

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?

Parashat Vayikra – Focusing on tefillah

This week we start reading sefer Vayikra. Much of sefer Vayikra focuses on the korbanot (sacrifices) and matters relating to the Mishkan. After spending the last five Parshiyot dealing with the construction of the Mishkan, we now begin to learn how the Mishkan was to be used, primarily through the offering of korbanot.

As we mentioned in previous weeks, it can be difficult for us today to identify with the Mishkan (and its more permanent replacement - the Bet Hamikdash), as it is far removed from our day-to-day experiences. Our Mikdash Me'at, the shul, can serve to replace in a small way the holiness of the Mishkan and the Bet Hamikdash.

Similarly, it can be difficult for us today to relate to the concept of offering Korbanot. We have not had the privilege of bringing korbanot for around 2,000 years. But just we have our shuls in place of the Bet Hamikdash, we have tefillah in place of korbanot. The Mishkan and the Bet Hamikdash were used as a place to bring korbanot. Similarly, our shuls are used as a place for prayer.

Given that our weekly Parshiyot are now focusing on the korbanot, it seems appropriate to begin a series focusing on tefillah.

First, let's get some perspective.¹ The Chumash consists of 55 parshiyot. Out of that, five Parshiyot deal with the construction of the Mishkan (the last five Parshiyot of sefer Shmot). Almost the entire sefer Vayikra (ten Parshiyot) is devoted to how to use the Mishkan and matters relating to the Mishkan (including the various korbanot and matters relating to tumah and tahara, which is relevant to who is allowed to visit the Mishkan and participate in the korbanot procedure). And the first three parshiyot of sefer Bamidbar relate to the structure of Bnei Yisrael's camp in the Midbar (of which the Mishkan was the centerpiece), the role of the Leviim in dismantling, transporting and assembling the Mishkan, the inauguration of the Mishkan by the Nesiim, and other matters relating to the use of the Mishkan (such as the sotah and nazir procedure and the lighting of the menorah).

We see that a total of 18 Parshiyot deal directly with the Mishkan and its use! This is almost a third of the Chumash! Clearly the Mishkan and its use is a crucial part of our religion. So our experience of Judaism without the Bet Hamikdash is a very b'dieved (sub-par) experience.

But we can still tap into this world of the Mishkan/Bet Hamikdash and korbanot.

The second Mishnah in Pirkai Avot teaches us that the world stands on three pillars – Torah, Avodah (Divine service) and acts of kindness. Avodah refers primarily to the korbanot (or to davening in shul). The mizbayach where korbanot were offered up to Hashem is compared to the dining tables of the righteous.² On one level, this means that we now obtain kaparah through acts of kindness that we perform when we feed the poor at our dining table. But on a deeper level, just like a person must eat food to provide energy and nutrients in order to keep his soul attached to his body, so too the world requires the korbanot to be offered to keep it running³. And when we don't have the ability to offer korbanot, they are replaced with our tefillot. Instead of offering up animal sacrifices, we offer Hashem our tefillot. As the prophet Hosea teaches:

¹ The following idea is based on the Chumash Overview, a shiur by Rabbi Avraham Goldhar from Zichru. (See zichru.com for some powerful tools to help you remember your Torah learning).

² See Gemara Chagiga Daf 26b.

³ This is a very deep mystical idea which is beyond the scope of this article (and beyond my understanding). Obviously, Hashem can keep the world running without requiring us to offer up korbanot. But when we do offer korbanot, Hashem allows us, so to speak, to participate in His role of keeping the world running.

“And let us pay for bulls [of sacrifice] with our lips” (Hosea 14:3).

Our thrice daily tefillot were instituted by the Sages to replace the daily korbanot. Shacharit and Mincha replace the two daily Tamid offerings that were offered every day in the Bet Hamikdash and Maariv replaces the burning up of the leftover parts of the korbanot that was performed at night.⁴ Though we can't offer korbanot today, we can still learn about the korbanot and we can pray, and Hashem will treat our verbal service as if we actually offered korbanot. This is actually part of the promise that Hashem made to Avraham at the Brit ben Habetarim:⁵

Whenever they [Bnei Yisrael] read those portions [relating to the korbanot], I will deem it as if they sacrificed an offering before Me, and I will pardon them for all of their iniquities.⁶

The Mishnah, the summary of the entire Oral law, contains six Orders (Sedarim):⁷

- Zeraim (which deals with agricultural laws pertaining to the land of Israel)
- Moed (which deals with Shabbat, the festivals and other significant days)
- Nashim (which deals primarily with the laws remaining to marriage)
- Nezikin (which deals primarily with jurisprudence, torts, penal laws and courts)
- Kodshim (which deals primarily with the Bet Hamikdash and laws relating to the korbanot and also the laws of shechita and kosher food)
- Taharot (which deals with matters relating to tumah and tahara – ritual purity and impurity)

The Babylonian Gemara (the Bavli) is in effect a commentary on the Mishnah. The Bavli was written in Bavel (Babylon) after the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash. Interestingly, there is almost no Gemara Bavli on seder Zeraim or Taharot because these laws were no longer relevant in Bavel. The exceptions are masechet Brachot (from seder Zeraim) and masechet Niddah (from seder Taharot) which are both still relevant today.⁸ Yet, in contrast, there is an entire order of Gemara Bavli dealing with Kodshim which relates primarily to the Bet Hamikdash and the Korbanot, even though these laws were also not relevant in Bavel. This begs the question – why didn't the Bavli just extract those parts of Kodshim that are still relevant in a practical sense (i.e. those parts that deal with shechita and kashrut)? That would be consistent with the way that the Bavli treated seder Zeraim and seder Taharot.

The answer is found in the verse from Hosea as quoted above. By learning about the korbanot, we are indirectly tapping in to the power of the korbanot. Seder Kodshim is just as relevant today as it was when we actually had the Bet Hamikdash!

Before praying Shacharit and Mincha, many people recite portions of the Torah and the Oral law which deal with the korbanot.⁹ Learning about the korbanot, reciting these portions, and praying the Shemoneh Esreh is our only way in galut of offering korbanot to Hashem. As we will see in the coming weeks, there are many parallels between our tefillot and the Divine service in the Bet Hamikdash.

Over the course of this series we will explore various ideas, halachot and practices relating to tefillah which will hopefully inspire and improve our tefillot.

Let's try something this week:

1. Try to be aware of how significant the Bet Hamikdash and the korbanot were to our service of Hashem.
2. When praying, focus on the fact that our prayers are replacing the korbanot and are our personal service of Hashem, one of the three pillars that support the world!

Shabbat Shalom,

Rabbi Ledder

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⁴ Brachot 26b. There is actually another opinion brought in the Gemara that the three daily prayers were instituted by the three Avot. We will hopefully discuss this idea in more detail in the future.

⁵ Breishit, Chapter 15.

⁶ Gemara Megillah, Daf 31b.

⁷ I heard this idea from Rav Aryeh Lebowitz.

⁸ Masechet Brachot deals with brachot, Shema and tefillah. Masechet Niddah deals with family purity.

⁹ We will discuss this in more detail during this series B'ezrat Hashem.