

Speak unto the Bnei Yisrael and say to them, A man from you who will bring close an offering to Hashem. (1:2)

Rashi explains the *Torah's* emphasis upon the word “*adam*”, man, as an allusion to Adam *Ha'Rishon*. His *korban* did not have a tinge of impropriety connected to it, since everything belonged to him. So, too, may we not offer any *korbanos* from that which is not rightfully ours. We may question the *Torah's* choice of word--*adam*--as the point of reference for teaching us that we may not use that which is stolen. Throughout the *Torah*, we derive the prohibition from using that which is *gezel*, stolen, from the word “*la'chem*,” yours. That which we use for a *mitzvah* must belong to us.

Horav Ze'ev Weinberger, Shlita, suggests that herein is implied a significant lesson with regard to the definition of sin. When an individual employs his G-d-given attributes and uses them for the purpose of offending Hashem by committing a transgression, he is stealing. He is stealing that which Hashem gave him for the purpose of performing *mitzvos* and good deeds, instead using it for sin. Is there a more blatant form of theft from the Almighty?

He cites the **Chiddushei Ha'Rim**, who notes that the *pasuk* which addresses the concept of *viddui*, confession, as the integral component in *teshuvah* is written in *Bamidbar* 5:7, “*And they shall confess the sin which they did,*” in regard to the *aveirah*, sin, of stealing. He explains that when one confesses his sin, he must realize that he has stolen from Hashem. He has used Hashem's gift and sinned. With this in mind, he explains *Chazal's* dictum regarding the *dor ha'mabul*, generation which perished during the Deluge. They say the fate of this generation was sealed as a result of *gezel*, thievery. Is this true? The people certainly did more than steal. Their perverse behavior, their immoral activities and their wanton acts of violence, were definitely sins that represented greater evil. Why was stealing considered their ultimate act of rebellion, the sin for which they could effect no forgiveness? He explains that all of the sins committed by that generation originated in stealing. One who sins is stealing from Hashem.

An individual who brings a *korban* from *gezel*, who has the audacity to offer a sacrifice from stolen merchandise, demonstrates his lack of understanding regarding the *aveirah* of theft. He has not risen above the level of an animal. Only he who perceives the significance of *mitzvos*, who understands and observes Jewish law, is permitted to partake of meat. Only he is on a higher plane than the common animal. One who does not understand the gravity of stealing has no right to offer a *korban* from an animal. *Adam Ha'Rishon* fully understood his purpose on this world. He was aware of his obligation. He accepted his responsibility. He had earned the right to bring a *korban*.

We derive an important lesson from here. Everyone is blessed with specific abilities and attributes. In one way or another, we are all beneficiaries of Hashem's gifts. We are to make use of these gifts for the purpose that Hashem has outlined for us. When we squander our talents for

the wrong goals or waste them on foolishness, we are guilty of theft--from the Almighty. Veritably, everyone will agree with this. The only point of contention is what constitutes the correct goals and the definition of foolishness.

Horav Avigdor Halevi Nebentzhal, Shlita, offers three reasons as to why a *korban* which is brought from *gezel* is shunned by Hashem. First, we find a number of instances in which a positive *mitzvah* literally pushes aside a negative commandment, where one *mitzvah* transcends another. In these cases, however, the *mitzvos* between man and Hashem are "moved around." Hashem can do as He pleases. When he distinguishes one *mitzvah* over another, He affects no one other than Himself. *Shatnez, Shabbos, Yom Kippur*, to mention a few, are all overridden under certain conditions--in the *Bais Hamikdash*. As mentioned above, no one other than Hashem is affected. Theft hurts another Jew. Hashem does not permit His *mitzvos* to be observed if it means another Jew will suffer. We learn from here the importance of considering others during our personal quest for spiritual advancement. It is important to grow spiritually, but never at the expense of another Jew.

A second reason which *Horav Nebentzhal* mentions is people's attitude towards stealing. For some reason, people "seem" to find *heteirim*, dispensations, to permit certain types of stealing. Of course, we never refer to it as theft. We always use a more dignified word to describe what really is nothing more than common theft. Many people to whom the thought of stealing is absolutely repulsive are not adverse to accessing funds for themselves under questionable circumstances. In order to discourage indifference to what is considered a grave sin, Hashem emphasized that He will not accept any offering that was stolen.

The third reason is a practical one. The word *korban* is derived from "*karov*," "to be close." The purpose of *korbanos* is to bring a person closer to Hashem. Hashem is the source of all giving. He gives us everything and takes nothing. So, too, we bring ourselves closer to Him via the medium of giving. We distance ourselves when we take. Every time we give and share with others, we are G-d-like and, consequently, become nearer to Him. Taking, regardless of the circumstances, distances one from Hashem. A *korban* from *gezel* does not fulfill the purpose of a *korban*. In fact, it represents its antithesis. It distances one from Hashem rather than bringing him closer. A person whose nature has become accustomed to taking might even come to believe that is the way it is supposed to be.

Horav Nebentzhal notes that the only place in the entire *Tanach* in which we find written that Hashem "*smelled the pleasant aroma*," "*reiach nichoach*," of a *korban*, is in reference to the *korban* offered by Noach after he was saved from the Flood. Why should this be the only place that receives this distinction? Were there no other *tzaddikim* whose *korbanos* were acceptable? He responds that this was the only *korban* that was entirely pure of any form of "taking." The world's inhabitants had drowned. Noach owned everything. Furthermore, Noach had just spent an entire year "giving," performing kindness in the Ark, to all the animals. His *korban* was the paragon of "giving" and consequently, rendered a "pleasant fragrance."