

When a man among you brings an offering to Hashem. (1:2)

I recently came across an article penned by a secular Jew, decrying our yearning for the rebuilding of the *Bais HaMikdash*. In one of his gripes, he declared that he found the notion of *korbanos*, sacrifices, primitive, archaic, and a form of service no longer necessary. While to the ancients it was natural to offer a *korban*, offering, to Hashem, this modern man eschews such form of worship. Obviously, he is clueless with regard to the underlying concepts of *korbanos* and the spiritual elevation they engender in the person who offers them.

A *korban* is a way of coming closer to Hashem. The word *korban* is derived from *karov*, to come/be near. A *korban* is offered as a form: of atonement, thanksgiving, of celebration of a milestone event – an opportunity to rejuvenate our relationship with Hashem. It is a way of declaring that we are connected to Hashem Above. Nothing is primitive about a *korban*, unless one considers spirituality primitive. It is a mechanism through which we add a spiritual dimension to a physical activity. During a *korban* the animal takes the place of the human being who is offering it; or, alternatively, we perceive a *korban* to be a way of sanctifying and giving meaning to the mundane.

Truth be told, the individual who shuns *korbanos* in the sphere of modernity, probably has long ago eschewed religion in general as being archaic. Today's Sanctuary is the *shul*; our *korbanos* are the *tefillos*, prayers, which we offer up to Hashem. All of these bring us closer to Hashem. An individual who does not *daven*, or has no *shul*, consequently will not have a need for the return of the *Bais HaMikdash*. His idea of worship is self-worship; his form of communal Jewish activity is protesting and slandering his co-religionists who abide by *halachah*. Is it any wonder he has no need for the *Bais HaMikdash*?

Veritably, as noted by *Horav Eli Munk, zl*, upon careful examination of the underlying reasons behind each of the *korbanos*, we cannot fail to note that the sacrifices were designed for a people who had achieved a very high level of morality and who aspired to achieve even greater spiritual elevation. Absolutely no parallel exists between the *korbanos* offered by *Klal Yisrael* and the pagan rites which were motivated by desire to appease the anger of their gods or seek their favor.

Let us analyze the primary *korbanos* and their ultimate purpose. The *Korban Olah*, Elevation/Burnt offering, was brought by a person who had sinned in his thoughts or had failed to execute a required positive action, such as a *laav she'nitek l'asei* – a prohibition which can be rectified through the performance of a positive command; a prohibition which can be rectified by the fulfillment of an *asei*, positive commandment.

The *Korban Shelamim*, Peace offering, was brought: in fulfillment of a vow made in Hashem's honor (*neder* or *nedavah*); as an act of thanksgiving (*Korban Todah*); to celebrate a *YomTov*, Festival (*Shalmei Simchah Chagigah*; *Shalmei Tzibur*); or at the end of a period of abstinence from wine (*Shalmei Nazir*).

The *Korban Asham*, Guilt Offering, was brought to atone for a sin of sacrilege (*Asham meilos*), for a false oath concerning a theft (*Asham g'zeilos*) or for a borderline situation involving doubt whether the sin was actually committed (*Asham talui*). There are other cases of *Asham* in which a sin of sacrilege was committed such as *Asham shifcha charufa*, *Asham nazir*, *Asham metzora*. These were guilt offerings which must be atoned, but even here the sins define – and are relative to – the spiritual plane achieved by the sinner.

Last is the *Korban Chatas*, Sin Offering, which was reserved for a sin committed through error (*b'shogeig*). There are special cases of a *Korban Chatas*: when the involuntary sin was committed by the *nasi*, prince of a tribe; or the *melech*, king; when the *Sanhedrin* or *Kohen Gadol* (*par ha'elem davar*) (*Par Kohen Moshich*) erred.

I have detailed the *korbanos* for the express purpose of showing the ethical and religious value that Jewish law places on *korbanos*. It has never been a question of offering an animal as a sacrifice in order to gain forgiveness for a sin that was committed in full awareness. A Jew who has descended to such a nadir as to sin knowingly cannot expect the “easy cure” of a *korban*. *Teshuvah*, repentance, prayer, performing good deeds, and a complete lifestyle change are prescribed for him.

Having demonstrated the spiritual level of the individual who offers a *korban*, we now cite *Horav Yitzchak Arama, zl* (*Akeidas Yitzchak*), who explains the role of *korbanos* in the Jewish religion. After analyzing the various sacrifices, he identifies two distinct defining characteristics: as expressions of gratitude or devotion; and expressions of penitence. In summation, the *korbanos* are either an expression of the gratitude felt by an individual or the nation in recognition of the Divine care they receive. On the other hand, the *Korban* offers one an avenue of atonement for sins he has committed, but at no time do they reflect the denial of his responsibility to Hashem and to others. These are sins committed by people who would never transgress out of indifference, rebellion, or unfaithfulness to Hashem. The *Korbanos* atone only for sins which fall into the “gray” area, on the borderline between good and evil, or the less obvious sins characterized by unawareness, doubt, or thought without action.

Let us return to the opening statement of those modern, secular thinkers who would audaciously reject the “primitive” nature of the *korbanos*, and, for that matter, the *Bais HaMikdash*. After all, if there is no service, why bother with an edifice? (These are the same people who slander Orthodoxy for maintaining the sanctity of the *Kosel*.) They have nothing to connect themselves to the *korbanos*, since it is evident from the above that the sacrificial service is intended for a society with a highly developed sense of self-discipline and moral values. Only such a society requires forms of atonement so subtle and so rare as those described. One whose moral compass is turned south, whose values are bankrupt, is beyond the scope of sacrificial atonement. *Korbanos* are spiritual “maintenance” for one who has an affinity for spiritual ascendance – not for eschewing the basic principles to which our people have adhered throughout the millennia.