

Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them: ‘When a man among you brings an offering to Hashem.’ (1:2)

The word *mi'kem*, “from/among you,” prompts *Chazal* to derive the *Halachic* injunction *mi'kem v'lo min umos ha'olam*, “From you and not from the nations of the world.” This *halachah* is applicable primarily to the spiritual dimensions of the *korban*, since we do accept *korbanos* from gentiles. *Chazal* are basically teaching that Hashem does not desire a gentile's sacrifice, and this sacrifice does not have the same spiritual standing as the *korban* of a Jew. Why?

Horav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg, zl, poses this question as a basis for a thesis distinguishing between the concepts underlying Jewish worship and sacrifice and that of other religions. He first traces the historical outward similarities between worship and sacrifice among the nations of the world and the Jewish religion. Veritably, Judaism and sacrifice are synonymous. Avraham *Avinu* was asked to prove his commitment by indicating his willingness to offer his only son as a sacrifice. As he stood prepared to sacrifice, so, too, have his descendants – Jews throughout the generations have been prepared to relinquish their lives in devotion to the Almighty. The *Parsha* that initiates a young boy into his Torah-study is *Parashas Vayikra*, the *Parsha* of *korbanos*. Clearly, sacrifice and Judaism are intrinsically bound together.

We do find similarities with the gentile religions. They, too, understand the value of sacrifice. Balak was prepared to sacrifice his firstborn son to Hashem. The Almighty, of course, despises human sacrifice. Indeed, *Chazal* (*Midrash Vayikra* 27) states Hashem's reply to Balak, “I want no sacrifice from you – not your sons, nor your daughters. I ask nothing of you. It is only of My sons that I ask.” This is what is meant by the lesson of *Chazal* – *mi'kem v'lo mei'umos ha'olom*. Rav Weinberg continues with the notion that life in general – be it Jewish or gentile – is fraught with sacrifice. Life is filled with one long chain of sacrifice. We sacrifice “today” for “tomorrow” – for our youth and for future years. We are always giving up something for that which we are convinced is better, more important, more valuable. Indeed, the ability and aforethought to sacrifice define humanity. Animals worry about the “here and now,” eating whatever they find to satiate their immediate hunger. An animal neither provides, nor does it “leave over” for other animals (except its young). It lives for itself. Man is willing to sacrifice for tomorrow – for others.

The great inventions, innovations that changed the world, ideas that sparked progress and transformation, were all the products of various forms of sacrifice. Those who live off the dole, who live for themselves, are not willing to give anything up; some take by force and refuse to sacrifice. Ethical man understands that in order to live a proper life, to be part of a community and a member of a progressive society, he must be willing to sacrifice. Let us now return to our original question: What is the difference between Jewish sacrifice and gentile sacrifice? How is Jewish sacrifice so distinct that Hashem desires it, while gentile sacrifice is missing that specific ingredient?

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that the distinction between the two is simple. It is the difference

between *emes*, truth, and *sheker*, falsehood – between *ohr*, light, and *choshech*, darkness. The *emes* of Hashem and His Torah transforms Jewish sacrifice into the symbol of truth. The false nature of paganism and its contemporary religions transforms any sacrifice in its name into something fraudulent, bogus and wrong. Nonetheless, while the objectives of the respective sacrifices distinguish one from another in regard to essential content, is there a difference in the material form of the act of sacrifice? Does a Jew sacrifice to serve the Almighty differently than the manner in which a gentile sacrifices to serve his god?

Rav Weinberg posits that there is a distinction between the manner in which a Jew worships Hashem and that in which a gentile serves his god. When a gentile reaches the high point of his service, when his sacrifice is going through the process of “acceptance,” the gentile has a sense of ecstasy, a sort of euphoria which intoxicates him. The Jew, on the other hand, has achieved a moment of *dveikus*, “clinging,” during which he bonds with Hashem, having achieved a moment of closeness unlike any other that he had experienced before. Ecstasy creates an experience whereby one divorces himself from reality, an almost hypnotic state very much like that achieved through an addictive drug. *Dveikus*, however, brings one closer to reality, as he experiences truth in a palpable form. His eyes are opened up to a world in which true light is envisioned. The Jew who dies *al Kiddush Hashem*, sanctifying Hashem’s Name, experiences a moment of reality during which he becomes one with G-d.

Judaism is not external to our essence. On the contrary, Judaism is part and parcel of our essential character. It is intrinsic to who we are. When a Jew is *moser nefesh*, sacrifices himself, he is proclaiming his allegiance to Hashem. He is declaring to the world, *Hashem Hu HaElokim*, “The Almighty is G-d!” When a gentile sacrifices himself, he is doing it to earn a special place, an inscription on the plaque in his church. He is acting for himself, out of service **to** his god. A Jew, in contrast, acts **for** G-d.

To explain this further from a practical point of view, let us take *mitzvos* – *Shabbos*, for instance. A Jew who observes *Shabbos* **for** Hashem, or as a sacrifice he must make for his religion has it all wrong! One who observes *mitzvos* **despite** their economic toll on his wallet is doing Hashem no favor. If he feels that he is giving something up to be an observant Jew, he fails in his conception of Judaism. He is missing the point. One does not perform Hashem’s Will – Hashem’s Will **is** our will! A Jew has an **inner compulsion** to serve Hashem. It is part of his essence. One who serves Hashem because he was commanded to do so – not because **he** wants to do so – is off his mark in Judaism. A Jew gravitates to serve. He wants to serve.

I think the above disparity between Judaism and other religions is alluded to by *Horav S.R. Hirsch, zl*, in his commentary to the beginning of the *Parsha*. He notes that there is no word that truly defines the word *korban*. We use the words “offering” and “sacrifice” lightly as a definition. In truth, however, these descriptions of *korban* cannot be further from the truth. Sacrifice, as well as offering, implies that one is giving something up, destroying it to his own detriment. This idea is entirely foreign to – and incongruous with – the character and connotation of the word *korban* as

seen through the spectrum of the Torah. The idea behind an offering or sacrifice implies that the one to whom the “gift” is being presented has a desire, a need, to be gratified by the gift. The concept implicit in a *korban* has no relevance to such a notion. Never does the Torah indicate that *korban* is some kind of gift.

This brings us to the reality concerning the true definition of a *korban*. It is neither a gift, nor is it an offering, an appeasement. A *korban* describes man’s relationship *vis-à-vis* Hashem. *Korban* is derived from its root word, *karov*, to come close, to approach, to be near. Thus, the *korban* implies attaining a close relationship with Hashem. The act of bringing the *korban*, the *hakravah*, implies the attainment of a place in a higher sphere of life.

With this in mind, we understand that *korban* **negates** the notion of sacrifice as an act of destruction or renunciation. One does not spurn anything when he offers a *korban*, nor is he acting to satisfy the needs of the one to whom this *korban* is offered. There are no needs or desires to be fulfilled. The *makriv*, one who brings the *korban*, desires that a part of him, something which is in his possession, enter into a closer, more intimate relationship with the Almighty. The purpose of the *korban* is to achieve *kirvas Elokim*, closeness with G-d. When one enters into this “close relationship” via the medium of the *korban*, he elevates himself to the destiny of a human being, to a different lofty dimension, where his outlook on life and his own concept of human happiness are measured on a barometer of holiness and nearness with the Source of all sanctity.

We now understand the vast chasm that exists between the dogma underlying Jewish sacrifice and the idea behind the gentile sacrifice. We do not give up – we move closer. We do not sacrifice – we transform our will to that of Hashem, so that His will is our will. Carrying out Hashem’s will is a reflexive action for a Jew. It is part of his Jewishness.