

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

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

Tzav – Trying to understand korbanot

This week's Parsha of Tzav continues with the laws of various sacrifices that were brought in the Mishkan and later in the Bet Hamikdash. A large portion of sefer Vayikra is devoted to these laws. Instead of starting Torah studies with sefer Breishit (which would be the obvious choice), there is a tradition for young children to begin learning sefer Vayikra and the laws of the korbanot. However these portions are difficult for us to relate to and we haven't had the ability to bring korbanot since the Bet Hamikdash was destroyed almost 2000 years ago. Why would we start a child's Torah learning with these laws? How we can understand and relate to this ancient practice that seems so foreign to us?

There are many mystical ideas behind the korbanot. We can't possibly come close to understanding the depth of their meaning. And even if we could, we couldn't possibly explain it in a short parsha sheet. (That's why the title to this week's edition is “**Trying** to understand korbanot”!) However, we can still try to attain some level of understanding and apply lessons to our lives today.

“Korban” is often translated as “sacrifice”. The word “korban” is actually related to the word “karov”, which means close. By offering sacrifices we are in effect bringing ourselves closer to Hashem and developing our relationship with Hashem.

Rabbi Akiva Tatz teaches us that if we want to understand the essence of any concept, we need to look at the first place that the concept appears in the Torah. The very first time that we encounter a korban is in the story of Cain and Hevel. Though the Midrash also discusses korbanot offered by Adam (which most likely preceded the korbanot of Cain and Hevel) the first description of a korban in the Torah itself is the famous story of Cain and Hevel. Let's revisit that story and see what lessons we can learn.

A farmer by profession, Cain had the idea of offering a portion of his crops to Hashem. Cain's brother, Hevel, was a shepherd. Hevel liked Cain's idea and he decided to copy him. Hevel brought an offering from the best of his flock. Apparently Cain was not as generous as Hevel and Hashem accepted Hevel's offering but did not accept Cain's. Cain became intensely jealous of Hevel. Not only did Hevel copy his idea, but he managed to find favour before Hashem while Cain did not succeed. Hashem appeared to Cain and warned him to pick up his game. But Cain did not heed the warning. The jealousy festered in his heart until it resulted in fratricide – the first case of murder in the history of the world.

What was going on here? Why did Hashem accept Hevel's offering but not Cain's? Surely Hashem would not be insulted or affected by the generosity of the gifts He is brought.

Let's analyse the motivation behind the korbanot offered by Cain and Hevel. Cain acknowledged that Hashem was the source of everything and he wanted to say thank you. This seems like an appropriate thing to do. Perhaps Cain thought that he only needed to offer a token of his appreciation. He clearly couldn't repay Hashem for all of the kindness that Hashem had bestowed on him. And clearly Hashem didn't need a portion of Cain's crops! But Cain certainly did need it. So what is the point of offering a large korban to Hashem? A small token is all that is required. Cain would be making

it clear that he is grateful for what Hashem gave him and Cain would also be able to keep the best of his crops for his own use. That seems to be a very practical approach.

Now let's examine Hevel's possible thinking. Hevel also wanted to say thank you to Hashem for all of his kindness. But Hevel went one step further. Hevel fully understood that Hashem was in charge, that He knew exactly what Hevel needed and that He would make sure that Hevel received what he needed. Thus Hevel did not hesitate to offer Hashem the best of his crops. Perhaps Hevel thought:

- On the one hand, if Hashem decides that I really do need the best of my flocks in order to fulfil my tafkid (purpose) in this world, then Hashem will replace them in some way or ensure that I am adequately recompensed. (For instance, by giving me an extra fertile flock or by helping me to avoid some large expenses that I otherwise would have had to pay.)
- On the other hand, if Hashem decides that I don't really need the best of my flocks, then it is not necessary, or even in my interests, for me to keep them.

This thinking represents an extremely high level of emuna. It requires us to believe in our hearts that Hashem gives us what we need and to act on that faith. We can all work towards that level. We are taught that Hashem decides on Rosh Hashanah what our income will be for the following year. If we truly believe this, we will not hesitate to pay 10% of our income to tzedaka.

If we can internalise this idea with pure faith, we would be more willing to make sacrifices for example to give up our relaxation time to help someone in need or to allow someone to borrow our possessions. And these actions would bring us closer to Hashem.

Today, we no longer have the opportunity to offer korbanot to Hashem. Our korbanot have been replaced by our prayers. We replace the offerings of bulls with the offerings of our lips.¹ Tefillah is called avodah she'balev – service of the heart. The main part of tefillah is the Shemoneh Esreh. However, we can also ensure that we include in our morning prayers the recitation of the portion that describes the daily korban that was offered in the Bet Hamikdash.² This will help to remind us that our prayers replace our korbanot. Our prayers are one of the best methods that we have today to communicate with Hashem, to work on our relationship with Him and to give back to Him something of ours (i.e., our time and our thoughts) in gratitude and recognition of all that He does for us.

Let's try something this week:

1. If you don't already do so, try to add in to your Shacharit davening the recitation of the short paragraph that describes the korbanot.
2. When you are called upon to make a sacrifice, with your money, your time, or your effort – remember the lesson from Cain and Hevel. Hashem is in charge and He will make sure that you get compensated in the exact proportion that is appropriate for you.

We will be taking a short break for Pesach.

The next Darchai Noam will be IY"H for Parshiyot Tazria Metzora.

Shabbat Shalom and chag kasher v'sameach,

Rabbi Ledder

¹ Hosea 14:3.

² This paragraph appears on page 30 of the standard Artscroll Ashkenazi siddur.