

He said to Aharon, “Take for yourself a yearling calf as a sin-offering.” (9:2)

Aharon *HaKohen* brought a *Korban Chatas*, Sin-offering, comprised of a yearling calf to atone for his part in the *chet ha'eigal*, sin of the Golden Calf. *Klal Yisrael* also brought a calf to atone for their role in making the Golden Calf. Their calf, however, was not a *Korban Chatas*, but, rather, a *Korban Olah*, Elevation/Burnt-offering. Why is there a distinction between their *korbanos*? **Horav Yisrael Belsky, Shlita**, explains this, based upon the distinction between the varied functions of the *Olah* and *Chatas*.

A *Korban Chatas* atones for the *maaseh aveirah*, actual deed of performing the sin. The sinful act concerning the Golden Calf was making the molten calf and being involved in the revelry that accompanied its worship. A person who acts *b'shogeg*, mistakenly, performs a sinful deed which, *b'meizid*, under such circumstances that his action would have been premeditated – he would have received *kareis*, Heavenly excision – he will now bring a *Korban Chatas*. While he may not have planned to sin, after all is said and done, he did commit a sinful act. He must atone for his actions. The *Korban Chatas* allows him to atone for his sinful act.

The *Korban Olah*, however, serves to atone for one's improper thoughts, one's *machashavos raos*. Perhaps we may suggest that this is why it is completely burnt – nothing is left over. Thoughts do not endure. Without action, they dissipate; the *Korban Olah* is sacrificed – burnt – end of story. The thoughts have been atoned for. We may now go on with life.

Klal Yisrael's role in the sin of the Golden Calf was primarily a sin of thought. They harbored doubts about Hashem's sovereignty. They actually thought that this molten idol would possess a power of its own to lead them. Furthermore, anyone who actually worshipped the Golden Calf was killed by members of *Shevet Levi*. The remainder of *Klal Yisrael* had entertained the idea, had fostered thoughts of worshipping the idol – but did not carry out their thoughts. Thus, their sin was *b'machashavah*, remained in their minds. The *Korban Olah* expunged the sin, and, with *teshuvah*, repentance, they were able to effect atonement.

Never for one moment did Aharon *HaKohen* consider the Golden Calf to be a god. He knew unequivocally that this was a molten calf with no power of divinity – whatsoever. His dilemma was how to respond to the people who were clamoring for action; they needed leadership – now. Moshe *Rabbeinu* was gone. Someone else had to fill in for him. In order to prevent this crisis from getting out of hand, Aharon made the *eigal* – which catalyzed other problems. Aharon *HaKohen's* sin was in his incorrect action, an action which in no way reflected any question in his mind regarding Hashem's Divinity. Aharon made a *maaseh aveirah*; he, therefore, brought a *Korban Chatas*.

On the other hand, one's *machashavah*, thoughts, determine the turpitude of his actions. One might act inappropriately, but, deep in his heart, his thoughts are far from evil. Let me cite an

example. In the previous *parsha* (*Tzav*), the Torah begins with a command to Aharon and his sons concerning the *Korban Olah*. The *Korban Chatas* is not mentioned until later. Why is this? Since an *Olah* atones for thoughts, it should follow after the *Korban Chatas*, which atones for sins of action. Clearly, harmful action is more egregious than bad thoughts.

In his *Ben Ish Chai*, **Horav Yosef Chaim, zl, m'Bagdad**, employs the following analogy to explain why *Olah* is the first *Korban* to which Aharon should relate. The *leitzanei ha'dor*, cynics of every generation, concentrate their malignant prattle against whomever they please. It makes no difference to them if it is Avraham *Avinu* – whose paternity of Yitzchak *Avinu* they impugn – or Aharon *HaKohen* – whom they feel was spiritually unsuitable to offer their *korbanos*. After all, was he not the one who participated in the creation of the Golden Calf? You might rush to his defense, saying that he was compelled to support their cause – or die. Why, then, did he make an altar? No one forced him to construct an altar in support of the Golden Calf.

Rav Yosef Chaim compares this to a band of robbers who chanced upon the royal prince who was traveling with his royal retinue. Their joy was boundless. Imagine how much money and jewels such a heist would bring them. Their chieftain was a reasonable man who only sought money. He had no desire to kill anyone. If his men were to seize the prince, the man would certainly be left to die. They could ill afford witnesses. He suggested that he alone attack the prince. He would bring them all of the booty. They could hide in a nearby cave and wait for him. The men had great trust in their leader.

The prince came by and was attacked solely by the leader of the robber band. "Quick, give me all of your money and run for your life," the chief told the prince. "My men would have your money and your head. I will relieve you of your wealth and tell them that I killed you." So it was: the prince escaped; the robbers were satisfied with their newfound wealth.

The prince returned home safe and sound. He related to his father, the king, what had transpired. The king immediately sent out a search party to find the chief of the band of robbers. He was brought before the king, who, after a few moments, determined that he should be executed. Prior to the hanging, they placed the robber into the sand in which he could not move around, and the officers began to beat him mercilessly. "Oy my heart! Oy my heart!" he cried out.

"What is wrong with your heart?" the king asked. "We are hitting your legs – not your heart!" "No, your honor, my heart hurts me, since it is the reason that I am here." Having caught the king's attention, he began to explain his predicament: "When the prince came along, my heart was filled with compassion for the young man. Why should he die? I then came up with an idea to satisfy both my band of robbers and the prince. I would take his wealth and share it all with my friends. The prince would be allowed to escape, and no one but myself would be any the wiser. I figured that for saving the prince's life, I would be freed. I guess I was wrong."

When the king heard the rest of the story, he realized that he was wrong in executing the robber.

Indeed, he deserved a medal. Out of gratitude, the king appointed him to a ministerial position.

A similar idea applies to Aharon *HaKohen*. He knew that if he alone built the *Mizbayach*, Altar, for the Golden Calf, it would take an extra day, thereby delaying its worship. The *eirav rav*, mixed multitude, rose early in the morning to worship their idol, but the remainder of the Jewish People did not. In the meantime, Moshe *Rabbeinu* returned.

Hashem knew all of this. Therefore, He first commanded Aharon and his sons concerning the laws of the *Korban Olah*, which atones for one's thoughts. Hashem knew that Aharon's thoughts were positive; he only wanted to save the Jewish People from sin. Thus, his positive thoughts actually transformed his actions from infamous to laudatory.