

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

The underlying concept of *korbanos*, ritual offerings, is shrouded in deep, esoteric wisdom. The early commentators – such as *Rambam*, *Ramban*, *Ibn Ezra* – each presents his individual approach and opinion concerning the efficacy and purpose of *korbanos*. For our purposes, I will cite from the *Ramban's* commentary to the beginning of the *parshah*: “Since the actions of humans are consummated through thought, speech and action, Hashem commanded that, when a person sins, he shall bring an offering. He shall place his hands on it, corresponding to the action component of his sin. Then he shall confess his sin, verbalizing it with his mouth, corresponding to the speech component of his sin. The innards and kidneys are burnt in the fire of the Altar. These are organs of thought and desire; thus, their offering corresponds to the thought aspect of his sin. The rest of the animal's organs and its hands and feet, coincide with its hands and feet. The blood spilled on the Altar corresponds to the blood of its soul... All this is intended, so that the person should contemplate while he is doing these rituals, that he sinned to Hashem with his body and soul, and it is only through the kindness of Hashem that He has exchanged the life of the animal for his (the sinner's) life.”

We derive from the words of *Ramban* that the primary intention of the one who brings the *korban* should be his preparedness to sacrifice himself to Hashem in place of the *korban*. It is only by the grace of Hashem that the *korban* takes his place. The *Shlah HaKadosh* adds that one who brings a *korban* elevates himself to such a high spiritual level that the fact that he is willing to relinquish his life for Hashem is in and of itself a *kapparah*, atonement, for him.

We glean from this that the barometer of a man's spirituality and relationship to Hashem is his total abnegation, to the point of self-sacrifice for the Almighty. The *Baalei Mussar*, Ethicists, teach that this level of *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice, may apply to – and is fulfilled, when one exerts himself in – the study of Torah. *Yegiah*, toil, to learn, to understand, to innovate, are all expressions of *mesiras nefesh* which demonstrate one's love for Hashem. Today, one does not have to battle enemies from without who prohibit Torah study. One primary contemporary deterrent is overcoming indolence and maintaining focus on learning and not on the world outside the *bais hamedrash*.

At the funeral of *Horav Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik, zl, Rosh Yeshivas Brisk* (eldest son of the *Brisker Rav, zl*), the deceased's son and successor, *Horav Avraham Yehoshua, Shlita*, said the following in his *hesped*, eulogy.

“*Abba*, I heard from you numerous times that the greatest form of *mesiras nefesh* is one's sacrifice to understand with optimum clarity every passage in the Torah. (This applies to both the Written and Oral law, as well as its commentators.) One should not forgo, give in and not press forward, clarifying every issue in *halachah* that is presented. This is the ultimate *mesiras nefesh*. The reason for this is that a spectator is unable to ascertain and determine the level of such *mesiras nefesh*, its veracity and sincerity, its love for Torah and Hashem. Only the Almighty knows. Only He who peers into the deepest recesses of one's heart knows the depths of one's true *mesiras nefesh*.”

As an aside, I feel it prudent to address the difference between *mesiras nefesh* in Torah theology and that of varied cultures who, often to prove a point, will immolate themselves or blow themselves up with a bomb just to inflict injury and worse on their enemies. The basic difference is our outlook on life in contradistinction to theirs: We view life as the greatest and most important gift that Hashem has given us. Life is sacrosanct; thus, every moment must be cherished and used for a higher purpose in service to the Almighty. If a life is in danger, one may transgress just about any sin – regardless of its severity. (This excludes the three cardinal sins, for which, under specific circumstances, one is compelled to give up his life.) Having said this, we understand what is involved for a Jew to make the decision when he is in a position in which he must relinquish his life. This is the epitome of devotion to the Almighty. Those who freely sacrifice their life either have no clue concerning the value of life or they consider their lives of no substance or no value. In addition, when one sacrifices his life out of hatred for an enemy or acts on the brainwashing orders and encouragement of a despotic cleric bent on making a name for himself, he is truly a very sick, very foolish, person. In short, we value life. Thus, when we give it up, it is *mesiras nefesh* of the highest order. On the other hand, in their minds, their life has little value to them and therefore, giving it up has little meaning to them.

We take our Torah leaders for granted, assuming that their distinction in Torah is, for the most part, due to their brilliance. *Horav Yechezkel Levinstein, zl*, the venerable *Mashgiach* of Mir and Ponovezh, said otherwise, “If you notice an *adam gadol*, great man, who has merited to achieve a pivotal plateau in Torah erudition or in his *avodah*, service to Hashem, you have no cause to search for a reason for his ascension to eminence. You may be certain that he endured and passed numerous difficult challenges, trials and ups and downs, in order to reach this point. On the contrary, the greater the *gadol*, the greater the indication that he went through even greater vicissitudes to reach this point.”

Exerting oneself to study Torah is clearly a prerequisite to achieving lofty goals. We are aware, however, of an added ingredient without which the toil expended will ultimately not achieve its desired goal: *simchah*, joy, enthusiasm, excitement in being able to learn Hashem's Torah. At the funeral for *Horav Moshe Shmuel Shapiro, zl*, *Rosh Yeshivas Be'er Yaakov*, *Horav Michel Yehudah Lefkowitz, zl*, was among the *maspidim* who eulogized him. *Rav Moshe Shmuel* achieved the distinction that his *sefarim*, *Kuntros HaBiurim*, became a staple in the *yeshivah* world. *Rav Michel Yehudah* began by underscoring the deceased's *ameilus*, toil, in Torah. He then added that, under no circumstances, regardless of the challenges, travail and illness which he confronted, did he ever lose his *simchah* in learning. His success was a result of his joy. It gave life to his toil and allowed him to appreciate and value every moment of his exertion.

*Horav Shlomo Zalmen Auerbach, zl*, related to one of his sons that, when he was a youth, the Yerushalayim community was suffering through a debilitating famine. There was no food, even for those who could afford to pay for it – let alone for those, like the Auerbach family, who lived in abject poverty. He remarked that, when he returned home from the *yeshivah* and noticed that all there was to eat was some stale bread, he decided to return to the *yeshivah* to continue learning.

He ruminated, “My sisters have nothing else to eat and no other means for soothing their hunger pangs. I can return to the *yeshivah* and, in a short while, be so engrossed in learning that the joy I will experience will help me to mitigate my starvation. My sisters do not have that option. He returned to the *yeshivah* and left his portion for his sisters.