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

Parashas Vayikra details the various korbanos, offerings/sacrifices, that Klal Yisrael brought on the Mizbayach. Four types of animal sacrifices are described: theKorban Olah, elevation/burnt-offering; the Korban Shelamim, peace- offering; the Korban Chatas, sin-offering; and the Korban Asham, guilt-offering. In order to understand the concept underlying these korbanos, it is essential that we first consider the meaning of a korban.

The root of the word korban, is in three letters of its name: karov – kuf, reish, and bais – which means to draw near, to come closer. On a simple level, this means that the animal is brought close to Hashem through its being offered and consecrated on the Altar. On a more profound level, through the korban ritual of selecting the animal, bringing it to the Bais HaMikdash, confessing over it, watching as the Kohen slaughters it and later when the he eats a portion of it, the owner becomes closer to Hashem. The korban is hence the medium for bringing a person closer to Hashem, for deepening his relationship with the Almighty.

The Shem M’Shmuel delves into the korban process: the manner by which man brings himself closer to Hashem, and the forces that he must overcome in order to succeed in his quest. Four forces exist in the world which historically have attempted to break asunder our closeness with the Almighty. They are known as the “arba malchiyos,” four kingdoms. These are the four nations who, throughout their individual reign of power, have been our nemesis, have terrorized, persecuted and oppressed us: Babylon, Media, Greece and Edom. While it is Klal Yisrael’s function in this world to be a vehicle for the Shechinah, Divine Presence, through our Torah study and mitzvah observance, these nations, through their various machinations, have endeavored to frustrate this goal.

The idea that Klal Yisrael are primarily Hashem’s emissaries to the world – and that these nations are here to oppose us – is a fundamental Jewish belief. Indeed, the Sifrei Kabbalah posit that the four letters of Hashem’s Name – Yud, Hay, Vav, Hay – are opposed by these four nations. The battle that these nations wage against Klal Yisrael is actually their war against Hashem. Our three Avos, Patriarchs, supplemented by David Ha’melech, represent the greatest examples of humanity. These four are also understood to be the antithesis of these four nations.

The Shem M’Shmuel explains that the three cardinal sins – murder, licentious behavior, and idol worship – together with lashon hara, slanderous speech, correspond with the four nations who each “exemplified” one area of evil behavior. In contrast, the Torah calls upon Klal Yisrael to eradicate the spiritual stench that those sins engender in this world. This is performed under the leadership paradigmatic of the behavior manifest by the Avos – Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov and David. Avraham Avinu exemplifies overcoming immorality. When he came to Egypt, the center of moral depravity, he noticed for the first time that Sarah Imeinu was a beautiful woman. So great

was the modesty between them! He was so holy – and removed from physical perception in these matters – that, until it was absolutely necessary, he had no idea of his own wife's physical beauty.

Yitzchak Avinu's readiness to become a human sacrifice for Hashem underscores his proficiency in overcoming idolatry. His action represents a sacrifice for G-d's will in contrast to idolatry, which counteracts and undermines Hashem. Yaakov Avinu's exceptional care in his own procreative activity and relationships overcame the evil of murder which Chazal consider to be closely related. (It is beyond the scope of this thesis and its appeal to a general readership to discuss the depth of this idea, other than to state the notion that man's focus on the world is to create, not to destroy. One who is assiduous and extremely circumspect in his procreative activity prevails over the evil of murder.)

David Ha'melech is known for his exemplary use of the power of speech in composing Sefer Tehillim, a most comprehensive and beautiful volume of praises to the Almighty. David is the last contributor to the process of amending that which had originated through Avraham. He would have completed the rift caused by sin and catalyzed a world where man and G-d would co-exist in perfect harmony, where the barriers erected by sin would be disintegrated. As Chazal say, however, in the Talmud Shabbos 56b, "Had David not listened to lashon hara, Malchus Bais David, the kingdom of the House of David, would never have been divided." Although his sin was ever so slight, in order to effect a total reformation, he needed to be perfect, totally devoid of any taint of lashon hara. Since he was not, the quest for perfection continues.

The forces of evil take on many guises: as particularly evil sins, or as entire national groups who seem to predominate in those sins. As the Avos and David Ha'melech set the tone, and taught us how to triumph over these sins, we must emulate them and attempt to overcome the challenges to our own spiritual development. Since the four korbanos are to bring man closer to G-d, it would seem sensible that there is a distinct corollary between the Patriarchs, the spiritual personality each represents, and the korbanos.

Yitzchak was prepared to give up his life – an act which corresponds to overcoming idolatry, an intellectual deficiency which causes one to falsely attribute power to an idol. We atone for the sin brought about by intellectual corruption by offering the Korban Olah, burnt-offering. The Korban Chatas is brought primarily for sins of immorality. Furthermore, the sin-offering is brought for a transgression committed unintentionally, an activity which involves solely the body, exclusive of the mind. This korban corresponds with Avraham Avinu, who excelled at overcoming the motivation for immorality. The Korban Shelamim coincides with Yaakov Avinu, who was called the ish shaleim, complete or perfect man. His ability to interact with and sublimate the physical world, catalyzing harmony between the physical and the spiritual aspects of man, is similar to the Shelamim, in which everyone shares in its meat, thereby increasing peace and harmony. Last, is the Korban Asham, which shares some features of the Chatas, since some of its meat is eaten by the Kohanim, and of the Olah, whose blood is splashed on the Mizbayach. This corresponds to David Ha'melech, who manifest traits characteristic of Yitzchak and Avraham. David was inspired with a

capacity for self-sacrifice, as was Yitzchak, as well as an ability to overcome immoral urges, as evinced by Avraham.

Thus, we see how the four korbanos, representing the characteristics of the three Avos and David Ha'melech, bring one closer to Hashem, overcoming the evil forces, as symbolized by the four nations who seek to create a barrier to impede this relationship.