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Weekly Parsha

VaYikra

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“Speak to Bnai Yisrael and say to them the following: When a person from among you offers a sacrifice to Hashem, if it is an animal sacrifice, it should be taken from the cattle or the flocks of sheep or goats.” (VaYikra 1:2)

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TWO STRUCTURES – ONE GOAL

the TEMPLE and the

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Parshas Vayikra commences the Torah's laws of sacrifices. When studying Maimonides' laws of the Selected House (the Temple) we come across many astounding findings, and much philosophy, not usually found in his formulations of Jewish law:

Law 1:1:

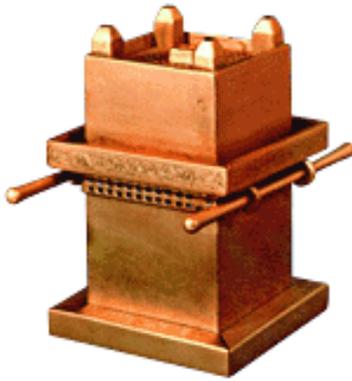
“It is a positive command to make a **House** to G-d, prepared to offer the **sacrifices** in it.”

Law 1:3:

“Once there was built the Temple in Jerusalem, all other places became completely prohibited to build a **House** to G-d, and to **sacrifice** in them sacrifices. And there is no House for all generations except in Jerusalem alone, and on Mount Moriah that is there, as it states, ‘And David said, ‘this is the **House** of G-d and this is the altar of **sacrifice** to Israel.’”

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TWO STRUCTURES – ONE GOAL

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ALTAR

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Law 2:1:

“The Altar’s place is exceedingly precise, and it may not be exchanged for its place forever, as it states, ‘this is the **Altar** of sacrifice to Israel.’ And in the **Temple** (here, Maimonides exchanges Altar for “Temple”), Isaac our father was bound (for sacrifice by Abraham) as it states, ‘and go for yourself to the land of Moriah’, and it says in Chronicles, ‘and Solomon commenced to build the House of G-d in Jerusalem in Mount Moriah that was shown to David his father, that was prepared in the place of David, in the threshing floor of Arnan the Jebusite.’”

Law 2:2:

“And the transmission is in the hands of all, the place where David and Solomon built the Altar in the threshing floor of Arnan, it is the (same) place that Abraham built the altar and bound on it Isaac. And it is the (same) place that Noah built (his altar) when he exited the Ark. And it is the (same) Altar that Cain and Ebel sacrificed upon. And on it Adam the First sacrificed a sacrifice when he was created, and from there, was he created. The Rabbis stated, ‘Adam, from the place of his atonement was he created.’”

Genesis 28:17, 19:

(Jacob fled from his brother Esav who sought his life for taking the birthright. Jacob arrived at a place where he slept. After Jacob awoke from his famous dream of the ladder with ascending and descending angels, he made this statement)

“And he was afraid and he said, ‘How awesome is this place. This is no other than the **House** of G-d, and this is the gate to heaven.’ “And he called the name of that place Beth El (G-d’s House)...”

Genesis, 35:1: (Many years after the previous quote) “And G-d said to Jacob, ‘arise and ascend to Beth El, and dwell there, and make there an **altar** to the G-d Who appeared to you when you fled from your brother Esav.’” (After Jacob’s troubles were terminated, G-d commanded him to return to the **House** of G-d (Beth El) and offer a **sacrifice**.)

Chronicles I, 22:1:

“And David said, ‘this is the **House** of G-d and this is the altar of **sacrifice** to Israel.’”

Immediately, a distinctly clear theme forces itself upon us: G-d’s **House** (Temple) and the **Altar** are inseparable. From Maimonides’ formulations, to the very Scriptural verses, in every case, the Temple is tied to the Altar! What is this relationship?

Let us outline all our questions, as there are many:

- 1) What is the concept of each, the Temple and the Altar?
- 2) What is the relationship between Temple and Altar? Is one more ‘primary’? Does one precede the other, as a basis for the other? We notice Maimonides’ formulation of Temple as “a place prepared to offer sacrifice.

And they celebrate to Him three times a year, as it says, ‘And make for Me a Temple...’”

Temple and Altar are clearly bound up with each other. How? (Maimonides includes “celebrate to Him three times a year” perhaps to focus on the significance of a location, to visit.)

3) Maimonides’ formulation seems out of order: In chapter one, he discusses the laws of the Temple, and even describes some of the Temple’s vessels, such as the Menorah. We would assume that he would complete his laws of the Temple (Menorah and other vessels) prior to discussing the Altar. But he does not. After commencing chapter one with laws of the Temple, he introduces his laws of the Altar in chapter two. In chapter three, he picks up with the Menorah. It would seem that laws of the Altar interrupt an unfinished discussion of the Temple and its vessels. Why does Maimonides discuss Temple, then prioritize Altar by positioning its laws right after laws of the Temple, and then return to the Temple’s vessels?

4) In law 1:2 Maimonides describes the historical sites of the Temple and the Altar. In law 1:3, Maimonides teaches that once the Temple was built in Jerusalem, no other place was fit for it, or for sacrifice. What is the reason behind this law?

5) Once I know from law 1:3 that both the Temple and sacrifice can never be relocated from Jerusalem, why does Maimonides seemingly repeat in law 2:1 that we can never change the Altar’s location?

6) One point astonishes us: While discussing the Altar in law 2:1, Maimonides teaches that the Altar can never be relocated. But he brings a proof from the location of the Temple! How is the Temple’s location a proof that the Altar cannot be relocated? Proof for the Altar’s location should be from a source relating to the Altar, not the Temple! Why are the two interchanged?

7) What is significant about the location of our forefathers’ sacrifices, all offered at the identical location, and that Adam was actually created from that very spot? This is truly amazing, but what is the idea?

8) When Jacob arose from his prophetic dream, what is the concept of his referring to that place as the “House of G-d” and the “gates of heaven”? What do these two terms mean?

9) Why did G-d command Jacob to return to Beth El, the House of G-d, to offer a sacrifice? Why was this required?

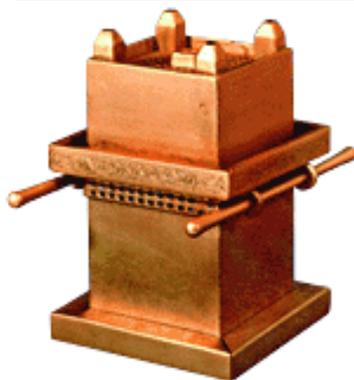
10) A question that underlies all we have asked this far is the following: Why is “location” so integral to the Temple and the Altar? Isn’t the act of sacrifice i.e., Temple worship, more essential than ‘where’ they are performed?

Defining the Temple

Let us begin to answer these questions. However, before moving further, we require a definition for both, the Temple and the Altar. What is the distinction between the two?

Temple is a fixed location for the sacrifices of the Altar, as Maimonides stated, “It is a positive command to make a **House** to G-d, prepared to offer

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the **sacrifices** in it". We learn that Temple is subordinated to Altar, as it modifies sacrificial practice by confining it to a set locale. Why is such a confinement necessary? Perhaps in part, this addresses the unbridled, religious emotion in man, seen rampant in the sin of the Golden Calf. Sforno teaches that Temple was in fact a response to the sin of that Calf. A delineated "location" for sacrifice, contains man's religious emotion. As stated by the Rabbis, the Temple or "religious expression" is the primary avenue where man's emotions lead him furthest from the truth, furthest from G-d.

But the main reason is found in the fact that Adam, his sons, Noah, Abraham, Jacob, David and Solomon sacrificed at the same, exact location: they testified to the significance that this place held. But significance of a location must call back to an event. What happened here? As Maimonides taught, its initial significance is that G-d created Adam there. From that point forward, all of these great individuals recognized the role of G-d, as man's Creator - their primary focus. By sacrificing to G-d at this location, they emphasized the importance of this concept. Each sacrifice on this Altar highlighted and reiterated the fundamental of G-d's existence, and His position as the Creator of the universe - and man. Adam's original sacrifice at this location underlined his place of creation, and the act of sacrifice, as recognition of the Creator. Therefore, we may define Temple as the "fixed location whose identification with fundamental truths properly directs man's approach to G-d." As the central focus of Temple is the Ark that houses the Torah, Temple functions to embody truth.

Sacrifice had always been associated with a "significant location". Man's "approach to G-d" is not free, religious expression. It must be guided by precise, fundamental concepts, primarily the correct notion of G-d, i.e., the Creator. Sacrificing at the same location of Adam's creation reiterated this idea.

Defining the Altar

Altar is man's approach to G-d. That is, man sacrifices to draw near to his Maker. We learn from Maimonides that Altar and sacrifice existed from the time of Adam. Altar preceded Temple. (But as you will see from the next paragraph, this is true only in structure.) After he was created, Adam responded to his Maker with sacrifice. Adam was also "created from the place of his atonement", from the place of his sacrifice. What does this mean? It means that even before Adam was created, there was a "place" for his sacrifice. Euphemistically, this means that inherent in man's design, is the need for sacrifice - atonement. So, we can speak of Adam's place of atonement predating him in this respect: sacrifice is integral to man's existence. This means that man has no option; he requires atonement, via sacrifice. Why does man require atonement? It is due to his very nature, as a being that possesses free will and instincts. It is impossible that man never sin: "For man is not righteous in the land who does good and does not sin." (Ecclesiastes, 7:20) Therefore, we say that Adam was created with an inescapable need for atonement, or "man was created from the place of his atonement."

But not all sacrifice was for atonement. Some were for thanks, as in Noah's case, being saved from the Flood. Some were out of recognition for G-d, as is the case with Adam, upon his creation, prior to sin. Even without sin, sacrifice is part of man's required function. We derive from this that man's existence must include approaching G-d, i.e., sacrifice. Man does not have an option in this respect. As a created entity, possessing intelligence and instincts, G-d designed man with the purpose of studying the works of his Creator. It is in this pursuit that man will achieve the most profound fulfillment, and be awed by his studies. If man does not seek out his Maker, he will live unfulfilled and never approach his purpose or true happiness. His central faculty of intelligence will go unused - his purpose, lost. No other being was offered this gift of intelligence. And as a Rabbi taught, such a precious gift, that man's soul is stamped with G-d's name, the "Tzelem Elokim", "Form of G-d".

We arrive at a dual nature contained in sacrifice: personal atonement, and recognition of G-d. However, both share equally in man's approaching G-d, man's purpose.

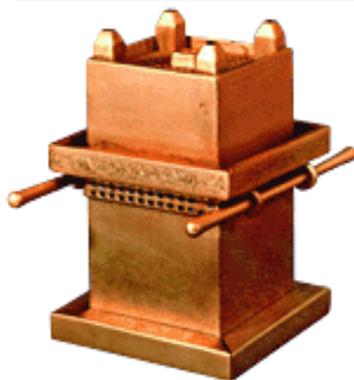
Temple and Altar – Ancient Partners

Earlier, we asked what is the relationship between Temple and Altar, and is one more primary. Even before the Temple existed, Jacob said, "...How awesome is this place. This is no other than the house of G-d, and this is the gate to heaven." Before the Temple existed, Jacob already understood the fundamentals underlying these two structures-to-be: "House of G-d" refers to a "significant location", and "Gates of heaven" mean man's approach to G-d, or sacrifice as stated by Ramban. Even before our two structures existed in the Law, the concepts of an "instructional location" (Temple) and "approaching G-d" (Altar) already existed, as all true ideas are eternal. (Torah is a formalization of eternal truths into a system for man. - Proverbs)

This prophetic event of Jacob's is a paramount model for Temple and Sacrifice. It embodies both institutions, while also teaching of their complimentary natures. It is quite a find! Jacob was awed by the realization of alighting upon a location wherein G-d's providence had resided. Arriving at such a place demands that man call out to G-d. Perhaps this is why G-d commanded Jacob to return to this place, named Beth El at that time, and offer a sacrifice. Jacob had not sacrificed there on his first visit, so perhaps he was lacking a perfection realized only through sacrifice at Beth El.

Can we derive any lesson from the very nature of Jacob's dream? Genesis 28:12 describes the dream as a ladder based on the ground reaching heaven, with angels of G-d ascending and descending, and G-d standing at the top. I would humbly suggest that the ladder's position and connection between Earth and heaven teaches a relationship between man and G-d. This relationship also has G-d at its "destination", or goal. This is man's purpose, to "approach G-d". The relationship between man and G-d can only exist via knowledge, i.e., the angels. Cherubim are affixed to the Ark that houses Torah knowledge for the same reason; the relationship between man and G-d is based on man's knowledge of G-d, the system of knowledge is conveyed

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by the cherubim. With no accurate knowledge of G-d and His Torah, man has no relationship with G-d; he has no means by which to comprehend G-d. We may suggest, based on this interpretation, that the very concepts verbalized by Jacob, i.e., “House of G-d” (Temple) and “gates of heaven” (Altar) are derived from the nature of the dream. Jacob’s words are in fact a response to this dream.

The Temple and the Altar go hand in hand. For this reason, Maimonides discussed the Temple in chapter one, and then the Altar in chapter two, before completing all the details of the Temple’s vessels. This teaches that Temple exists on par with the Altar. And for this reason, Maimonides formulates his very first law, as “It is a positive command to make a **House** to G-d, prepared to offer the **sacrifices** in it.”

We now come to Question 4. “Once the Temple was built in Jerusalem, no other place was fit for it, or for sacrifice.” Perhaps a Temple, built on Mount Moriah, the location of our forefathers’ sacrifices, now embodies what all previous Temples did not: man’s perfected approach to G-d, prior to the Golden Calf sin. Our forefathers’ sacrifices were untainted with improper, religious expression. Ironically, perhaps the Temple on Mount Moriah reaches its zenith of perfection: it reminds us of the era in which a formal Temple was not required, an era prior to sinful religious expression. On Mount Moriah, the Temple carried with it a never-before achieved status. A new, halachic designation was achieved which could not tolerate relocation. Therefore, relocation is prohibited, as sacrifice now achieved its initial undiluted form displayed by our forefathers. Temple was now synonymous with sacrifice of the most perfected status. It must be retained. Keeping the Temple on Mount Moriah means retaining the significance of approaching G-d out of a pure recognition of His role as Creator, and not from a subsequent concession to man’s Gold Calf sin.

This complimentary relationship of Temple and Altar explains why Maimonides exchanges their terms. Both function together as one unit. Temple has no meaning without Altar, and without the words of the prophet (law 2:4) Altar cannot exist without Temple. This complimentary relationship is also seen by the specific location of the Altar: it must be lined up with the opening of the Temple. This close proximity and alignment conveys their close relationship.

The Torah says, (Exod. 25:8) “And make for Me a Temple, and I will dwell in it.” G-d cannot “dwell”, nor can He be “in” anything! Kings I, 8:27, “...the heavens, and the heavens of heavens cannot hold You, how much less this Temple”. What does this verse in Exodus mean? Perhaps it embodies our idea: G-d will associate His name with a location: “in it” means G-d permits us to view the Temple with a distinct designation associated with Him exclusively. He allows man to use a place to remember Torah fundamentals. “I will dwell in it” means that man may identify the Temple, a location, with true concepts of G-d.

Discussing this area with Rabbi Reuven Mann, he reminded me of the famous Talmudic saying. Today, although we do not have the Altar, and the Temple does not stand, prayer replaces sacrifice, “Tefilah bimakome

karban”, “Prayer is in place of sacrifice.” (Talmud Brachos, 26a) Rabbi Mann added that even without a quorum, man benefits more when praying in temple. My friend Rabbi Burstein told me of a Gemara where two Rabbis selected to pray where they learned. What do these two Talmudic sections teach? They teach us this very idea that our approach to G-d must be associated with, and directed by truth, which both our temples and places of learning represent. Just as our ancient Temple and Altar worked together to purify our approach to G-d, basing it on truths, so too today, our prayers in place of sacrifice are to be directed by our temples, and our Torah study halls.

As Sforno taught, Temple is a concession to man, and his need to relate to life as a physical being. It is strictly prohibited to have any physical relationship with G-d, as G-d is not physical. A physical relationship with G-d via practices like the Golden Calf is both prohibited, and impossible. However, man is a sentient being requiring physical expression. The concession? Temple and Altar are created as the vehicles through which man uses the physical to obtain true ideas, and express his attachment to G-d. Unguided, with no sacrifice or location of significance, man created the Golden Calf. However, via the Temple and Altar, man is directed by G-d’s wisdom with precise laws that guide man to true concepts.

The fact that G-d revealed a prophecy to Jacob, and that He gives prophecy in general, teaches the most primary lesson of our existence: man’s purpose goes unrealized without G-d’s intervention i.e., G-d’s instruction. Man makes his most grave error when assuming he is autonomous. Without Temple to define the vital fundamentals of truth, and Altar to relate to our Creator, man is a fish out of water, doomed to failure.

Postscript

Temple and Altar are co-dependent: The knowledge of G-d acquired through Temple demands that man relate to G-d, and this is via Altar. Conversely, Altar, as a means to relate to G-d, requires that our thoughts are refined, and our knowledge of G-d, true. Temple is a prerequisite for Altar, and Altar is an expression of our perfection obtained via Temple. □

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VaYikra

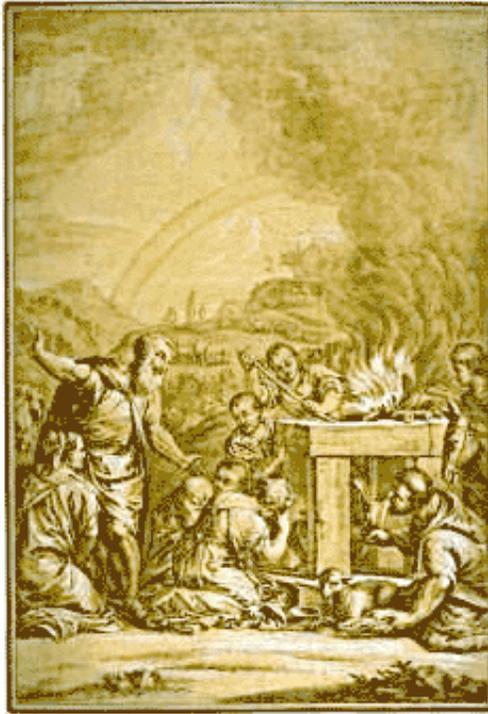
RABBI BERNARD FOX

This passage introduces the Torah's discussion of sacrifices. The midrash offers many important insights into the Torah's concept of Divine service and the commandments regarding the sacrifices. One of the most interesting insights is presented in connection with our passage.

The midrash asks a question. Imagine a king served by two chefs. The first prepares a dish for the king. The king eats the delicacy and is pleased. The second chef also prepares a special dish for his master. The king partakes of this second offering and is also pleased. How can we determine which cuisine was most appreciated? The midrash responds that we merely need to observe the king's subsequent actions. The chef that is summoned to prepare the next meal has won the contest. The king's choice indicates his preference.

The midrash explains that this simple story has an important parallel. When Noah left the ark, he offered sacrifices. The Torah tells us that the Almighty regarded these offerings as "an appeasing fragrance".[1] The sacrifices of Bnai Yisrael are also frequently referred to as "an appeasing fragrance".[2] How can we determine which sacrifice is preferable? The midrash responds that we must consider the Almighty's subsequent actions. He commanded Bnai Yisrael in the laws governing the Burnt offering – the Olah. The Torah states, "This is the law of the Olah."[3], [4] Through this command, Hashem indicated that the sacrifices of Bnai Yisrael are preferred. The discussion in the midrash continues. However, we will limit our analysis to this portion.

The midrash asks a simple question. Which sacrifices are preferable – those of Noah or those of Bnai Yisrael? The midrash compares this question to the inquiry regarding the alternative dishes prepared by two chefs. It is important that we understand this analogy. The analogy allows us to accurately define the midrash's question concerning sacrifices. In the analogy the king's preference is not determined by any bias towards one of his servants. The king makes his choice based on a comparison of the virtues of the two dishes. The question concerning sacrifices must be defined in the same manner. The midrash is



asserting that the sacrifices are fundamentally different – just as each cuisine presented to the king is distinct. They represent two interpretations of the concept of sacrifice. What are these two different types of sacrifice? In other words, in what fundamental characteristic are the sacrifices of Noah different from those legislated by the Torah?

The most obvious difference is that Noah was not guided by a system of laws and regulations. His decision to offer sacrifices was spontaneous. He was not following any commandment from G-d. Also, his method of sacrifice was a personal expression. He was not directed by any system of instructions. In contrast, the Torah created a highly regulated system of sacrifices. Specific occasions require sacrifices. The sacrificial service is regulated down to the minutest details. True, a person can offer a free-will offering. Nonetheless, in regard to sacrifices, the Torah leaves little room for personal expression and spontaneity.

We can now clearly define the midrash's question. Which type of sacrifice is preferable? Does Hashem prefer the

spontaneous sacrifice that is a personal expression? Does the Almighty favor the highly regulated and structured offering?

One might argue that the Almighty, Himself, replaced the informal sacrifices of Noah with the structured sacrifices of the Torah. This suggests that the Torah's concept of sacrifice represents an evolution from the more primitive sacrifices of Noah!

This certainly is a reassuring argument. However, it is not sound. In order to understand the defect in this argument, we must consider the reason Hashem introduced regulation and structure into the sacrificial service. Sforno discusses the issue in his commentary on Sefer Shemot. He explains that the commandment to build a Mishkan was a consequence of the Golden Calf – the Egel HaZahav.[5] Bnai Yisrael created and worshipped the Egel. This indicated that the nation had not shed its idolatrous attitudes. These tendencies could influence Divine worship. In order to preserve the integrity of the Divine service, regulation was introduced. In short, the introduction of intricate structure into the sacrificial service was a response to a failing in the nation. It cannot be defined as an evolutionary advance.

We have shown that the midrash's question cannot be easily dismissed. In fact, it seems that a powerful argument can be made in favor of Noah's sacrifices. Is not the heartfelt, spontaneous offering superior to the structured regulated sacrifices of the Torah? It seems that the Torah's sacrifices are only an artificial imitation of the personal and expressive sacrifices offered by Noah!

There is a remarkable parallel to the development of sacrifices. Maimonides discusses the mitzvah of prayer in his Mishne Torah. He explains that, according to the Torah, we are required to pray every day. The Torah does not establish a set number of prayers for each day. Neither is there a specified text. Each person is free to pray once or numerous times each day. Each individual's prayers are a personal expression of one's own feelings.

Originally, the mitzvah was observed in the manner prescribed by the Torah. However,

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VaYikra

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after the destruction of the first Temple and the subsequent exile a problem arose. The majority of the nation was no longer fluent in Hebrew – the sacred language. Hebrew was replaced by a variety of languages. Most were unable to effectively express themselves in appropriate prayers. Ezra and his court intervened. They ordained that we should pray three times each day. They also established a specific text for the prayers.[6] In short, prayer was transformed. Originally, it was a personal expression. Ezra created structure and regulation.

It seems that the midrash's question can also be expressed in reference to prayer. Prayer and sacrifices both experienced and identical transformations. A personal, creative activity was transformed into a highly structured and regulated expression. The midrash is dealing with a basic question. Which expression is superior – the personal or the structured? The midrash frames the question in reference to sacrifices. However, the same question is relevant to prayer.

The midrash responds to the question. The structured form of worship is superior. The midrash quotes an interesting passage. In describing the process for offering an Olah sacrifice the Torah states, "This is the law of the Olah." Why does the midrash quote this passage? It is because the passage refers to the laws of the Olah. The midrash is telling us the Torah's sacrifices are superior as a result of their structure and regulation – the laws of the Olah!

However, the midrash does not provide an explanation for its conclusion. Why is the structured sacrifice superior to the spontaneous offerings? The midrash does not provide much information. This raises an important issue. Does the midrash's conclusion also apply to prayer? In order to answer this question, we must better understand the midrash's conclusion. Why is the structured sacrifice superior? Once we answer this question, we can determine if this midrash's conclusion also applies to prayer. We can answer this question through analyzing another pasuk from our parasha.

“And he shall split the bird apart by its wings. He should not completely separate it. And the Kohen should burn it on the altar on the wood that is on the fire. It is an Olah, a fire offering, an appeasing fragrance to Hashem.” (VaYikra 1:17)

Various creatures can be offered as an Olah. This includes types of cattle and even some fowls. Our passage discusses an Olah of a fowl. The pasuk explains that this Olah is an appeasing fragrance to Hashem. Rashi observes that the same phrase is used in describing the Olah brought from cattle. Rashi explains, based on the Midrash Sifra, that the passage intends to compare these two offerings. The Olah of the fowl is a modest offering. Typically, the fowl is offered by a poor person. The Olah brought from cattle is a more substantial sacrifice. Nonetheless, both are an appeasing fragrance to Hashem. The modest and the more substantial offering are equal to the Almighty. Both represent submission to His will.[7] This is implied by the phrase, “an appeasing fragrance to Hashem”. According to Rashi, this phrase means that the person has fulfilled the will of Hashem.[8]

Rashi is providing a basic insight into the concept of sacrifices. The object offered does not define the value or quality of a sacrifice. Instead, the element of submission is fundamental to the sacrifice. The modest sacrifice is not inferior to the more substantial offering. The important issue is that the person bringing the sacrifice surrenders to the will of the Almighty.

How does the sacrifice represent this submission to the will of Hashem? This occurs through the adherence to the specific laws regulating the sacrifice. Conforming to these laws represents submission to Hashem's will. This surrender defines service to Hashem and worship.

We can now more fully understand the midrash's comments. The sacrifices of Noach were not regulated by any system of law. They did demonstrate submission. However, this demonstration was only symbolic. Noah represented himself through the animal on the altar. He communicated he, like the sacrificed

animal, was completely devoted to Hashem.[9] However, these sacrifices did not involve an actual act of submission. They did not conform to any Divinely ordained structure or law. This structure and law did not exist. The Torah introduced an elaborate system of law governing sacrifices. With these laws, sacrifices acquired a new significance. The sacrificial service was transformed from a symbolic to an actual submission.

Now, our question regarding prayer is answered. Ezra's reformulation of prayer did not detract from the mitzvah. Instead, the mitzvah was enhanced. Ezra made prayer more accessible to the average person. He also added structure and regulation. This addition enhances the element of devotion in prayer. The supplicant, through adhering to these laws, demonstrates submission to the Almighty's will. Through Ezra, prayer more closely models the concept of Divine service expressed in sacrificial service. ■

[1] Sefer Beresheit 8:20-21.

[2] The midrash cites as an example Sefer BeMidbar 28:1.

[3] Sefer VaYikra 6:2.

[4] Midrash Rabba, Sefer VaYikra 7:4.

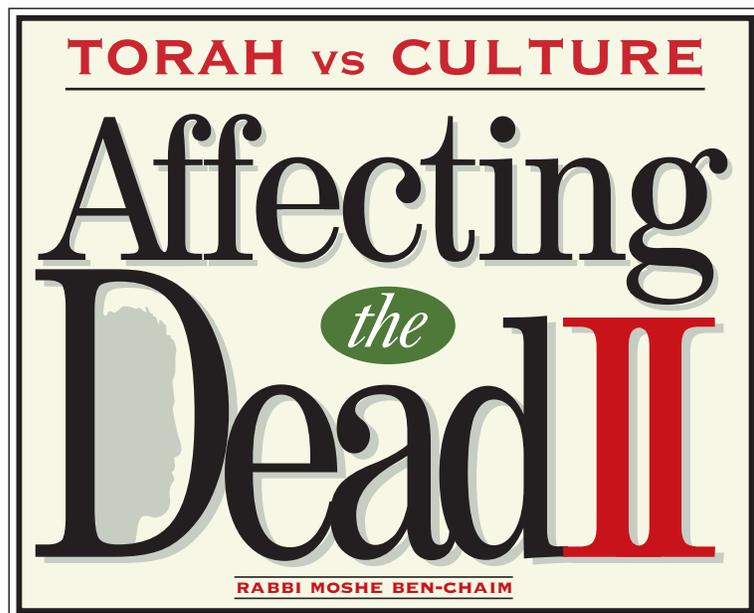
[5] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Shemot 31:18.

[6] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Teffilah 1:1-6.

[7] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 1:17.

[8] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 29:18.

[9] See Rav Yitzchak Arama, Akeydat Yitzchak on Sefer Shemot, Parshat VaYikra.



The following is an email discussion in response to last week's article "Affecting the Dead". In that article, we reasoned that the living could not benefit the dead.

After our discussion, additional material was included for the benefit of our readers.

Reader: I'd like to point out that there are many sources that talk about bestowing merit on the dead by learning Torah in their memory or Praying as Chazzan on the day of the Yahrzeit. The source for this is none other than Rabbi Akiva who taught an ignorant orphan to pray in order to merit the boy's father. This may be connected to the deceased man being responsible for leaving behind an ignorant son and is part of his judgment. The Mitzvos his son performed still impacted him positively. See the Sefer Geshar HaChaim at length regarding these issues. Do you have a source that directly states that the living cannot benefit the dead by their Mitzvot? - Shalom.

Mesora: I believe the article sufficiently addressed why the living have no bearing on the perfection of the deceased. See Sforno on Devarim 10:17, as pointed out to me by Rabbi Reuven Mann. There, Sforno teaches that a mitzvah (commandment) cannot expiate one's sins. The only means by which man may remove his sins is repentance. This clearly teaches that if one failed to repent, and died, he failed to correct himself, and certainly others have nothing by which they may remove his sins. This makes sense: How can another's actions atone for my evil? I was the corrupt one, so if I died with that corruption, another person has no relationship to my evil, and cannot affect change in my soul. Additionally, if death fixes one's soul from that point forward, then there is nothing to discuss.

Please comment as to why you feel the sources I have already stated are inadequate, according to you. Please cite your sources as well in the Gemara and Rishonim. Where is the source for the account of Rabbi Akiva that you made mention of? Aside from sources, please also tell me your own reasoning as proof to this concept. Thank you.

Reader: I can try to address my rationale and understanding of the issue. It is partially based on the same premise you assert regarding accountability for one's own actions as well as reward and punishment for one's own actions. In order to have full accountability for one's actions during a lifetime the impact of those actions also need to be judged as they occur later on such as if a person did evil and the impact carried on after they died - Hitler would be a good example. On the good side, if someone taught a child or a student wisdom, and that child was inspired to Teshuva and Mitzvos by that person - the outcome of the actions would be positively rewarded even after death.

Mesora: But does not "Reward and Punishment" exist in this world, both via G-d and Bet Din, thereby displaying an absolute measure of evil and good, and this is measured during life, with no regard to "outcome"? Man is punished and rewarded in this life, prior to his death, thereby displaying that he is measured by his actions in this life, and G-d does not wait to see if there is positive or negative outcome after he dies. Man is measured by the here and now, so he is punished or rewarded, based solely on his actions. As my close friend Rabbi Schwartz suggested, G-d said this to the angels when He provided a well for Ishmael, who in the future would kill Israel with thirst. (Gen. 21:17, see Rashi) The angels asked G-d how He could provide water for Ishmael, one who would become a murderer of Jews. G-d responded, "What is he now, good or evil?" The angels responded, "good". G-d said, "then this is how he is judged now."

However, according to your theory, one is unjustly rewarded or punished at ANY TIME, for the ultimate outcome of his acts has yet to be seen! There are an infinite number of repercussions, which may result from his actions: 1 year after his death his actions may cause others harm, and 2 years later - benefit; yet again 3 years later - harm, ad infinitum. Using your theory, it is impossible to ever calculate whether any given act is truly good or evil. Reward and punishment can never be administered according to this theory. Reasoning, not sources, forces us to arrive at the same conclusion cited by Rabbi Schwartz. Man is judged at that moment. This makes sense to our minds as well. For if man means well and follows the Torah to implement good, this is the true measure of his perfection, not whether his act - 20 years after his death - caused someone harm. Where is the justice in accusing someone for harm he could never have anticipated 20 years earlier?

Reader: I believe Rav Chaim Volozhin in Nefesh HaChaim translates the book of life and the book of death as literal (Sefer HaChaim-the book of those living and Sefer HaMeisim-the book of those who have died). The accounting of reward or punishment that precise judgment would warrant is revisited for the dead on Rosh Hashana as well.

If this is the case then I could see how one logically can attribute Mitzvos done by someone to the merit of a dead person since obviously that dead person had inspired or educated that surviving relative or student in a positive way to be motivated to think of them even even after they had passed away. Hence, judgment would dictate rewarding the dead person.

I hope my ideas are clearly expressed. The only concern I have with your sources are that they are deductions and implications as opposed to direct proof for the literal words quoted. I believe data trumps opinion as well as interpretation. Chodesh Tov.

Mesora: Let us make an important distinction here: The issue is not as you suggest, data versus opinion, the former assumed to be more substantial. Rather, when determining truth, we look for reason, and not fallacy. If reasonable ideas emanate from data, opinion, or any area, it is irrelevant. It is the idea itself that determines its validity, not

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TORAH vs CULTURE

Affecting the Dead II

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

its source. Again I ask you to please also offer your own rationale whereby you dismiss our interpretations of the sources, as quoted in our article. "Interpretation" or not, what is your dispute with our reasoning?

Perhaps here is a proper point to elucidate the underlying concepts of reward and punishment: "Perfection" refers to man's own acts and thoughts, which adhere to Torah principles. Possessing free will, man is the sole cause of his actions. When man sins, Bet Din will punish him, and not another person. G-d's Torah states, "Each man in his own sin will be killed." Nowhere do we find that if Ruben sins, that we punish his son Simon. Certainly, no other person is punished. This is clearly unjust, and a crime. During life, no other, than the person himself, is responsible, or can affect his own perfection or corruption. Again, this is all based on G-d's will that each man possess free will. Therefore, after death, this principle does not change. If on Earth, this principle is just, there can be nothing to render it unjust after death. A person's passing cannot affect this principle, which is true, and just.

"Perfection" and "corruption" are two opposite poles on man's scale of intelligence and morality. Man's values, are attributed to him alone. Therefore, Simon's perfection or corruption has no bearing at all on Ruben's. Once this idea is seen clearly, I feel the other opinion of affecting the dead will be recognized as false.

Samuel II, 12:23: "Now that he has died, why shall I fast?..." King David fasted and cried for his dying child. Once the child died, this was his response to his servants, astonished to see the king cease from his fasting and crying. King David expressed this idea: when someone has died, there is nothing others may do to affect he that has passed.

Who shall we study more carefully for taking lessons, our Kings, who acted from their immense Torah knowledge, and whose words form our Scriptures and prayers, ...or others? □

Reader II: I read your article "Affecting the Dead" in Jewish Times III, no. 22, with great interest. Please explain how the thrust of your article relates to the notion that saying kaddish for a deceased person elevates the neshama of the deceased. Is that a different concept from what you were writing about, or is that also a mistaken notion? If so, what is the point of saying kaddish? Thank you.

Mesora: I addressed the concept of elevating the neshama, and believe it to be untrue, as I attempted to convey by the sources I

quoted. See the Sforno on Devarim 10:17 where he states that sin is only removed via repentance. This means that another person cannot affect your soul, in life or death, and you need to do teshuva yourself to improve your soul. Therefore, after death, the person's chance for teshuva has ended. His soul is now fixed in the level of perfection reached during his limited years. Kaddish is recited for the relatives' own perfection, not for the deceased. I once heard an explanation, which makes sense to me: At a time of grieving, one may feel sentiments that G-d is not just. Kaddish addresses this. One is mindful through Kaddish to praise G-d's "great name." Man is thereby focusing on the greatness of G-d, and removes his personal feelings of loss from diminishing his appreciation for the Creator.

Reader II: Thank you for your quick reply. I am looking up the sources that I have access to, and I am asking around. If I come up with a different opinion with a solid source, I will let you know. Again, thank you for shaking up something I have never much thought about. □



SACRIFICE

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

There is a famous argument between Ramban and Maimonides on the purpose of sacrifice. Maimonides writes in his great work the Guide for the Perplexed (Book III, Chap. 46) that the purpose of sacrifice is to eradicate false notions that certain species of animals were deities. By sacrificing to G-d, the heathens' worshiped species, we counter the problem, as Maimonides writes:

"...In order to eradicate these false principles, the law commands us to offer sacrifices only of these three kinds: 'Ye shall bring your offering of cattle, of the herd and of the flock' (Lev. 1:2). Thus the very act which considered by the heathen as the greatest crime, is the means of approaching G-d, and obtaining His pardon for our sins. In this manner, evil principles, the diseases of the human soul, are cured by other principles which are diametrically opposite."

Ramban argues vehemently on Maimonides in the beginning of his commentary in the book of Leviticus (Lev. 1:9). There, Ramban lodges two salient arguments:

1) We see that sacrifice existed in the days of Adam's son Able, and

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in Noah's days when idolatry of this kind did not yet exist. Therefore Maimonides cannot be correct to suggest that sacrifice is to function to remove idolatrous notions.

2) Sacrifice is really viewed as an approach to G-d, as shown by Bilaam's offerings, not a neutralizing procedure. How can sacrifice be a negative, i.e., an agent countering idolatry, when it is described as a positive, "a pleasant fragrance".

These questions certainly require a response. But I wondered, is Ramban really suggesting that Maimonides was ignorant of the stories in every Torah, that of Able, and Noah and Bilaam? This possibility is absurd. So what exactly is Ramban saying when quoting the facts that these early individuals offered sacrifice?

We are forced to say that Maimonides knew very well that sacrifice existed prior to the command at Sinai. Perhaps then, Maimonides' reasoning is that the Sinaic command of sacrifice is that alone to which he refers which is to counter idolatry. But cases prior to the Sinaic command of sacrifice were not for the eradication of idolatry. But again, this answer is far too basic that someone like a Ramban would not consider. I am of the opinion that Ramban considered this answer, and yet, still lodged his arguments against Maimonides.

Perhaps Ramban held that even with the sacrificial command at Sinai, sacrifice can not be removed from its original form. This I believe to be the pivotal point between Ramban

and Maimonides.

Ramban held that although a new command and Torah system was given, nonetheless, if sacrifice had an inceptional structure, i.e., to approach G-d, it cannot deviate from this form. It may have incorporated additional purposes at Sinai, but it cannot be exclusively to eradicate idolatry as Maimonides holds. There is sound reasoning as to why Ramban takes this approach. When something comes into existence, its form at that moment is integral to its definition. Water was created in a moist state, and as such, it is inherently moist. Water without moisture is not water. Once dust was created inherently dry, this feature forms part of its very definition. So also, sacrifice at Adam's, Able's and Noah's time, emerged as man's own attempt to approach G-d. Since this is the very inception of the institution of sacrifice, sacrifice by nature is an approach to G-d, and cannot be viewed as lacking this property. Sacrifice without approach to G-d is no longer sacrifice, according to Ramban. Based on this reasoning, Ramban held that sacrifice could not be defined solely as that which eradicates idolatry. It must - by definition - include the inceptional property of an approach to G-d.

However, Maimonides was of the opinion that although sacrifice came into existence in this form, as Ramban says, nonetheless, Sinai has the ability to redefine its structure from the ground up, and completely undermine its original nature. But this addresses Ramban's

second argument alone, dealing with the structure of sacrifice. I believe his first argument to be dealing with the goal of sacrifice. There, Ramban is of the opinion that just as the structure cannot deviate, so also the goal of approaching G-d must be an inherent property of sacrifice. It is for this reason that Ramban gives two arguments, as each addresses an additional point of contention Ramban had with Maimonides' view.

According to Maimonides, Sinai had the ability to take an institution and completely redefine it. The new reality of "national commandments" given at Sinai are so overwhelmingly objective in their truth, so real, as they emanate from G-d as part of His Will, that commandments go so far as to define what truth is. The Sinaic Commandments redefined reality for the Jew. Sacrifice according to Maimonides for all halachik intents and purposes didn't exist prior to Sinai. Historically it did, but now as the Jews had new laws governing their lives, previously known activities were only similar in name, and nothing else. Sacrifice prior and subsequent to Sinai were as divergent in nature as are color and weight. This was clear to Maimonides, and he therefore had no qualms about explaining sacrifice as if it never existed before.

Ramban was of the opinion that although Sinai redefines our actions, it only adds the nature of 'command' to a preexisting institution of sacrifice, but it does not redefine its original nature. ■