

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

Unlike pagan offerings and the “dogma” surrounding that form of worship, *korbanos* which are mandated by Hashem are not meant to influence the Almighty. Pagan sacrifice was meant to appease their pantheon of gods and other imaginary idol figures. Humans were taught to believe that by offering various forms of sacrifices to the gods, they would succeed in dissipating his anger. How fortunate are we that we have been blessed with minds that comprehend that such an idea is ludicrous. When we distance ourselves from Hashem through sin, we must seek an avenue of return, a medium for narrowing the distance that we have created. The Hebrew term *korban* is derived from *karov*, close, to/ come close. Our goal (mission in life) is to come as close as possible to Hashem. When we offer an animal on the Altar, we are, by our actions, expressing our intention to bring our material side closer to Hashem. Thus, the *korban* experience teaches us that we are to take the physical/material base aspect of ourselves, and sanctify it to Hashem. The esoteric aspect of *korbanos* is beyond the scope of this *dvar Torah*.

A young man who had fought in the Vietnam War informed his parents that, now that the war was over, he was coming home. He had to address a few issues before he left, and then he would come home. He added that he had a friend who was a war hero who would be accompanying him as a house guest. Would they mind?

The parents were excited to hear from their son and only too happy to acquiesce to hosting his friend. He then explained to his parents that he had “forgotten” to mention that his friend had been seriously wounded in a heavy firefight, during which he had been instrumental in saving his platoon. His face was badly disfigured, and his leg was damaged. In addition, he suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder. When the parents heard this, they quickly recanted their invitation, opting instead to contribute to the young man’s therapy.

Weeks passed, and after hearing nothing from their son, they decided to visit the base where he was staying. When they arrived, they were informed that no one by their son’s name either was on active duty or had returned from Vietnam. Perhaps they should inquire at the hospital. They visited the hospital and after being directed from one staffer to another, they discovered that their son was in the serious burns unit – refusing visitors. Parents never give up. They went to the unit and demanded to see their son. After all, they had just spoken to him a few weeks ago. The physician in charge of his case said that it was precisely a few weeks ago that their son had succumbed to a deep melancholy and had refused to speak to anyone. They insisted that he allow them to visit. The doctor added one condition: that they do not upset his patient. They entered his room and took one look at their son, and they realized why he was refusing to see or speak to anyone. He was the imaginary friend whom they had refused to host. He was feeling them out to see what their reaction would be to their son who had been disfigured on the battlefield. They cried, they pleaded. He would not listen. They explained that while they were not prepared to host a stranger, their own flesh and blood was always welcome, under any circumstances, regardless of his condition.

End of hypothetical story. Hashem dispatches us to this world, in which we must battle the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination. Throughout life, the battle is severe, and we sustain a number of serious hits. We fall prey to the wiles of the *yetzer hora*, and the sins which we commit damage our spiritual persona. Our entire spiritual image is disfigured, much like the soldier who had survived a firefight with the enemy. As a result, we distance ourselves from Hashem, figuring that that He would never welcome us back. What we forget is that we are His children, and a Father never closes the door on his son.

Hashem asks that we make the first move. This is the idea behind *korbanos*. He wants to see if we are prepared to return, to remember that He is a loving Father, and we are returning to our rightful home, where we belong. We are ashamed. Our sins have so disfigured us that we are no longer recognizable. Our identity has changed. Perhaps it might make a difference to strangers. A father, however, always welcomes his child home, regardless of his transformation.

Today, we no longer have the ritual sacrifices that were once offered in the Temple which is no longer extant. We still have prayer. Let us plead to Hashem. The right words will open the door. But we no longer know how to pray. "We have forgotten the words. Hashem, now what should we do?" The Almighty replies, "Weep. Tears will always pierce the Heavens." Our Heavenly Father waits for us to overcome our shame and return to Him. The light is on; the door is open, but we must know and ask if we may enter. The answer will be, "Yes."