
☞ CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE TRANSCENDENT KIND: THE TEMPLE AND THE SACRIFICES ☞

The concept of sacrificial offerings may conjure up images of ancient, primitive cultures. Yet, when we read the Torah, the timeless guide for life, we are struck with the predominant emphasis it places on the role of sacrifices. Perhaps more than anything else, it is this prominence that brings the modern Jew to think that the Torah is antiquated.

Not only does the Torah abound with the philosophy and laws of the *Mishkan* (the pre-temple Tabernacle) and *Beit HaMikdash* (the Temple in Jerusalem) and the sacrificial offerings that functioned for over 1300 years until 70AD. Beyond this, Jewish prayers are replete with aspirations for the Messianic era when the Temple will be rebuilt, accompanied by the reinstatement of the sacrifices. Judaism's focus on this form of worship challenges the modern sensibility that sees sacrifices as a relic of the past, a superstitious practice far below the dignity of modern man.

How are we to make sense of this pervasive passion for the Beit HaMikdash? Why does the longing for the Temple and sacrifices lie latent in the heart of Judaism?

In this class we will explore the meaning of the Temple and the sacrificial service prescribed by the Torah. As we delve into this religious rite that has been without practical significance for two thousand years, we will discover just how deeply pertinent the Jewish concept of sacrifice is to our own modern lives. As such, we will be seeking to answer the following questions:

- ☞ Why is it that we have such a hard time relating to the sacrifices in the Torah?
- ☞ Why is the concept of the Temple and its sacrificial service so central to Judaism?
- ☞ What is the significance of offering sacrifices?
- ☞ Aren't sacrifices just a relic of the pagan practices of the ancient world?
- ☞ Is there any contemporary relevance to the sacrificial service?

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SECTION I: INTRODUCTION – THE LOST ART OF WORSHIP

Because sacrificial service is so alien to our twenty-first century lifestyle, its profound symbolism and meaning may elude us. Before we delve into this difficult arena, we must first take a step back and try to gain a bit of perspective on our subject matter.

It is important, by way of introduction, to note how foreign the world of the Bible is to the modern person.

1. **Jeremy Kagan, *The Jewish Self*, pp. 25-6 – The world of the Bible is foreign to us.**

The Torah is the supreme prophetic vision, yet it is completely foreign to us. Not only are we baffled by most of its commandments and prohibitions, we don't even recognize the world it portrays. It is filled with descriptions of miracles and the appearance of God in the world – but we have never seen a sea split or a flaming representative of the Creator descend from the heavens. The Torah is fixated on the need to separate us from idol worship – but we feel no overwhelming desire to bow as we pass a rock or tree. For that matter, worship itself is incomprehensible...Yet the archeological record makes clear that all ancient societies were worshipping societies...

The ancient world was obsessed with worship. The second commandment of the Ten Commandments is not to worship idols, as if that were one of the greatest challenges of the Jews as they emerged from Egypt. Today the idea of worshipping an idol sounds ridiculous.

In fact, even the sages of the Talmud had a hard time understanding the sway that idolatry held over people. This can be seen in the following Talmudic passage, recording a conversation between the Sage, Rav Ashi, and the ancient king, King Menashe, who appeared to him in a vision.

2. **Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 102b – One cannot underestimate the influence of the drive to worship idols.**

He [Rav Ashi] then questioned him [King Menashe], “Since you are so wise, why did you worship idols?” He replied, “Were you there, you would have picked up the ends of your garment and sped along after me!”

אמר ליה: מאחר דחכימתו כולי האי, מאי טעמא קא פלחיתו לעבודה זרה? אמר ליה: אי הוה התם - הוה נקיטנא בשיפולי גלימא ורהטת אבתראי.

Although a king of Judah should have known better than to worship idols, the Talmudic Sages were nevertheless well aware of the tendency toward idolatry that existed amongst the ancients. They were also aware of why such a tendency did not exist, at least not to the same degree, in their own time.

3. **Talmud Bavli, Yoma 69b – The Jewish Sages prayed for the death of the drive to worship idolatry.**

And [they] cried out with a great voice unto the Lord, their God. What did they cry? “Woe, woe, it is ‘he’ [the desire for idolatry] who has destroyed the Sanctuary, burned the Temple, killed all the righteous, driven all Israel into exile, and is still dancing around among us! You have surely given him to us so that we may receive reward through him [by overcoming the desire]. We want neither him, nor the reward through him!” Thereupon, a tablet fell down from heaven to them, upon which the word “Truth” was inscribed... They ordered a fast of three days and three nights, whereupon he was surrendered to them. He came forth from the Holy of Holies like a young fiery lion. Afterwards, the prophet said to Israel, “This is the evil desire for idolatry.”

ויצעקו אל ה' אלהים בקול גדול מאי אמור? - אמר רב ואיתימא רבי יוחנן: בייא, בייא! היינו האי דאחרביה למקדשא, וקליה להיכליה, וקטלינהו לכולהו צדיקי, ואגלינהו לישראל מארעהון, ועדיין מרקד בינן. כלום יהבתי לן אלא לקבולי ביה אגרא - לא איהו בעינן. ולא אגריה בעינן. נפל להו פיתקא מרקיעא, דהוה כתב בה אמת... אותיבו בתעניתא תלתא יומין ותלתא לילואתא, מסרוהו ניהליהו. נפק אתא כי גוריא דנורא מבית קדשי הקדשים. אמר להו נביא לישראל: היינו יצרא דעבודה זרה.

We are familiar with such concepts as the sexual drive and the survival instinct – but what is the meaning of the “drive for idolatry” with which the Sages had to contend? Where does an instinct to bow to a statue stem from?

4. **Rabbi Jeremy Kagan, The Jewish Self, p. 67 – The drive to worship idols stemmed from an awareness of self as existing by virtue of something outside of oneself.**

The Talmud reports the prior existence in man of an inclination to worship idols. What is startling in this is the idea that there should be an inclination to worship of any sort. This means that there was a desire within each individual as palpable as hunger to nullify himself before something beyond himself. This is totally foreign to our existence today...[I]n that time, the primary awareness of self was located in the spiritual aspect rather than the physical ...The whole experience of being was an expression of something that existed beyond us and which was more real and essential than our own individual being. The consequence of this experience of being was a natural sense of life as worship.

The age of idol worship is more correctly dubbed as *the age of worship*. The desire to worship emanated from a visceral awareness of the spiritual world. This spiritual desire fueled not only idolatry but the entire concept of worshipping in the form of sacrifices and other tangible acts.

5. **Rabbi Baruch Leff, *Forever His Students*, pp. 88-90 – The drive for idol worship was balanced by the drive to sacrifice to God; we no longer have either.**

We no longer appreciate what the lure and temptation of idol worship was to the world more than 2000 years ago. We also no longer understand the beauty and meaning of sacrificial worship. These two phenomena are directly intertwined...

How are idolatry and sacrificial worship related? And just what is the element of goodness and truth found in idolatry?

The basic rationale for the obsession the ancients had for idolatry was the recognition that they were dependent on a higher power. Humanism as a philosophy and movement did not exist, and they did not feel, as the moderns do, that humans can solve all of the problems of the world. They knew they had to rely on the supreme controlling heavenly force of the world. The only question was whether there was a multiplicity of forces or a single one. No matter what, though, they desperately needed to relate to a higher power. So they constructed idols that represented in physical form the higher powers in which they believed...

The minute we would truly feel God's reality, we would be overcome with an enthusiasm to worship and offer Him a sacrifice. This is why the Torah is replete with admonitions and violations of the commandment not to offer sacrifices on an altar (called a *bamah* in Hebrew) outside of the Temple. People had a very difficult time controlling their desire to offer a sacrifice to God. It was very much like a hunger to eat. It would be an extremely hard task to tell someone that he had to wait until they reached the Temple in Jerusalem in order to eat. The same was true with the offering of sacrifices to God.

The connection between idol worship and sacrifices will be explored further when we turn to examining the Rambam's understanding of sacrifices.

For now, we can appreciate the centrality of sacrifices in the Torah and in Judaism at large, in knowing that it stems from a different experience of reality, a more heightened awareness of the spiritual world and the nature of our dependency on it. With this in mind, we can approach the topic of sacrifices from a more broadened perspective.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION I

- ☞ It is difficult today to relate to the Torah's focus on sacrifices. It is important to realize in this context that all ancient societies were worshiping societies – whether in idol worship or sacrifices to God. Clearly, it was a universal human awareness of the spiritual that prompted such behavior.
- ☞ The need to worship stemmed from an awareness of existence as founded outside of oneself, in something far greater than the individual. Ancient peoples attempted to attach to the source of their existence through the act of worship. This awareness no longer exists today and as such we have a hard time relating to the practices of the ancients.

SECTION II. THE ETERNAL POINT OF CONNECTION BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH

The main site of sacrificial offering was at first the Mishkan [usually translated as “Tabernacle” but more accurately translated as “dwelling place” – a transportable place of worship], and later at the Mikdash – the Holy Jerusalem Temple built during the reign of King Solomon. Together with the sacrificial order, the central function of the Mishkan and then the Mikdash was to be the place where God rested His *Shechinah* [Holy Presence].

PART A. DWELLING PLACE FOR GOD

1. **Shemot (Exodus) 25:8 – God wants the Jewish People to create a worldly abode for Him – a place where the Shechinah can reside in this world.**

They shall make Me a sanctuary, and I will dwell among them.

ועשו לי מקדש ושכנתי בתוכם.

2. **Ibid. 29:45-46 with Commentary of Avraham ibn Ezra – The purpose of the redemption from Egypt was for the Shechinah to dwell among Israel.**

I shall dwell among the Children of Israel... they shall know that I am God, their Lord, who took them out of the land of Egypt, to rest My Shechinah among them.

Ibn Ezra

... They will then know that I only took them out of Egypt so that they would make for me a Mishkan and I would dwell among them.

ושכנתי בתוך בני ישראל ... וידעו כי אני ה' אלקיהם אשר הוצאתי אתם מארץ מצרים לשכני בתוכם.

אבן עזרא

.... אז ידעו כי לא הוצאתי אותם ממצרים רק בעבור שיעשו לי משכן ושכנתי בתוכם.

The Talmud, Bava Batra 21a relates that during the time of the Beit HaMikdash, Yehoshua Ben Gamla decreed that local schoolchildren should study with teachers in Jerusalem because of the inspirational influence of the Temple and the Divine service.

3. **Tosafot, Talmud Bavli, Bava Batra 21a – Schoolteachers were situated in Jerusalem to inspire the students, because of the great holiness of the Temple.**

For from Zion will the Torah come forth [Yeshaya/Isaiah 2:3] [The students] would study in Jerusalem since they would see the great holiness and the Kohanim (priests) performing the Divine service.

כי מציון תצא תורה - [ישעיה ב:ג] לפי שהיה רואה קדושה גדולה וכהנים עוסקים בעבודה היה מכוון לבו יותר ליראת שמים וללמוד תורה כדררשי' בספרי למען תלמד ליראה וגו' גדול מעשר שני שמביא לידי תלמוד לפי שהיה עומד

This infused them with awe of Heaven and [a desire] to study Torah, as it is explained in the Sifri, “In order to learn awe...How great is the mitzvah of Ma’aser Sheini (which obligates a person to consume certain produce in Jerusalem), which inspired a person to Torah study! When someone arrived in Jerusalem to eat his Ma’aser Sheini, he would see everyone involved in spiritual activity and Temple service, and this would strengthen his awe of Heaven and diligence in Torah study.

בירושלים עד שיאכל מעשר שני שלו והיה רואה שכולם עוסקים במלאכת שמים ובעבודה היה גם הוא מכון ליראת שמים ועוסק בתורה.

PART B. THE REALIZATION OF THE REDEMPTION

1. Ramban (Nachmanides), Introduction to Sefer Shemot – The redemption was completed when Israel constructed the Mishkan and the Shechinah descended upon the nation.

... The Book of Exodus deals with the first exile and the redemption from it...The exile was not completed until the day that the nation “returned to their place, and to the stature of their Fathers.” When they came out of Egypt, even though they emerged from the house of bondage, they remained in exile, for they were not in their Land but rather confounded in the wilderness. Only when they came to Sinai, constructed the Mishkan, and God once again rested His Presence among them, then they returned to the stature of their Fathers, whose tents were an abode for the Divine, and they themselves formed the [heavenly] Chariot. At that point, they were considered redeemed. Therefore, the Book of Exodus concludes with the completion of the Tabernacle, and with the Glory of God dwelling within it continuously.

.... ונתיחד ספר ואלה שמות בענין הגלות הראשון ... ובגאולה ממנו ... הגלות איננו נשלם עד יום שובם אל מקומם ואל מעלת אבותם ישובו - וכשיצאו ממצרים אף על פי שיצאו מבית עבדים עדיין יחשבו גולים, כי היו בארץ לא להם נבוכים במדבר, וכשבאו אל הר סיני ועשו המשכן ושב הקדוש ברוך הוא והשרה שכנתו ביניהם אז שבו אל מעלת אבותם, שהיה סוד א-לוה עלי אהליהם, והם הם המרכבה (ב"ר מז ח), ואז נחשבו גאולים ולכן נשלם הספר הזה בהשלימו ענין המשכן ובהיות כבוד ה' מלא אותו תמיד:

Elsewhere it appears that the purpose of the redemption was for the sake of receiving the Torah: “When you come out of Egypt, you will serve God on this mountain” (Shemot 3:12). The Ramban explains that the two purposes are essentially one and the same: The Divine Presence that appeared at Sinai is the same Presence that later dwelled in the Mishkan.

2. **Ramban, Commentary to Torah, Shemot 25:1 – The Glory that rested upon the Mishkan is a continuation of the Glory revealed at Sinai.**

The secret [significance] of the Mishkan is that the Glory that rested upon Sinai should discreetly rest upon the nation...The Glory that was revealed to them at Sinai was constantly present among Israel in the Mishkan. When Moses came, the [Divine] speech came forth to him from there, just as it had at Sinai.

וסוד המשכן הוא, שיהיה הכבוד אשר שכן על הר סיני שוכן עליו בנסתר ... והיה במשכן תמיד עם ישראל הכבוד שנראה להם בהר סיני ובבא משה היה אליו הדבור אשר נדבר לו בהר סיני.

PART C. COMPLETING CREATION

Not only did the Shechinah's dwelling among Israel fulfill the purpose of the redemption from Egypt; it also fulfilled the essential purpose of the creation of the world.

1. **Bamidbar Rabbah 13:6 – The dedication of the Mishkan was the culmination of the process of creation.**

Rabbi Shmuel bar Abba said: What does the phrase “on the first day” [in connection with the inauguration of the Mishkan] (Shemot 40:2) mean to tell us? It means that from the first day of the creation, God desired to have an abode among His creatures in the lower worlds...Yet He did not do so. Rather, after the Mishkan was established and the Shechinah dwelled in it, and the princes brought their offerings, God said, “It shall be written that this is the day on which the world was created.”

אמר ר' שמואל בר אבא: מהו ביום הראשון מן היום הראשון שברא הקב"ה את העולם נתאוה לדור עם בריותיו בתחתונים.... לא עשה כן, אלא כיון שהוקם המשכן והשרה בו הקב"ה שכניתו ובאו הנשיאים להקריב, אמר הקב"ה: יכתב שביום זה נברא העולם.

The ultimate expression of God's involvement with humanity was made at the Mishkan and the Mikdash. In this sense, the enshrinement of the Shechinah at the Mishkan brought the creation of the world to its purpose (see also Source 12, below, where the Mishkan is depicted as a perfected microcosm of the world).

PART D. THE CENTRALITY OF THE TEMPLE AND SACRIFICES IN JEWISH LIFE

The Mikdash was (and shall one day again be) the place for God's most manifest connection to humanity. Yet, its cosmic importance goes far beyond that and impacts greatly on the spiritual level of every individual Jew. In light of the powerful effect of the Mikdash, one was not only supposed to offer personal sacrifices, but was to visit Jerusalem three times a year in order to experience the Mikdash.

1. **Rambam (Maimonides), Sefer HaMitzvot, Positive Mitzvah 20 – It was important to visit the Mikdash, not only for offering one’s sacrifices.**

The twentieth mitzvah is to build a house of worship, and the offerings and the continual burning of the fire will be in it, and the pilgrimage, ascent and assembly will be towards it every year...and He said, “And make a Mikdash for Me.”

והמצוה העשרים היא שצונו לבנות בית עבודה בו יהיה ההקרבה והבערת האש תמיד ואליו יהיה ההליכה והעליה לרגל והקבוץ בכל שנה ... והוא אמרו יתעלה ועשו לי מקדש.

2. **Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, Commentary on Shemot II, Ner Le’Elef, pp. 57- 62 – The Mishkan and Temple provided a practical model for spiritual development.**

The building of the Mishkan was the creation of a mini-version of the world. Every detail in the Mishkan was crucial and corresponded to something in the larger creation. This is why the Torah focuses at such length on the building of the Mishkan in all of its details; that building was the creation of a smaller version of the world. For this reason when we emulate how God Himself rested from the work of the Creation on the first Sabbath, we rest specifically from the forms of creative activity that we used in building the Mishkan.

Not only was the Mishkan a microcosm of the world, every individual man is a microcosm of the world. This being the case, a person could perceive a perfected version of himself from looking at the Mishkan. When we visited the Mishkan or the Mikdash we saw an incredibly detailed model for how we could build ourselves so that we too could become temples in which holiness could dwell.

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin (Nefesh Hachaim 1:4) explains that both the earthy human form and the Mishkan are modeled after the holy elevation of a lofty spiritual world. Seeing the form of the Mikdash and its details would thus raise a person to a lofty human elevation. He could see himself as a vessel for holiness, like the Mishkan.

Unfortunately, the passage of time since we had the Mikdash has made these ideas quite foreign to us. Nevertheless, we still possess the ability to connect with the Shechinah, the Divine Presence in this world, on some level.

3. **Rabbi Ze’ev Leff, Shemoneh Esrei: The Depth and Beauty of Our Daily Tefillah, pp. 320, 406 – The Divine Presence in Jerusalem is eternal.**

Regarding the blessing of the Amidah *דיברת כאשר בתוכה* “dwell within her [Jerusalem] as You have said”: The Avnei Eliyau says that this request is not only for God to dwell in Jerusalem in the future, but even before the Temple is restored, during the exile, God’s presence should dwell in Jerusalem. In this vein, the Midresh informs us that the Shechinah has never left the Kotel Hama’aravi [Western Wall] (Tanchuma,

Shemot 10), and the Rambam posits that the holiness of Jerusalem is eternal since the Shechinah is there and the Shechinah is eternal..

The Shechinah was present in the Second Temple and even between the Batei Mikdash [in the period between the two Temples], and it is even present today on the ruins of the Temple Mount. However, the intensity of the Shechinah varies. Compared to the concentration and intensity of the Shechinah that was present in the First Temple, the Shechinah that was present in the Second Temple was negligible.

This is not meant to imply that God's Presence dwelling in any one place means that God is "there" and not somewhere else, since God's Presence permeates the entire world. However, God's existence is more easily perceived in those places, and therefore we say that God's Presence is there more than somewhere else.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION II

- ∞ **The Jewish People have a unique mission in the world. That mission is to form a connection between Heaven and Earth, to bring the light of the Divine into the world. This purpose is only completed when the Holy Presence (Shechinah) dwells in the Temple.**
- ∞ **As a resting place for God's Presence in this world, the Mishkan and the Mikdash after it represent the fulfillment of the purpose of the Exodus from Egypt and the completion of the process of creation.**
- ∞ **When the Shechinah dwelled in the Temple, contact with the Mikdash also enhanced our ability to turn our own persons into vessels for holiness.**

SECTION III. THE FUNCTION OF KORBANOT (SACRIFICES)

In this section we will begin to explore the rationale behind bringing sacrifices to God.

Sacrifices in general served three purposes: 1) To bring individuals and the Jewish nation closer to God; 2) To atone for transgression; and 3) To enable the perpetuation of the world. For a detailed list of the types of offerings and their specific functions, please see Appendix A below.

PART A. DRAWING CLOSE TO GOD

The Maharal (Gevurot Hashem, Ch. 69) explains that by resting His Presence in the Mishkan, God connected to us. After that, He gave each of us the opportunity to respond and come closer to Him through the korbanot.

1. **Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, Commentary on Vayikra (Leviticus), Ner Le'Elef, p. 9 – The experience of bringing a sacrifice to the Temple inspired people to come closer to God.**

The Temple – like the Mishkan before it – was an awesome structure. Josephus reports that the marble of Herod's second Temple was so smooth, that the sun reflected off it in such a way that, even if someone was located in a part of Jerusalem where one could not see the Temple directly, one would see a shimmering light reflected off of it. In this way, wherever one was in Jerusalem, one was always aware of the Temple. As one approached the Temple, one saw the Levites and Kohens all over guarding it, and one was struck by the majesty of the building. For the average Jew, this sight came at the end of extensive preparations. He had to identify his korban, guard it carefully, take care of his affairs and walk for days and maybe weeks to Jerusalem. There he would join hundreds of other Jews in going up to the Temple. He was ready to connect to God on a deeper level than he had done until then.

Bringing an offering involved much preparation, both physical and spiritual (such as purification from spiritual defilement [*tumah*]). The very process of bringing the offering would bring a person close to God.

2. **Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Vayikra 1:2 – God's closeness, achieved by the sacrifices, is the ultimate good.**

The purpose of every sacrifice is closeness to God: "They will seek the closeness of God" (Yeshaya 58:2)...For closeness to God is the only yardstick by which to measure the truth of one's worldview and one's wellbeing. There, in the holy chambers of the Temple, it becomes clear that one's spiritual and physical "well-being" will only develop out of closeness to God and by abiding by His law – and that this is the destiny of one's purpose...There, every estrangement from God brings demise, "Those removed from You will perish" (Tehillim/Psalms 73:27); there, the only good is found in closeness to God. Furthermore, only closeness to God is truly good for man: "God's nearness is my good" (Ibid. 73:28).

תכלית הקרבן היא קירבת א-להים: "קירבת א-להים יחפצון" (ישעיה נח ב) ... שקירבת א-להים היא קנה מידה יחיד להשקפת עולמו ולהערכת אושרו. שם, בדביר ובהיכל, יתברר לו שאושרו הרוחני והחומרי יתפתח רק בקירבת ה' ובשלטון דת א-ל, וזו כל אחרית ייעודו ... שם כל ריחוק מה' מביא לידי אבדון, "רחקיך יאבדו"; שם הטוב מצוי רק בקירבת ה'. יתר על כן, רק קירבת ה' היא טוב לאדם: "קירבת א-להים לי טוב".

The concept of closeness to God achieved by means of sacrifice emerges from the word "korban" (offering), which derives from the root meaning closeness (*karov*). The act of sacrifice itself is an act of closeness.

3. **Rabbi Baruch Leff, Forever His Students, p. 90 – Sacrifice is the ultimate expression of closeness with God.**

Sacrifices are an outgrowth of a tremendous drive to serve and relate to a higher power. A man who really loves his wife cannot simply tell her that he loves her. He feels compelled to buy her flowers or chocolates to express his love and to give something of himself to her. So it is with relating to God. Because we are physical beings, we are driven to show our love and passion for God in some physical form. And this giving of oneself to God must be in an ultimate sense. I want to give my entire existence, my whole life to God. I express this with the offering of my animal's life. This is why the word for sacrifice in Hebrew is "Korban," meaning closeness.

PART B. ATONEMENT OF TRANSGRESSION

We have seen that the essence of korbanot is to bring the sacrificer closer to God. How is this resultant closeness manifest?

1. **Ramban (Nachmanides), Commentary to Vayikra 4:2 – Expiation of sin through closeness to God.**

The reasoning behind offering sacrifices for wrongdoing is that all sins cause a degradation of the spirit and a blemish upon the soul, which is only able to face its Maker when clear of all sin...Therefore, the person who sins unintentionally must bring a sacrifice that will draw him closer to "God, Who gave the soul" [Kohelet/ Ecclesiastes 12:7].

וטעם הקרבנות על הנפש השוגגת, מפני שכל העונות יולידו גנאי בנפש והם מום בה, ולא תזכה להקביל פני יוצרה רק בהיותה טהורה מכל חטא ... ולכן הנפש השוגגת תקריב קרבן שתזכה לקרבה "אל הא-להים אשר נתנה" [קהלת יב:ז].

For certain intentional sins, offerings are not enough to procure atonement, and more is required. However, for some intentional sins and for all unintentional sins, the closeness latent in the sacrifice was sufficient.

2. **Maharal, Gevurot Hashem, Ch. 8 – A sacrifice draws us to God and leaves behind iniquity.**

The very essence of a sacrifice is that it draws one close to God, to leave behind iniquity and to return to Him. This is the meaning of the word korban, closeness to God which is achieved by means of the sacrifice.

כי אין קרבן זולת הקירוב והדבוק בו יתברך, לצאת מן החטא לשוב אליו ית', וזהו לשון קרבן, התקרבות אל השם ית' על ידי הקרבן.

Korbanot thus bring us closer to God in expiating sin, breaking down the barriers between God and Man. In essence, the sacrifice comes instead of the sinner himself.

3. Ramban, Commentary to Vayikra 1:9 – The sacrifice is in place of the sinner.

Since the acts of man are comprised of thought, speech, and action, God commands that when an individual sins and brings an animal sacrifice, he should rest his hands upon its head, corresponding to the element of action; he should verbally confess what he did wrong, corresponding to the element of speech; he should burn the innards and kidneys that are the seat of all human thought and passion, and the animal's limbs, corresponding to the sinner's hands and feet, which carry out all of his activity; and he should cast the sacrifice's blood upon the altar to bring to mind the phrase, "his blood will be on his soul."

[This is] so that the person doing [or watching] all of these actions will come to realize that he has sinned against God with his body and his soul, and that he deserves that his own blood be spilled and his body burned, had it not been for the compassion of the Creator who has accepted a substitute instead. Therefore the sacrifice atones by its blood corresponding to the sinner's blood, its soul corresponding to the sinner's soul, its limbs corresponding to the sinner's limbs; and the portions (that are given to the priests) will give life to Torah teachers, who in turn will pray on his behalf.

כי בעבור שמעשי בני אדם נגמרים במחשבה ובדבור ובמעשה, צוה השם כי כאשר יחטא יביא קרבן, יסמוך ידיו עליו כנגד המעשה, ויתודה בפיו כנגד הדבור, וישרוף באש הקרב והכליות שהם כלי המחשבה והתאוה, והכרעים כנגד ידיו ורגליו של אדם העושים כל מלאכתו, ויזרוק הדם על המזבח כנגד דמו בנפשו,

כדי שיחשוב אדם בעשותו כל אלה כי חטא לאלקיו בגופו ובנפשו, וראוי לו שישפך דמו וישרף גופו לולא חסד הבורא שלקח ממנו תמורה וכפר הקרבן הזה שיהא דמו תחת דמו, נפש תחת נפש, וראשי אברי הקרבן כנגד ראשי אבריו, והמנות להחיות בהן מורי התורה שיתפללו עליו.

4. Dayan Grunfeld, Introduction to Horeb, p. lxxvii – The specific parts of the sacrifice correspond to different aspects of the human psyche.

The offering of each part of the animal assumes its spiritual meaning, such as, for instance, the suppression of sensuality symbolized by the burning of kidneys and liver, of selfishness by the offering up of the heart of the animal; the consecration of life, of the sentiments, and of one's entire personality to God and the fulfillment of His law are expressed by the sprinkling of the blood, the offering of the incense and the burnt offering.

The concept of atonement for unintentional sins deserves scrutiny. If a sin was committed unintentionally, why does it require expiation?

5. **Rabbi Yissachar Frand, class on Parashat Vayikra – One does not forget, even temporarily, something that he considers essential.**

Rav Eliyahu Dessler [Michtav Me'Eliyahu Part 3] explains that Torah must become such a part of a person's existence that it is literally impossible for him to forget and commit a sin. The atonements of Korban Chatat and Korban Asham are required because he failed to achieve this level of integration with Torah.

I will give an example and ask your pardon for suggesting such an example. Does anyone ever leave home in the morning having forgotten to put on his pants? Never! We may forget our watch, our keys, our tie, or some other article of clothing, but never our pants. Pants are so integral to our existence, that it is literally impossible for a person to even make the mistake of walking outside his front door without his pants on.

Torah, mitzvot, and fear of God need to be such an integral part of a person's existence that he should not even be able to commit a sin unintentionally.

This is the concept of the atonement of the Asham and the Chatat offerings. The atonement is about the fact that fear of sin was not real enough and not integral enough and not essential enough in a person's life to prevent him from even unintentionally, and even possibly unintentionally, committing a sin.

The Ramban relates specifically to the purpose of sacrifices as expiation of sin. However, there are a number of sacrifices whose purpose is essentially unrelated to sin, such as a Thanksgiving Offering or a Peace Offering. It appears that the closeness involved in sacrifices, and the concept of seeing oneself as the true object of sacrifice, is true for all offerings.

6. **Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, Commentary on Vayikra, Ner Le'Elef, pp. 10-12 – Korbanot had a huge impact on the one who brought them.**

When someone brought a korban, he would do so from the best of his possessions – an expensive domestic animal like a prize bull or sheep. By showing that the best of what he has really belongs to God, the person was educating himself that he has to serve Him with all that he has. He would be showing his recognition that everything ultimately connects back to God...

This dedication of his physical possessions served as a springboard to his dedication of all of his faculties, character traits, creativity and uniqueness to increasing spirituality, to revealing the Oneness of God in the world. That blood on the altar, that ought to be my blood, my very life on that altar. But God commands that I serve Him with my life, not with my death. Since the time of the binding of Isaac, I am commanded to bring a korban in place of myself, and to learn from that the dedication of self that is required. The arm of that animal, that really should be my arm and I hereby dedicate my arm to serving only God. The heart, the legs, the body – all call upon my body parts to be that

daily offering in my work, my family life, my joys and sorrows...

As far as this explanation goes, the Kuzari warns us that intellectual reasoning alone will never give us the full picture of the closeness to God which the korbanot (or, for that matter, many other mitzvot) gave. The korbanot are God's will – and doing His will connects us with elements of spirituality which our human intellects can never anticipate. Do and you will see. There were giants of the spirit – from the first man through to the prophets at the time of the Temple who testified to the deep spiritual value of the offerings – a testimony arising out of their actual sacrificing rather than any discussion or ideas.

PART C. NOURISHING THE WORLD

We have seen in Section I that the fundamental purpose of the Mishkan and the Mikdash was to function as a dwelling place for the Shechinah on Earth. Rambam, however, notes a different purpose:

1. **Rambam, Hilchot Beit HaBechirah 1:1 – The purpose of the Temple is to bring sacrifices.**

There is a Positive Commandment to build a house for God, [a place] readied for our offering sacrifices, and for rejoicing there three times a year.

מצות עשה לעשות בית ליי' מוכן להיות מקריבים בו הקרבנות, וחוגגין אליו שלש פעמים בשנה.

According to Rambam, the primary function of the Mishkan (and the Mikdash) is to serve as a place where sacrifices are brought. Clearly, then, the theme of the sacrificial service must be intimately bound up with the resting of the Shechinah within the world. Indeed, the world exists in part by virtue of the sacrificial service, called “Avodah.”

2. **Mishnah, Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 1:2 – The sacrificial service is one of the three things upon which the world subsists.**

The world subsists upon three things: On the Torah, on Avodah (service of God), and on deeds of kindness.

על שלשה דברים העולם עומד, על התורה ועל העבודה ועל גמילות חסדים.

The power of sacrifices is their ability to maintain the existence of the world, to draw the “soul” of the world into its physical “body.”

3. **Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer, Beneath the Surface, Vayikra – Sacrifices are the inner nourishment of the world.**

The Shechinah entered the Mishkan, and later the Mikdash, like a soul enters the body. Of this combination we mention in the weekly blessings of Haftarah, “Have

compassion upon Zion, for it is the house of our lives.” Zion, the Temple where the Shechinah resides, is the *house of our lives*.

Yet, as the laws of the natural world dictate, the body-soul connection that defines life requires constant input. Without food, without obtaining the required nutrition by the act of eating, the connection weakens, and is finally severed. The same is true of the sacrificial order of the Mikdash. The Shechinah’s presence depended on the input of our own service. The words of the Torah express this idea in the clearest possible terms: the Tamid (constant) offerings are described as “My sacrifice, My bread” (Numbers 28:2).

In the book of Exodus, which describes the redemption from Egypt and the final construction of the Mishkan, we were created as a nation and the elevated life of the Mishkan was imbued within us. In the book of Vayikra, which follows immediately, we are taught how to live – most principally, the service of the Mishkan and the Mikdash that is required to maintain our inner life.

The idea that our sacrifices help to strengthen God’s connection to the world means that the physical world, instead of being a barrier to the spiritual, can in fact become a vehicle for spirituality. That is why the sacrificial services performed in the Mishkan and Temple involved every part of the physical world.

4. Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin, Ruach Chayim Ch. 3 (s.v. *shnayim*) – All the elements of the world are included in the sacrificial service.

The mineral, vegetable, animal and speaking [creations] are all connected through the sacrifice. The salt [of the sacrifice] represents the mineral, the meal offering and the [wine] libations represent the vegetable, the sacrifice itself is the animal, and the officiating Kohen is the speaking (human).

חוברו כל הדומם, צומח, חי ומדבר, בקרבן.
מלח - הוא הדומם, מנחה ונסכים - צומח,
והוא עצמו [הקרבן] - חי, והכהן המקריב - הוא
המדבר.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION III

- ☞ The word for sacrifice in Hebrew is *korban*, which derives from the word for closeness. A sacrifice brings us closer to God.
- ☞ The specific way sacrifices bring us closer to God is by removing the barriers that we have created between Him and us. Sacrifices effect atonement and thereby bring us back spiritually to God.
- ☞ Beyond this effect, the practice of bringing sacrifices also impacts greatly on the people offering them.

- ☞ Like the body-soul connection, the connection between God and the world is “nourished” by the sacrificial service. By offering up all parts of the world on the altar, we unite them all as a part of our service to God, elevating them to a level of sanctity, and providing them with lofty purpose. In turn, this brings the world continual existence.

SECTION IV. THE RAMBAM'S AND RAMBAN'S APPROACHES TO KORBANOT

On the surface, according to Rambam, the basic aim of sacrifices is to serve as a counterbalance to idolatry, offsetting the ancient pagan rituals of sacrificing to a wide variety of gods. In contrast, the Ramban shows that the Torah records the practice of sacrifices before the existence of idolatry and states explicitly that sacrifices are not just tolerated by God, but pleasing to Him. We will see that according to both opinions, the korbantot revolve around our relationship with God.

PART A. THE OPINION OF RAMBAM

Maimonides writes that the purpose of the sacrifices is to combat the pagan custom of serving gods and offering them sacrifices.

1. **Rambam, Moreh Nevuchim (Guide for the Perplexed) 3:32 – The Torah's sacrifices replaced the idolatrous practices of the ancients in which Jewish people had been steeped.**

But the well-known custom which was common then, and the general mode of worship in which the Israelites were brought up consisted of sacrificing animals...It was in accordance with the wisdom and plan of God...that God did not command us to give up and to discontinue all these manners of service. For to obey such a commandment would have been contrary to the nature of man, who generally cleaves to what he is accustomed to; in those days it would have made the same impression as a prophet would make at present [the 12th Century] if he called us to the service of God and told us in His name, that we should not pray to God nor fast, nor seek His help in time of trouble; that we should serve Him in thought, and not by any action.

והיה המנהג המפורסם בעולם כולו, שהיו אז רגילים בו, והעבודה הכוללת אשר גדלו עליה - להקריב מיני בעלי חיים ... לא גזרה חכמתו ית' ... שיצונו להניח מיני העבודות ההם כולם ולעזבם ולבטלם, כי אז היה זה מה שלא יעלה בלב לקבלו, כפי טבע האדם, שהוא נוטה תמיד למורגל; והיה דומה אז כאילו יבוא נביא בזמננו זה, שיקרא לעבודת הא-לוה ויאמר, הא-לוה צוה אתכם שלא תתפללו אליו ולא תצומו ולא תבקשו תשועתו בעת צרה, אבל תהיה עבודתכם מחשבה מבלתי מעשה:

Elsewhere in Moreh Nevuchim, Rambam provides an alternative justification for the practice of sacrifices.

2. **Ibid., 3:46 – Offering sacrifices was a statement in defiance of idolatry.**

The Egyptians worshipped Aries, and therefore abstained from killing sheep, and held shepherds in contempt – “behold we shall sacrifice the abomination of the Egyptians before their eyes, and will they not stone us?” (Shemot 8:22) and “for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians” (Bereishit/Genesis 46:34)... Most idolaters objected to killing cattle and held this species of animal in great esteem. Therefore the people of India up to this day do not slaughter cattle even in those countries where other animals are slaughtered. In order to eradicate these false principles, the Torah commands us to offer sacrifices of only three kinds: “You shall bring your offering of the cattle, of the herd and of the flock” (Vayikra 1:2) [The three types are cows/bulls, goats and sheep.] Thus the very act which is considered by the heathen as the greatest crime is the means of approaching God and obtaining His pardon for our sins. In this manner, evil principles, diseases of the human soul, are cured by other principles, which are diametrically opposed.

המצרים היו עובדים מול טלה, ומפני זה היו אוסרים לשחוט הצאן והיו מואסים רועי צאן - אמר, "הן נזבח את תועבת מצרים", ואמר, "כי תועבת מצרים כל רועה צאן". ... שחישת הבקר כמעט שהיו מואסים אותו רוב 'עובדי עבודה זרה', וכולם היו מגדילים זה המין מאד. ולזה תמצא אנשי הודו עד היום לא ישחטו הבקר כלל, ואפילו בארצות אשר ישחטו שאר מיני בעלי חיים. ובעבור שימחה זכר אלו הדעות אשר אינם אמיתיות צוינו להקריב אלו השלושה מינים לבד "מן הבהמה מן הבקר ומן הצאן תקריבו את קרבנכם", עד שיהיה המעשה אשר חשבוהו תכלית המרי, בו יתקרבו אל האלוה, ובמעשה ההוא יכופרו העוונות. וכן מרפאים הדעות הרעות, אשר הם חליי הנפש האנושית, בהפך אשר בקצה האחר.

Rambam's teaching is clearly well-founded in Scripture.

3. **Vayikra 17:7 – They will no longer sacrifice to the demons.**

And they will no longer offer their sacrifices to the demons, after whom they stray; it shall be an everlasting statute for them, for all generations.

ולא יזבחו עוד את זבחיהם לשעירים אשר הם זנים אחריהם חקת עולם תהיה זאת להם לדרתם.

PART B. RAMBAN'S DIFFICULTY

Ramban (or Nachmanides as he is also known) strongly questioned Rambam's interpretation of the sacrifices. Can it truly be said that the entire purpose of sacrifices was merely to negate

idolatry? The Torah clearly records the practice of sacrifices before the existence of idolatry and states explicitly that sacrifices are not just tolerated by God but pleasing to Him.

1. **Ramban, Commentary to Vayikra 1:9 – The sacrifices predate idolatry and bring a person to find favor in God’s eyes.**

[It cannot be as Rambam says, for] behold, Noah and his sons brought sacrifices when they emerged from the ark, and at that time there were no Chaldeans or Egyptians in the world (who later in history worshipped idols). [Furthermore, their sacrifice] was found pleasing to God, as the verse says, “and God inhaled the beautiful aroma [of the sacrifice]” (Bereishit 8:21). And by virtue of this offering God proclaimed that he would no longer curse the ground on account of Man.

[Even earlier in world history, the son of Adam and Eve] Hevel (Abel) also offered some of the firstborn of his flock, from the fattest ones. “God paid heed to Hevel and his offering” (Bereishit 4:4). And at that time there was not yet any trace of idolatry in the world...And the expression “korban” comes from the verse, “My offering (korban), My food for My fires, My satisfying aroma...” (Bamidbar/Numbers 28:2). God forbid that the only purpose of the sacrifices was to negate idolatry from the minds of fools!

והנה נח בצאתו מן התיבה עם שלשת בניו אין בעולם כשדי או מצרי הקריב קרבן וייטב בעיני ה' ואמר בו (בראשית ח כא) וירח ה' את ריח הניחוח. וממנו אמר אל לבו לא אוסיף עוד לקלל את האדמה בעבור האדם (שם).

והבל הביא גם הוא מבכורות צאנו ומחלביהו, וישע ה' אל הבל ואל מנחתו (שם ד ד), ולא היה עדיין בעולם שמץ ע"ז כלל ... ולשון הקרבנות את קרבני לחמי לאשי ריח ניחוחי... (במדבר כח ב), וחלילה שלא יהא בהם שום תועלת ורצון רק שוללות ע"ז מדעת השוטים:

PART C. RESOLVING THE DISPUTE

It is possible that Rambam’s conception of sacrifices as aimed at weaning the Jewish people from idol worship fits well with the approach that the main goal of sacrifices was closeness to God in general and atonement in particular. These can be seen as two facets of one deeper truth.

1. **Rabbi Yom Tov Asevilli (Ritva; 13th century), Sefer Hazikaron – Sacrifices are intended to cleanse the minds of Israel from the mistakes of idolatry.**

Our Master [Ramban] of blessed memory, rejects the way the Guide for the Perplexed explains the [purpose of] sacrifices... However, in my opinion, Rambam chose...

ועל זה הטיח דברים רבינו ז"ל על טעם הרב המורה בקרבנות ... ודעתי ברב המורה ז"ל בטעם זה ובטעמים רבים אחרים שכתב במצות כי לא מאשר יאמין הוא שהוא עקר טעם המצוה

explanations of the commandments in order to provide them with some meaning and to furnish the masses with some rational arguments against heretics, rather than believing these to be the principal reasons...

With all due respect to our great Master (Ramban) and his divinely inspired words, his zeal confused him and prevented him from examining Rambam's statement thoroughly. There is no doubt in my opinion that Rambam's explanations contain some elements which do not concur with those of the kabbalists or other scholars. However, there is neither error nor contradiction in the approach he follows, for his carefully presented arguments are full of wisdom and logic.

...Our Master [Ramban] apparently concluded that in Rambam's view the sacrifices were instituted to repudiate the views of the wicked and the foolish, i.e. the Egyptians and Chaldeans.

I, however, with my limited intellect, do not glean this from his words. Rambam's general view of the sacrifices is set out in Part 3, chapter 32 of his work.... The text there clearly demonstrates that according to Rambam the sacrifices were meant to eliminate the erroneous conception from the minds of our own people, who had also succumbed to idol worship. Unfortunately, our ancestors did not cleanse themselves of that abomination, even after having become a Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation. Thus, Moses declared: "for I know that after my death you will surely become corrupted" (Devarim/Deuteronomy 31:29). This is how they acted throughout many generations until they brought upon themselves the exile. All this is common knowledge.

ההיא אלא שרצה לתת קצת טעם בהם עד שאפי' ההמון שבו ידע להשיב בהם גם לאפיקורוס בדברים שכליים ... לא מאשר יאמין הוא שהוא עקר טעם המצוה ההיא ...

ועם כל זה שדברי רבינו ז"ל בטעמו דברי א-להים חיים מה שכתב על הרב המורה ז"ל לא עיין בו יפה כי קנאת לבו לשם ית' הבהילתו מלעיין בלשון רבינו המורה ז"ל ולפי דעתי אין ספק שימצאון בדברי המורה ז"ל דברים שאינם כפי חכמי האמת או חכמים אחרים אך לפי הדרך שדורך בה הרב המורה לא ימצא בו טעות ולא דרך סתירה והפך כי בתכלית השמירה וחכמת ההגיון שמר את עצמו בדבריו...

כי הנה רבינו ז"ל כתב שדעת המורה שהקרבת בא להוציא מלבן של רשעים וטפשי עולם ויתבאר בלשונו במה שהשיב על המורה שרשעים וטפשי עולם הם המצרים והכשדים.

ואני איני רואה בקצר דעתי שיאמר המורה כן והנה טעמו בטעם כלל הקרבן מפורש בספרו בחלק השלישי פל"ב ... ולפי זה הלשון לא נשאר בלב שום ספק אחר זה שלא בא הקרבן לדעת הרב המורה ז"ל אלא להוציא הטעות מלב אומתנו שהיו ג"כ שטופים בעבודות ההם ובעונותינו שרבו אפי' אחרי היותנו ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש לא הטהרו אבותינו מן הטינוף ההוא גם אדון הנביאים אמר בביאור [דברים לא:כט] "כי ידעתי אחרי מותי כי השחת תשחיתון" וכן עשו ימים רבים בדורות ידועים פעמים אין מספר עד אשר הביאו הגלות כאשר ידוע ומפורסם.

Rambam's comment quoted by our Master indeed appeared in the Guide 3:46, but it refers to the specific animals the Torah declares fit for the altar, and not to the rationale of the sacrifices as such dealt with in Chapter 32...It is clear...that Rambam's general and substantive explanation of the sacrifices is not in Chapter 46 but rather in Chapter 32.

ומה שכתב רבנו ז"ל בשם המורה ז"ל באמת שכתב הלשון ההוא במורה בפרק מ"ו בחלק השלישי לטעם פרטי הקרבן אבל לא נתנו לכלל הקרבן כי הטעם לכללו אצלו הוא מה שכתבתי מפרק ל"ב.

According to Ritva, Rambam's approach to sacrifices is that they were a way of affirming belief in God, which in turn had the effect of countering idolatrous notions. Taking this one step further, it emerges that the opinions of Rambam and Ramban are not all that different. They merely address the subject from different perspectives.

2. **Rabbi Gedaliah Schorr, Ohr Gedalyahu, Commentary to Vayikra, p. 6 – Rambam and Ramban speak of the same fundamental principle, just from different perspectives.**

Even though Adam, the first man, could himself perceive that he was created something from nothing (ex nihilo), he was nonetheless a creation, meaning that even he sensed that he was distinct and separate, master of his own domain. That is why he brought a sacrifice to draw closer to God and remove any sense of ego. So too with Hevel and Noah who brought sacrifices; they did so with this intention in mind: to remove the sense of separation [from God]. This answers Ramban's question (as to why these people brought sacrifices). According to this we may say that Rambam's opinion dovetails with that of Ramban, only that Rambam speaks from the reactive perspective, that sacrifices come to distance people from any hint of idol worship...and also so they will not have a sense of independent existence inherent to the human ego, whereas Ramban speaks from the proactive perspective, that the sacrifices come to draw a person, along with the whole world, closer to its Source.

אע"פ שאדם הראשון הרגיש בעצמו כי נברא הוא מאין ליש, מ"מ נברא הוא, והרגיש בעצמו שהוא דבר נפרד ו"יש" - בכח עצמו, ולכן הביא קרבן להתקרב לד' ולהתרחק מכל הרגש של ישות, וכן הבל ונח שהקריבו קרבנות, בכוונה זו היתה הקרבתם, להרחיק מעליהם כל מחשבה של פירוד, ומיושב השגת הרמב"ן. ולפי זה י"ל דטעם הרמב"ם הוא קרוב לטענת הרמב"ן אלא דהרמב"ם מדבר מצד השלילי של הקרבנות שענין הקרבן הוא להרחיק כל שמץ ונדנד של ע"ז ... שגם האדם לא ירגיש עצמו כדבר נפרד וכישות בפני עצמו, והרמב"ן מדבר מצד החיוב של הקרבן לקרב עצמו וכל הבריאה עמו להשורש.

Even sacrifices that were brought before idolatry came into the world can be understood in line with Rambam's explanation, as "distancing from idolatry." The sacrifice serves as a counter to the sense of independence from God, which is latent in the human psyche and is fundamental to idolatry.

The essence of all offerings, as expressed by both Rambam and Ramban, is to demonstrate the unity of God by showing that all of existence is dependent on the Divine existence. Thus, Maharal states that sacrifices are intended to indicate the Oneness of God in the world.

3. **Maharal, Gevurot Hashem, Ch. 69 – Sacrifices demonstrate that there is nothing besides God.**

The entire matter of sacrifices is to demonstrate that God, may He be blessed, is One in the world, and there is no power besides Him...For sacrifices demonstrate His unity, in that compared to His greatness all things are considered nothing, and are annulled before Him, and everything comes back to Him, for there is nothing that is not from His kindness...This is [what is referred to as] His completeness, that there is no existence besides His.

כל ענין הקרבנות הוא להורות כי השם ית' יחיד בעולם ואפס זולתו ... כי הקרבנות כמו שהם להורות על אחדותו, שכל הנמצאים במדרגת רוממותו ומעלתו נחשבים לאפס, והכל שב אליו, שאין דבר נמצא זולת מחסדי ה' וזהו שלמותו ית' שאין מציאות זולתו.

As we discussed in the introduction to this class, the inner drive to nullify oneself to "something beyond" and the subsequent urge to worship that source of existence can manifest itself in two ways: either toward God in the form of sacrifice, or toward idolatry. Ramban speaks of the positive expression – the sacrifice bringing one closer to God – while Rambam speaks of the sacrifices' power to override the negative tendency towards idol worship. (See further: Rabbi Uziel Milevsky, Ner Uziel to Parashat Vayikra)

KEY THEMES OF SECTION IV

- ☞ Whereas in the previous section we saw that the fundamental purpose of sacrifices is to achieve closeness to God (in expiation of sin), Rambam refers to its purpose as the negation of idolatry.
- ☞ Ramban questions the Rambam's approach because (a) sacrifices predate idolatry in the Torah, and (b) the Torah states that God positively "enjoys" our sacrifices, and not merely tolerates them.
- ☞ According to both, however, it is possible that the deeper meaning of sacrifices is the unity of God and the disabusing of any notion to the contrary. Hence, Rambam and Ramban might actually be speaking of the same essential principle, just from different perspectives.

SECTION V. MAINTAINING A CONNECTION IN THE ABSENCE OF THE TEMPLE AND SACRIFICES

After the destruction of the Second Temple, the sacrificial order ceased, and it has not been restored since. Nonetheless, we still have some access to what sacrificial service offered us – through prayer, the Beit Knesset (synagogue) and Torah study.

PART A. PRAYER

In place of the communal sacrificial order, the Men of the Great Assembly enacted the daily prayers to correspond to the regular sacrifices. In addition, the reading of the passages about the sacrifices is considered to some degree as if one actually offered the sacrifices.

Like a sacrifice, prayer expresses total human dependency on God for everything one has. A sacrifice unites the spiritual and material by making use of the animal world for the sake of Divine service. Similarly, prayer unites the spiritual and material by transforming our material requests into service of God. And like sacrifices, prayer too demonstrates the unity of God and repudiates idolatry.

1. Hosea 14:3 – Words replace the sacrificial calves.

Take words with you, and turn to the Lord. Say to Him: forgive all iniquity and receive us graciously, so we will offer the words of our lips instead of calves.

קחו עמכם דברים ושובו אל ה' אמרו אליו כל
תשא עון וקח טוב ונשלמה פרים שפתינו:

The Shacharit (morning) and Minchah (afternoon) prayers correspond to the continual offering, the Tamid, which is brought every morning and afternoon. The Arvit (evening) prayer corresponds to the burning of the remains of the offerings that took place at night. In addition, holidays and special days incorporate a Mussaf prayer, which corresponds to the Mussaf (Additional) sacrifice of these days.

2. Talmud, Berachot 26b – Prayers correspond to the continual offering.

The [regular] prayers were instituted corresponding to the continual offerings.

תפלות כנגד תמידין תקנום.

In addition to prayer services that correspond to sacrifices, the recitation of the sacrificial passages of the Torah has an effect that parallels the sacrifices themselves.

3. Talmud, Megillah 31b – Recitation of the sacrificial passages comes in lieu of the sacrifices themselves.

Avraham said before God: “Master of the World, perhaps Israel will sin before You,

אמר אברהם לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא רבנו של
עולם שמא חס ושלום ישראל חוטאים לפניך

and You will act with them like You acted with the generation of the Flood and the generation of the Dispersion.” He said to him, “No.” He replied: “Master of the World, with what will I know?” He told him, “Take for me a calf...” Avraham said to Him, “This is sufficient during the time that the Temple stands. But when the Temple will not stand, what will become of them?” He replied to him, “I have already enacted for them the Order of Sacrifices. Whenever they read them, I will consider it for them as though they have brought a sacrifice before Me, and I will forgive them for all their iniquities.”

ואתה עושה להם כדור המבול וכדור הפלגה אמר לו לאו אמר לפניו רבונו של עולם במה אדע אמר לו קחה לי עגלה משולשת וגו' אמר לפניו רבונו של עולם תינח בזמן שבית המקדש קיים בזמן שאין בית המקדש קיים מה תהא עליהם אמר לו כבר תקנתי להם סדר קרבנות כל זמן שקוראין בהן מעלה אני עליהן כאילו מקריבין לפני קרבן ומוחל אני על כל עונותיהם:

How did prayer come to replace sacrifices? The concept of “offerings of our lips” connects sacrifices to prayer, but what do they actually have in common? Are prayers just a concession to God in lieu of the sacrifices He really prefers?

4. **Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, Koren Siddur, Introduction – Prayer did not come to replace sacrifice after the destruction of the Temple; rather, it is the internal dimension of that very same sacrificial experience.**

The transition from sacrifice to prayer was not a sudden development. A thousand years earlier, in his speech at the dedication of the Temple, King Solomon had emphasized prayer rather than sacrifice (I Kings 8:12-53). Through Isaiah, God had said, “My House shall be called *a house of prayer* for all peoples” (Is. 56:7). The prophet Hosea had said: “Take words with you and return to the Lord ... Instead of bulls we will pay [the offering of] our lips” (Hos. 14:3). Sacrifice was the external accompaniment of an inner act of heart and mind: thanksgiving, atonement, and so on. Therefore, though the outer act was no longer possible, the inner act remained. That is how sacrifice turned into prayer.

Rabbi Sacks continues to write that the perpetuation of the sacrificial experience in the form of prayer ensured the survival of the Jewish people, despite the loss of our most central place of worship.

5. **Ibid. – Prayer carries the sacrificial service beyond the Temple.**

That is why Judaism was able to survive the destruction of the Temple and the cessation of the sacrificial order. The external act could no longer be performed, but the internal act remained. That is the link between sacrifice and prayer.

Finally, a deeper understanding of the Talmud (Megillah 31b; Source 35) can show that the recitation of Korbanot (the sacrificial service) in the morning prayers concretizes and

strengthens our faith and belief in the final redemption – the coming of the Messiah, the rebuilding of the Temple and the reinstatement of the sacrificial order.

6. Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky, Emes L'Yaakov, Bereishit 41:1 – Recitation of the sacrificial passages strengthens our faith in the coming of Mashiach (the Messiah) and rebuilding the Temple.

Hidden here (in Megillah 31b) is another idea. What Avraham was asking was: The offering of sacrifices is sufficient during the time that the Temple stands, the Divine Presence is apparent in all its glory and the Jewish people are living in the Land of Israel. Then he was certain that they would not perish from the world, for they have an eternal connection to their people and to their land.

However, when the Temple will no longer exist and they will be scattered and separated in exile, what will become of them? Meaning, how will it be possible to maintain their connection to God and their hope of redemption? To this God responded, "I have already enacted for them the Order of Sacrifices." Meaning, when they recite the Order of the Sacrifices they will be tied and strongly connected to the belief in the coming of the Messiah.

Behold, until Eliyahu arrives, we will not know the specific location of the altar, as well as other necessary details to build the altar and offer sacrifices. Therefore, if the Jewish people recite the Order of Sacrifices, they will be connected to Jerusalem and will wait with great anticipation for the future redemption, and this will ensure that they will not perish.

טמונה כאן כוונה אחרת, דכוונת אברהם בשאלתו היתה דבשלמא בזמן שבית המקדש קיים ושכינה בתפארתה וישראל על אדמתם אז בטוח אני שלא יאבדו, שהרי הם מקושרים קשר נצחי לאדמתם ולאומתם.

אבל בזמן שאין בית המקדש קיים, והם בגלות מפוזרים ומפורדים בין כל העמים מה תהא עליהם, כלומר, איך הם ישמרו את הקשר למחצבתם ואת התקווה לגאולה. ועל זה ענהו הקב"ה "כבר תיקנתי להם סדר הקרבנות" היו קשורים ומאוגדים לאמונה בביאת המשיח.

דהלא קודם שיבוא אליהו לא נדע מקום המזבח היכן הוא ועוד פרטי דינים הנצרכים כדי לבנות מזבח ולהביא קרבנות, ולכן אם יאמרו סדר הקרבנות אז בהכרח יהיו קשורים לירושלים ולצפיה בכלות עינים לגאולה העתידה, וזה ישמור עליהם שלא יאבדו ח"ו, ודו"ק.

For more on the nature and power of prayer, see the Morasha Syllabus module on Prayer.

PART B. THE BEIT KNESSET (SYNAGOGUE)

Lacking the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, every place of prayer is a temple for reenacting the inner experience of the sacrificial service. Just as prayer would substitute for sacrifices, so too the Beit Knesset came to function as a miniature Mikdash.

1. **Yechezkel (Ezekiel) 11:16 – After the exile and destruction of the Temple, God left us a “miniature Mikdash.”**

Thus said the Lord God, “Although I have driven them far away into the midst of the nations, and although I have scattered them among the lands, I have still remained for them a small sanctuary in the lands where they arrived.”

”כה אמר ה' אלקים כי הרחקתים בגויים וכי הפיצותים בארצות ואהי להם למקדש מעט בארצות אשר באו שם.”

2. **Talmud Bavli, Megillah 29a – The miniature Mikdash refers to the Synagogue and Study Hall.**

“I have remained for them a small sanctuary” – Rabbi Yitzchak said: this refers to the synagogues and study houses.

ואהי להם למקדש מעט (יחזקאל י"א), אמר רבי יצחק: אלו בתי כנסיות ובתי מדרשות.

For more on the significance of the Beit Knesset, see the Morasha class entitled, “The Beit Knesset: The Jewish Communal Spiritual Connector.”

PART C. TORAH STUDY ON THE BEIT HAMIKDASH AND SACRIFICES

Major sections of the Written and Oral Torah address the philosophy, practice and laws of the Temple and the Korbanot. These teachings describe and analyze the nature and laws of the Temple service, and prepare the Jewish people for the rebuilding of the Third Temple and reinstatement of the Korbanot. In the Torah, the bulk of the book of Vayikra (Leviticus) is for the most part dedicated to the detailed laws of the sacrificial service. Other writings of the Written Law also address the Temple and sacrifices. In the Oral Law, one of the six Orders of the Mishnah (Kodashim) is dedicated to different elements of the sacrificial order.

1. **Based on the Introduction to the Order of Kodashim, Tractate Zevachim, Shottenstein Talmud Edition – Overview of the tractates in the Talmud addressing the Temple, sacrifices and Divine Service.**

The Order of Kodashim (Holiness) is the fifth of the six divisions of the Mishnah. The principal subject matter (excluding tractate Chullin) is the sacrificial law, consecrated objects, the Divine Service of the Beit HaMikdash, and all issues relating to this.

Since the destruction of the Temple, these laws have not been applicable, for we are not permitted to ascend to the Temple

סדר קדשים הוא הסדר החמישי מששת סדרי המשנה. עיקר ענינו של הסדר (חוץ ממסכת חולין) הוא דיניהם של הקרבנות (והקדשות) ושל העבודה בבית המקדש, וכל הנוגע לזה.

דינים אלה אינם נוהגים למעשה בזמן הזה, לאחר חורבן בית המקדש, שאין אנחנו יכולים לעלות ולעשות חובותינו בבית הבחירה, אולם נהגו

area and fulfill our obligations. However, these laws were practiced for a very long time...For this entire period these laws were applicable on a daily basis, not just for Kohanim (Priests) and Levi'im (Levites) in the Beit HaMikdash, but also for every Jewish person (Yisrael). Even in the future, with the building of the Third Temple, the Divine Service will return to Jerusalem with all its details and minutiae – may we merit to see it soon.

The names of the eleven tractates in the Order of Kodashim are: Zevachim, Menachot, Chullin, Bechorot, Arachin, Temurah, Keritot, Me'ilah, Tamid, Middot, and Kinim.

There are also four tractates in the Order of Moed [Festivals] (Pesachim, Shekalim, Yuma, Chagigah), two tractates in the Order of Nashim [Women] (Nazir and Sotah) and one tractate in the Order of Nezikim [Damages] (Horayot) that also address topics of the Temple service and sacrificial offerings.

הלכה למעשה במשך תקופה ארוכה מאוד...

בכל אותה תקופה היו דינים אלה נוגעים למעשה יום יום, לא רק לכהנים וללויים בבית המקדש, אלא לכל אדם מיישראל. ואף לעתיד לבא, בבנין הבית השלישי, תשוב העבודה למקומה בכל פרטיה ודקדוקיה, ויהי רצון שנוכה לזה במהרה בימינו.

בסדר קדשים יש אחת עשרה מסכתות, ואלו הן: זבחים, מנחות, חולין, בכורות, ערכין, תמורה, כריתות, מעילה, תמיד, מידות, וקינים.

ארבע מסכתות נוספות בסדר מועד (פסחים, שקלים, יומא, חגיגה) שתים בסדר נשים (נזיר וסוטה) ואחת בסדר נזיקין (הוריות) עוסקות אף הן בעניני קדשים.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION V

- ☞ The principal themes of prayer closely parallel the sacrificial order. When we pray to God, we declare that He is the only source of goodness and bounty – we negate idolatry. At the same time, we recognize our total dependence on God for all that we have, “annulling” ourselves before His all-embracing existence.
- ☞ The basic emotion that prayer teaches is humility. We declare that nothing we have is our own or self-assumed; everything is given us by the grace of God. One who, through prayer, reaches true humility has brought a sacrifice: he has sacrificed himself before God.
- ☞ Just as prayer would substitute for sacrifices, so too the Beit Knesset came to function as a miniature Mikdash (Temple).
- ☞ Major sections of the Written and Oral Torah address the philosophy, practice and laws of the Temple and the sacrificial order.

SECTION VI. REBUILDING THE TEMPLE - A GIANT STEP FORWARD FOR MANKIND

It was God's intention that the Temple should serve as an eternal "home" for His Presence and for the sacrificial service, which are a means by which Israel comes close to Him. The Divine Service in the Mishkan and Mikdash were the focal points of our relationship with God from the time the Torah was given at Sinai until the Second Temple's destruction.

This powerful connection was broken, but not severed, after the destruction of the Second Temple. At this time, the Jewish people lost this easy connection because of shortcomings in their behavior and because of baseless hatred.

The Jewish people have mourned the destruction of both the First and Second Temples since 70 AD and still yearn for the rebuilding of the Third Temple. We constantly pray for God's return to Zion, through the construction of the Beit HaMikdash. Moreover, it is in our hands to accomplish this goal by mending our ways and in particular by improving our character and interpersonal relationships.

The Third Temple will be built as we usher in the Messianic era, characterized by undisputed clarity of God's existence and presence, when the entire world will unify in His service. Through the re-establishment of the Temple and the sacrifices, the same importance, meaning and benefits of the Divine Service (discussed in Sections II and III above) will once again be apparent:

(For further reading on how we can merit bringing the Messiah and rebuilding the Third Temple, see the Morasha shiurim "Messiah II, Section II. What Can We Do to Bring Mashiach?" and "The Three Weeks and Tishah B'Av II: Why the Temple was Destroyed & How to Rebuild It.")

1. **Rabbi Shalom Noach Brozovsky, Netivot Shalom, Vayikra, p. 10 - The Temple, Sacrifices, and Divine Service have eternal relevance and potential to be restored.**

The Holy Torah is eternal for each generation and each person, and although on account of our sins we are unable to offer You sacrifices, we deeply desire to restore the Divine Service to the Your Holy Chamber. Behold, the sacrifices are always relevant by means of our own service of God.

והתוה"ק היא נצחית בכל דור ולכל אדם, ואף שבעוה"ר אין אנחנו יכולים להקריב לפניך, והננו מייחלים והשב את העבודה לדביר ביתך, והרי ענין הקרבנות שייך תמיד ע"ד העבודה.

2. **Siddur (Prayer Book), Amidah Service – Daily prayer to rebuild Jerusalem and establish the Third Temple.**

And to Jerusalem, Your city, may You return in compassion, and may You rest within it, as You have spoken. May You rebuild it soon in our days as an eternal structure, and may You speedily establish the throne of David within it. Blessed are You, God, the Builder of Jerusalem.

וְלִירוּשָׁלַיִם עִירָךְ בְּרַחֲמִים תָּשׁוּב. וְתִשְׁכַּן בְּתוֹכָהּ
בְּאֵשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ. וּבִנְהָ אֹתָהּ בְּקֶרֶב בְּיָמֵינוּ בְּנֵן
עוֹלָם. וְכִסֵּא דָוִד מִהֲרָה לְתוֹכָהּ תִּכְנֶן: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה
ה' בּוֹנֵה יְרוּשָׁלַיִם.

3. **Ibid. – Restoring the Divine Service to the Temple.**

Be favorable, Lord our God, toward Your people Israel and their prayer, and restore the service to the Holy of Holies of Your Temple. The fire-offerings of Israel and their prayer accept with love and favor, and may the service of Your people Israel always be favorable to You. May our eyes behold Your return to Zion with compassion. Blessed are You, God, who restores His Presence to Zion.

רְצֵה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ בְּעַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל וּבִתְפִלָּתָם
וְהֵשֶׁב אֶת הָעֲבוּדָה לְדַבֵּיר בֵּיתְךָ. וְאֲשֵׁי יִשְׂרָאֵל
וּתְפִלָּתָם. בְּאַהֲבָה תִקַּבֵּל בְּרָצוֹן. וְתֵהִי לְרָצוֹן תָּמִיד
עֲבוֹדַת יִשְׂרָאֵל עִמָּךְ: וְתַחֲזִינָה עֵינֵינוּ בְּשׁוּבָךְ לְצִיּוֹן
בְּרַחֲמִים: בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְהוָה הַמְחַזֵּיר שְׂכִינְתוֹ לְצִיּוֹן:

4. **Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer, Shemoneh Esrei, pp. 240 – Prayer is a substitute for the sacrifices that we want restored.**

... We realize, however, that no matter how sincere our words of prayer are, they are merely a substitute for the ultimate service of God – the sacrificial service of the Temple. In this blessing we ask that the true service be restored in the Temple (Etz Yosef).

5. **Ibid. pp. 242 – A return to intimacy.**

וְהֵשֶׁב אֶת הָעֲבוּדָה לְדַבֵּיר בֵּיתְךָ – And restore the service to the Holy of Holies of Your Temple. The inner sanctum of the Tabernacle and the Temple, the Kodesh K'doshim, the Holy of Holies, is also called the דַּבֵּיר (see I Kings 6:20, 8:6, 8 et al). Iyun Tefillah explains that the root of דַּבֵּיר is דְּבַר, speech, i.e., the Holy of Holies is the private chamber, the conference room where God talks intimately to the representatives of the Jewish people, as it says: And I will meet with you there [in the Holy of Holies] and I will speak with you...of all matters which I will command you to tell the Children of Israel (Exodus 25:22). We plead with God to restore His original love for Israel so that we may enjoy the most intimate relationship with Him. We ask God to communicate with us directly and guide every aspect of our lives.

6. Siddur – Closing request: to re-establish the Divine Service in the Temple.

May it be Your will, Lord our God, and the God of our forefathers, that the Temple be rebuilt, speedily in our days, and grant us a portion in your Torah. And may we serve You there with reverence, like earlier days and former years. “Then the offering of Yehudah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to God, like earlier days and former years” [Malachi 3:4].

יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ, יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְאֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, שְׂיִבְנֶה בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ בְּמַהֲרָה בְּיָמֵינוּ וְתוֹן חֶלְקֵנוּ בְּתוֹרַתְךָ [פרקי אבות ה:כד]. וְשָׁם נַעֲבֹדָה בְּיִרְאָה בְּיָמֵי עוֹלָם וּכְשָׁנַיִם קְדָמוֹנֵיֶיךָ. “וְעֲרָבָה לִיהוָה מִנְחַת יְהוּדָה וִירוּשָׁלַם בְּיָמֵי עוֹלָם וּכְשָׁנַיִם קְדָמוֹנֵיֶיךָ” [מלאכי ג, ד].

These final words of the Amidah are a prayer for the restoration of the Temple service in the Beit HaMikdash. They refer to sacrifices, prayer, and the dwelling of the Divine Presence.

7. Siftei Chayim, Rinat Chayim, p.321 – We pray to perform the Divine Service.

Why do we conclude our Shemoneh Esrei [Amidah prayer] with a request to build the Temple? The reason for this is that “The prayers were established corresponding to the daily sacrifices” (Talmud: Berachot 26b; Taanit 27). If so, all the blessings of the Shemoneh Esrei are in place of the sacrifices. We are unable today to actually offer sacrifices, and we are only able to pray. Therefore, when we conclude our prayers, we pray that we should speedily merit to actually offer up sacrifices. This is what the Rema writes (Shulchan Aruch 123:1): “We are accustomed to say at the conclusion of the Shemoneh Esrei, “May it be Your will... that the Temple be rebuilt...” Since prayer is in place of the sacrifices, we request [the rebuilding of] the Temple, so that we may be able to actually perform the Divine service.”

“יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ ה' או"א שִׁיבְנֶה בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ.” מדוע כאן לאחר סיום בקשות השמו"ע אנו מבקשים על בנין בית המקדש? ההסבר הוא, שהרי “תפילות כנגד תמידין תקנום” (ברכות כו: וע"ע תענית כז) א"כ כל תפילת שמו"ע היא במקום הקרבנות, ובזמן הזה אין לנו אפשרות להקריב, אלא רק להתפלל במקום הקרבנות, ואחר שסיימנו את התפילה, אנו מבקשים שזוכה בקרוב להקריב קרבנות ממש בפועל, ולא רק תפילה שבמקומם. כך כתב הרמ"א (שו"ע סי' קכג ס"א) “ונהגו לומר אח"כ 'יהי רצון שיבנה בית המקדש' וכו', כי התפילה במקום העבודה, ולכן מבקשים על המקדש שנוכל לעשות עבודה ממש”.

8. Rabbi Ze'ev Leff, Shemoneh Esrei: The Depth and Beauty of Our Daily Tefillah. p. 401 – Animal sacrifices will once again be brought in the Third Temple.

First of all, the prophet Yechezkel (in Ezekiel Ch. 46) clearly prophesies about the various animal sacrifices that will be brought in the Third Temple after Mashiach comes. Second, in our mussaf prayers we say, “And there

we will offer our obligatory sacrifices as prescribed in the Torah” – including animal sacrifices. Finally, in the eleventh chapter of Hilchos Melachim, the Rambam says clearly that when Mashiach comes, all the Torah laws previously inoperative will become operative again. Among them are the requirements for sacrificial service prescribed in the Torah, certainly including animal sacrifices.

It is noteworthy that Rav Kook, in his Olot HaRiyah, highlights our prayer for the rebuilding of the Temple and the bringing of a “Minchat Yehudah and Yerushalayim” – a flour offering. Rav Kook writes that this implies that animal sacrifices will no longer be offered, possibly because in the Messianic era, animals will not require the *tikun* [rectification] achieved through being sacrificed. This is not a mainstream view, but it underscores the fact that the Messianic era is not something that we know much about, and our vision of that future time is necessarily hazy.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION VI

- ☞ **The Temple is meant to serve as an eternal “home” for God’s Presence, and the sacrificial order functions as a means of coming close to Him.**
- ☞ **The Divine Service in the Mishkan and Mikdash were the focal points of our relationship with God from the time the Torah was given until the destruction of the Second Temple.**
- ☞ **In the Messianic era, the Third Temple will be rebuilt, characterized by undisputed clarity of God’s existence, and the entire world will unify in His service.**

CLASS SUMMARY:

WHY IS IT THAT WE HAVE SUCH A HARD TIME RELATING TO THE SACRIFICES IN THE TORAH?

- Sacrifice has long since passed as a mode of religious expression for modern man. We tend to regard it as a pagan practice associated with superstitious cults of the ancient world. But what we fail to realize is that there must have been some sort of reason that worship in the form of sacrifice was so common in the ancient world.
- One explanation for the universality of worship in the ancient world was that back then they were more attuned to the spiritual world. People used to have a sense –long lost to us today – that the source of their existence was actually outside of themselves. The general practice of worship and its specific manifestation in sacrifice came from an urge to connect with that source.

WHY IS THE CONCEPT OF THE TEMPLE AND ITS SACRIFICIAL SERVICE SO CENTRAL TO JUDAISM?

Sacrifice expresses the basic human desire to nullify oneself before the Creator. Sacrifices were a way of deepening our awareness of this desire, implementing it in practice, and removing the obstacles of sin that separate us from God. In so doing, the Temple and its sacrifices became the mechanism for bringing God's Presence into this world. Hence they fulfilled the purpose of the Exodus and the design of creation.

WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF OFFERING SACRIFICES?

- The very word for sacrifice in Hebrew, *korban*, expresses its purpose. Korban means “to become close.” The act of offering a sacrifice would bring a person closer to God, as the object being sacrificed was in lieu of the person himself. The various parts of the animal corresponded to different elements of the human psyche that the sacrificer wished to correct.
- Additionally, sacrifices gave people a mode by which to express thanks to God and to mark special occasions in both the individual and communal spheres. The inspiring experience of going to the Temple and offering a sacrifice was central to the lives of our ancestors.

AREN'T SACRIFICES JUST A RELIC OF THE PAGAN PRACTICES OF THE ANCIENT WORLD?

Although many have claimed this to be true, and even pointed to Rambam for support, a deeper investigation reveals that negating idolatry is only half the story. Idolatry represented the adulteration of the drive to connect to spirituality; sacrifices to God actualized this drive. As the sacrifices brought us closer to God, they simultaneously distanced us from the folly of idolatry.

IS THERE ANY CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE TO THE SACRIFICIAL SERVICE?

We no longer have the sacrificial service in its outward form, but we remain connected to the inner experience of subjugation to God and to the recognition of our dependency on Him by means of prayer. The act of prayer, which was always part and parcel of the sacrificial act, continues to this day. The communal prayer services were modeled after the sacrificial service, and the Beit Knesset (synagogue/shul) is considered a miniature Temple.

RECOMMENDED ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Rabbi Noson Weisz, Do We Want Mashiach Now?, Aish.com

Rabbi David J. Bleich, “A Review of Halakhic Literature Pertaining to the Reinstitution of the Sacrificial Order.” Tradition 9 (1967): 103-24

APPENDIX A. THE VARIETY OF KORBANOT

In this appendix we will outline the various types of sacrifices detailed in the Torah and their basic function. It should be noted that although there are only a limited number of types of sacrifices, the instances in which they would be brought are numerous. Sacrifices are brought from animals and birds (cows, sheep, goats, doves, pigeons), crops (wheat, barley, olive oil, wine, specific spices), water (on Sukkot), and salt (brought together with offerings on the altar).

Many special days of the year include their own sacrificial service (most prominently Yom Kippur), and numerous sins and events (such as giving birth, escaping a dangerous circumstance, bringing the First Fruits to Jerusalem, becoming purified from a state of leprosy, and so on) involved sacrificial ritual. The following is a basic list of the different sacrifices that were offered:

1. Olah – A Burnt Offering (See Vayikra Ch. 1)

Perhaps the best-known class of offerings is the burnt offering. Historically, this is the oldest and most common sacrifice – the Torah implies that the sacrifice offered by Noah, following the Great Flood, was a burnt offering, representing absolute submission to God's will. It is as though the world, represented by the animal, “annuls itself” before the all-encompassing essence of God.

The Hebrew word for burnt offering is *Olah*, based on a root that means ascension. An Olah is totally burnt on the outer altar; the world, as it were, completely “ascends” to God, and no part may be eaten. The Olah expresses a desire to commune with God, and expiates sins incidentally in the process – how can one commune with God if one is tainted with sins? An Olah could be made from cattle, sheep, goats, or even birds, depending on the offerer's means.

The Olah could be brought by individuals, and served to atone for certain offenses (specifically, failure to carry out Torah positive commandments); many communal offerings were also burnt offerings.

2. Zevach Shelamim (and Todah) – Peace (and Thanksgiving) Offering (See Vayikra Ch. 3; 7:11-12)

A peace offering is an offering expressing thanks or gratitude to God for His bounty and mercy. The Hebrew term for this type of offering is *Zevach Shelamim* (or sometimes just *Shelamim*), which is related to the word *shalom*, meaning “peace” or “whole” or “harmony.” A representative portion of the offering is burnt on the altar, a portion is given to the Kohanim, and the rest is eaten by the offerer and his family; thus, everyone gets a part of this offering. Unlike the Olah, which represents annulment before God, the Shelamim symbolizes the harmony between humankind and God – part is given to the altar, and part is consumed by man. The peace offerings could be from cattle, sheep or goats.

This category of offerings includes thanksgiving-offerings (in Hebrew, *Todah*, which was obligatory for survivors of life-threatening crises), free will-offerings, and offerings made after fulfillment of a vow. The offering could be brought by any individual. Note that this class of offerings has nothing to do with sin. In fact, the Midrash states that in the age of the Messiah (when there will be no more sin) this will be the only class of offering brought to the Temple. At the time of the Messiah all the world will be in complete harmony with God.

3. **Chatat – A Sin Offering (See Vayikra Ch. 6)**

A sin offering is an offering to atone for and purge a sin. It is both an expression of sorrow for the error and a desire to be reconciled with God. The Hebrew term for this type of offering is Chatat, from the word *chet*, which means “missing the mark,” and more broadly “sin.” Importantly, a Chatat could only be offered for unintentional sins committed through carelessness, and not for intentional, malicious sins. Because the sin was committed unintentionally, God, as it were, “helps” the individual to achieve complete atonement. For intentional sin, for consciously rebelling against his King, the sinner must dig deeper into his own self to find the power for repentance and atonement.

The size of the offering varied according to the nature of the sin and the financial means of the sinner. Some Chatat are individual (offered for individual sins) and some communal. Communal offerings represent the interdependence of the community, and the fact that we are all responsible for each others’ sins. A few special Chatat could not be eaten, but for the most part the Chatat was eaten by the Kohanim.

4. **Asham – A Guilt Offering (See Vayikra Ch. 5; 19:20-22; Bamidbar 6:6-12)**

A guilt offering is mandated by the Torah to atone for one of several sins: for stealing things from the altar, for committing a breach of trust, and for when a person is unsure whether or not he committed a sin, or which sin he committed. There are also other sins for which an Asham is brought, personally and communally. If a person brought an Asham out of doubt, and later discovered that he had in fact committed the sin, he would have to bring a Chatat. An Asham was eaten by the Kohanim.

5. **Minchah – A Meal Offering (See Vayikra Ch. 2)**

A meal offering (Minchah), brought from produce grown by man, represented the devotion of the fruits of man’s labor to God. A representative piece of the offering was burnt on the fire of the altar, but the rest was eaten by the Kohanim. The first sacrifice recorded by the Torah was a meal offering – the offering brought by Cain, which was rejected by God. Meal offerings could be brought by individuals and also constituted part of the sacrificial service for many communal offerings.

6. Tamid – The Continual Offering (See Bamidbar Ch. 28)

All of the sacrifices mentioned above could be brought by individuals. However, as mentioned, there are also sacrifices that were offered communally, as part of the regular sacrificial order. The most prominent of these is the Tamid, a burnt offering that was offered each day of the year, twice daily. The Tamid offering, which the Torah refers to as God's "bread," is closely associated with the continual existence of the world – much like the bread that sustains human life. Other regular sacrifices include the Mussaf offerings brought on special days (such as the Sabbath, the New Month, and festival days), festival offerings, the Omer offering (a barley meal offering brought on Pesach), and others.