

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Vayikra
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

Vayikra – The world of korbanot

This week we start sefer Vayikra, and we enter the world of korbanot. It's a whole new world! Those of us who are learning Daf Yomi are deep into masechet Menachot, which focuses on the intricate details of the various types of flour offerings. The previous masechet we learnt was Zevachim, which deals with the different animal and bird sacrifices that were brought in the Bet Hamikdash. It's a very special feeling when the Gemara that you are learning each day overlaps with the weekly Torah portion.

The second half of sefer Shmot dealt with the building of the Mishkan in great detail. Almost the entire sefer Vayikra deals with how to use the Mishkan – including the laws of the korbanot and the laws of purity and impurity (which are primarily relevant in the context of the Mishkan). And then the beginning of sefer Bamidbar deals with the centrality of the Mishkan in the camp of Bnei Yisrael. We see that a very significant percentage of the entire Torah focuses on the Mishkan. This gives us an indication of the importance of the Mishkan (and it's more permanent replacement – the Bet Hamikdash) and korbanot in Judaism. The fact that we have been living without the Bet Hamikdash for the past two thousand years means that the Judaism we are able to practice today is very 'b'dieved' (non-ideal).

As noted above, the tractates of Zevachim and Menachot deal extensively with the details pertaining to the various korbanot that were offered in the Mishkan and the Bet Hamikdash. Many of these details are foreign to us, because we have not had the benefit and privilege of serving Hashem in this manner for so long. For this reason, the study of these tractates can be quite challenging.

Nevertheless, the Chofetz Chaim writes at length about the importance of learning about the korbanot in anticipation of the coming of the Moshiach.¹ When the third Bet Hamikdash is rebuilt (may that happen speedily in our days!) these laws will obviously become very relevant. There is a principle that Eliyahu HaNavi will answer all of our outstanding questions when he arrives to announce the coming of the Moshiach. If a question remains unresolved, the Gemara will often conclude with the word 'תיקו' which literally means 'let it [i.e. the question] remain standing [i.e. without a resolution]'. However, תיקו is also explained homiletically as an acronym for 'תשבי יתרו קושיות ובעיות'. This translates as “The Tishbite [i.e. Eliyahu²] will resolve difficulties and problems”. But surely this only applies to issues that we are genuinely unable to resolve on our own after making an appropriate effort. If we were to ask Eliyahu simple questions where the answer is readily available, he may ask us why we did not bother to learn the answer for ourselves! Imagine when the Bet Hamikdash is rebuilt and we need to start bringing korbanot. If we do not learn the halachot, we will not know what to do. Since the knowledge is available to us right now, we need to make the effort to learn it!

With that background, let us explore some of the details of the korbanot and try to find lessons relevant to our lives today.

¹ See for example his introduction to 'Likutei Halachot – Kodshim', his halachik work that focuses on these laws.

² Eliyahu is referred to as Eliyahu HaTishbi because he came from the place called 'Toshav' (see Melachim I 17:1 with Rashi's commentary).

Though there are so many practical details relating to korbanot, Zevachim and Menachot both begin by focusing on the requirement to have the correct mental intent when offering a korban. When performing the various practical steps, the kohen must have the right kavana, keeping in mind various matters, including the purpose of the korban. The fact that both masechtot start with these laws demonstrates the centrality of one's intention when offering a korban. The word korban is related to the word 'karov', which means to draw close. When we are offering a korban to Hashem, we are meant to be drawing close to Him. Obviously, in order to feel emotionally close to someone, our mind and hearts have to be involved in our actions.

A specific example of this principle is the law of 'pigul'. In many cases, if a kohen has improper intentions when offering a korban, the korban is rejected and it does not achieve atonement for the owner. In particular, if the kohen had in mind to consume the meat of the korban outside of its designated time, the meat is known as pigul and its consumption becomes strictly forbidden. One who consumes such meat is liable to the extremely serious punishment of karet, spiritual excision. Even though the actions of the kohen may be identical, an improper underlying intention of the kohen can change the korban from a holy and precious mitzva to an abomination!

Though these days we do not have korbanot, our tefillot replace the korbanot. Thus, we can extrapolate from the laws of korbanot the importance of appropriate kavana while davening.

The Mishnah³ teaches us that we should not make our prayer into something that is fixed, but rather we should entreat Hashem for mercy. The Shulchan Aruch⁴ rules that we should pray in a manner of pleading and entreating, like a pauper at the door gently making his request. The prayer should certainly not appear as a burden that we would like to get over with. The Mishnah Berurah explains that merely reciting one's prayer in a pleading manner is not enough. One must actually think to himself that he needs something and is coming to request it from the King.

The Biur Halacha emphasizes how important this is. He writes that a number of poskim rule that if someone prays merely because there is an obligation to do so, he has not fulfilled his obligation and must repeat the Amidah! Note that in practice, the halacha is that we do not repeat the Amidah (because the chances are that we will not have the correct kavana the second time either!)

The Yetzer Hara knows how important it is for us to have the correct kavana when davening. That is why it works so hard to distract us during tefilla. We need to work on our kavana, especially now when our tefillot are so vital! We are davening for safety in Eretz Yisrael, when every single intercepted missile is a miracle and a chesed from Hashem. We are davening for the safety of Jewish people all over the world, from Bondi Beach to Michigan and everywhere in between. We are davening for the IDF and the US Forces to have success in removing evil from the world. There is so much to daven to Hashem for. We need to tap into the power of our davening, and daven with the mindset that Hashem is the King of the world and our loving Father, and only He can save us. There is so much at stake.

Let's try something this week:

1. Focus on increasing our kavana to Hashem during davening.
2. Put in place practical steps to assist our kavana. One example is to use memory aides - grab a pencil and make notes in your siddur with ideas or topics to focus on while davening. Be creative. Use a sticky note, a paperclip or anything else that will remind you to focus your mind while reciting the words.
3. When you recite 'ה' שפתי תפתח...' and take three steps forward to commence the Amidah, remember before Whom you are standing.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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³ Pirkai Avot 2:13.

⁴ Orach Chaim 98:3.