. The result was that all the Children of Israel saw the *kohanim* serving G-d, and they tried to emulate them.

The foundation of Torah observance lies in the fact that the great men of the generation accomplish it, and all the people see them and then emulate them. As such, the Torah will naturally be in the mouth of every Jew. In fact the Torah is an "inheritance" for the Jewish people, as it is written: "Moshe commanded us the Torah, the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob" (*Devarim* 33:4). The great men in every generation are like Moshe, as the Zohar states: "There is a little of Moshe's soul in every generation and in every *tzaddik*."

This is why the verse warns us by using the term *tzav*. This teaches us about the enthusiasm that we must demonstrate, especially in regards to the burnt-offering, since the same expression is not used for the other offerings mentioned in *Sefer Vayikra*. Why not?

It is because the burnt-offering alludes to a great degree of sanctity, more than what is mentioned in the Torah. This is the "financial loss" that we are being told of here. This sanctity is not explicit, and a person may think that it means nothing to him. Hence the verse gives an even greater warning when speaking of the burnt-offering, thereby telling us that a person must sanctify himself even in permitted areas, for as such he will not fall into sin.