

VAYIKRA - KORBAN OLAH IN THE SOUL

THE ELEVATED STATUS OF THE KORBAN OLAH

Parshas Vayikra discusses the *korbanos* (sacrifices). The first *korban* mentioned is the *korban olah*, the offering which was entirely burnt on the Altar.

The Sages explain several reasons why it was called “*olah*”. The simple meaning is because it was “*olah*” (elevated) since it was entirely burnt. It is also called *olah* because it was “*me’uleh*”, the most desired, of all the *korbanos*. It is also called *olah* because it was *ma’aleh*, it “elevated”, the Jewish people from *Gehinnom*.

The common denominator between all of these terms is that the word *olah* refers to *aliyah*, ascension. The *korban olah* ascends entirely onto the Altar. It is most elevated of all the *korbanos*, and it elevates *Am Yisrael*.

THE “KORBAN OLAH” IN PLACE, TIME & SOUL

In Hashem’s creation, everything exists on three planes – in *olam*/place, in *zman*/time, and in *nefesh*/soul.¹ There is therefore a *korban olah* in place, time, and soul.

1) Place: The *korban olah* is *olah l’maalah* - it “ascended to above”. The Sages state that the Torah was given over a period of forty days, by one who ascended to Heaven for forty days (Moshe Rabbeinu), just as it

takes forty days for a fetus to develop. “Hashem looked in the Torah and created the world” - the world itself comes from the Torah.

An infant is called “*olel*”, for it is always searching to attach itself to its source, its mother. Similarly, the world yearns to return its source, to the Torah which it comes from. The *olam*, the world, is a place that really desires *aliyah*/ascension to its source which is the Torah.

2) Time: The *korban olah* in “time” is the *alos hashachar*, the dawn, when the sun begins to rise. The day begins from an *aliyah*/ascension when the sun rises. It is not by chance that the sun rises each day. It is because the very design of Creation is *aliyah*, ascension. The Creation first is brought down to our own level, “Hashem looked into the Torah and created the world”, there is a Heaven and earth, and all of the Creation desires ascension to its source. Every day, at dawn, with the rising of the sun, the entire Creation ascends.

In addition, we also had three festivals in the year in which we had the *mitzvah* of *aliyah l’regel*, to ascend by foot, to *Yerushalayim*. This was an *aliyah*/ascension of time itself. For three times a year, the very “time” itself was uplifted and elevated.

3) Soul: The *korban olah* in terms

of the “soul” is depicted in a statement of one of the Sages, “I have seen those who ascend (*bnei aliyah*) and they are few.”² A *ben Aliyah* is one who grows and ascends in spirituality. They are people who reveal the nature of the Creation to ascend to its Source.

A *ben aliyah* is not merely a person who accepts resolutions upon themselves to have spiritual growth. That is merely the beginning of what it means to be a *ben aliyah*. The meaning of a *ben aliyah* is a person who wishes to return to their Source, just as the world and time desires to ascend back to its Source. Those who have revealed the deep nature of the soul, of wishing to ascend back to their Source are those who are called “*bnei aliyah*”.

ELEVATING ACTIONS, SPEECH & THOUGHTS

There is also more to understand about *aliyah*, ascension.

The Ramban explains that the *mitzvos* involving *korbanos* correspond to different functions of man. There are three general functions of man, from lowest to the highest use: action, speech, and thought.

The “action” aspect of *korbanos* is the act of offering the *korban* on the Altar. The “speech” aspect in *korbanos* is when reciting *viduy* (confession over sins) before offering the *korban*. The “thought” aspect of *korbanos* is rep-

¹ *Sefer Yetzirah III:1*

² *Bava Metzia 45a*

resented by the kidneys of the animal, for the *Gemara* says that “kidneys offer advice”, corresponding to thought. Thus, all aspects of man (action, speech and thought) need to undergo *aliyah*/ascension.

It was explained earlier how there is *aliyah* in the areas of world, time, and soul. With the *korbanos*, the concept of *aliyah* is manifested in the *korban olah*, as the Ramban explains (cited in earlier words of the Sages as well) that whatever was done to the *korban* is really what the person himself deserves, for the Torah says, אדם "כי יקריב מכם", which implies that the person himself is really the *korban*. Man contains the functions of action, speech, and thought, and the purpose of the *korban olah* is to elevate the actions, speech, and thought of a person [hence the *korban olah* ‘offers’ the entire spectrum of the person as a *korban*].

Similarly, the *Rishonim* explain that the word *korban* is from the world “*keiruv*”, “close”, for it draws a matter closer to its root, its source.

As it was explained, the root of all of the *korbanos* is the *korban olah*, which is most elevated from all the *korbanos*, and on a deeper note, which also raises all of the *korbanos* to a higher level.

ELEVATE THE THOUGHTS OF MAN

Where is the root of the *korban olah* in the Torah?

Avraham *Avinu* was told, “Take

now your son, your only son, whom you love, and elevate him as an offering.” The Torah uses the word “*olah*” here, and this is the first time in the Torah where the word “*olah*” appears. (Adam *HaRishon* also offered a *korban olah*). Avraham took Yitzchok as a *korban olah* for Hashem. This involved action, speech, and thought. It involved the action of preparing Yitzchok for the Altar. It also involved speech, similar to reciting *viduy*. It also involved thought. How do we see this?

[The *Gemara*³ says that according to Rava, the “*olah* comes as a gift”. Whereas a *chatas*-offering is for the purpose of atonement, the *olah*, which is brought after the *chatas*, comes as a “gift”.] However, the *Talmud Yerushalmi*⁴, as well as *Vayikra Rabbah*, both state that the *korban olah* comes in order to atone for “improper thoughts of the heart” (*hirhurei halev*). Hashem does not punish for sinful thoughts which did not lead to any action, (with the exception of thoughts to commit idol worship, which Hashem does punish for)⁵. Even so, the *korban olah* is brought in order to atone for *hirhurei halev*, for any sinful or improper thoughts. Why?

As explained earlier, the *korban olah* elevates actions, speech, and thoughts. Its unique quality to elevate is mainly with regards to its power to elevate the power of thought. It is called the most desired (*me’uleh*) of all the *korbanos* because it has this spe-

cial power to elevate thought. Since thought is the highest function of man, and the *korban olah* is the most elevated of all the *korbanos*, its main power is that it atones for improper thoughts.

How do we see this power of the *korban olah* to elevate thought, in the *korban olah* which was brought by Avraham *Avinu*?

The Sages said that the Satan tried to stop Avraham *Avinu* by telling him that if he offers Yitzchok as a *korban olah* to Hashem, his lineage will discontinue and all of that Hashem had promised him will be ruined. Avraham *Avinu* then said to Hashem, “I could have questioned Your words, but I did not question. Rather, I have gone to offer Yitzchok.” Thus, the “*korban olah*” which Avraham brought was for the explicit purpose of countering any *hirhurei halev* (improper thoughts). This is the depth of the power of the *korban olah* to elevate thought.

The simple level of the atonement of the *korban olah* is that after a person has had any *hirhurei halev* (improper thoughts), the *korban olah* comes in order to atone for these thoughts. This is the lower use of the *korban olah*. The higher use of the *korban olah*, which was Avraham *Avinu*’s offering of Yitzchok as a *korban olah*, was brought in order to prevent any *hirhurei halev* from taking root in the first place. The *olah* which Avraham *Avinu* brought was for the purpose of

³ Zevachim 7a

⁴ Yerushalmi Yoma

⁵ Kiddushin 40a

elevating his own thoughts, so that he wouldn't have questioned Hashem in his thoughts.

This is the depth behind the matter that the *korban olah* comes to atone for *hirburei halev*, for improper thoughts of the heart.

THE VILNA GAON'S EVIL INCLINATION

Rav Chaim Volozhiner said that he asked his teacher, the Vilna *Gaon*, what his evil inclination was like. Since the Sages state that "Whoever is greater than his friend, his inclination is greater"⁶, Rav Chaim Volozhiner wished to know what kind of evil inclination the Vilna *Gaon* had, in order to see how the Vilna *Gaon* had a greater evil inclination than others. The Vilna *Gaon* answered that he has an evil inclination to ask questions about much higher levels of comprehension that he hadn't attained yet.

Each person has his current spiritual level (*madreigah*) and the level that is above him. If a person wonders about the level above him, this is an example of *hirhur* – a subtler degree of an improper kind of thought. It is not within one's current grasp, and therefore it is improper for the person to think about it. Most people associate the term "*hirburei aveirah*", "sinful thoughts", with lewd kinds of thoughts. But that is only a baser level of *hirhur*. There are higher levels

of *hirhur*, which are also forbidden: When one wonders about levels of comprehension that are higher than his current level.

The *Gemara* says, "Do not involve yourself in secret matters [of the Torah]." A subtle form of *hirhur* is when one wishes to understand things that are beyond his current level of comprehension. This requires atonement through the *korban olah*. The *olah* comes to atone for any thoughts that are *me'uleh*, "above", the person's actual level. These kinds of thoughts are in the category of "sinful thoughts" which greater people struggle with.

ELEVATING OURSELVES TO A HIGHER LEVEL – IN OUR OWN TIMES

When the *korban olah* was brought and atoned for improper thoughts of the heart, it would elevate the person to higher spiritual levels which he hadn't been on before which were above his grasp.

By the lighting of the *Menorah*, the commandment was to light it so that "the flame shall rise on its own".⁷ This same concept is also the innermost depth of the *korban olah*. The *korbanos* were offered on the outer Altar, but on the inside of the *Beis HaMikdash*, there was the *Menorah*, *Shulchan* and the inner *Mizbeiach*. The flame of the *Menorah* would ascend, similar to the concept of the

korban olah which ascends above. The flame of the *Menorah* was meant "to rise on its own", and this is like the concept of "I have seen those who ascend (*b'nei aliyah*), and they are few". The *b'nei aliyah* are those who are always ascending higher [like a flame rising on its own]. They keep ascending higher, even after the atonement of the *korban olah* [like a flame rising on its own].

This is what is behind the first *korban* of the Torah, זאת תורת העולה – the *korban olah*. We do not have the actual *korbanos* in our times. All we have today is the recitation of the *korbanos*, of which it is said "All who recite [the *parshah* of] *olah*, it is as if he offered an *olah*". (One who studies the "*Toras Olah*", the *parshah* in the Torah about the *korban olah*, is considered to have brought it). When one studies about the *korban olah*, he can reach the "*Menorah*" [in the inner sense], which corresponds to the study of the holy Torah.

When one reaches true understanding in Torah, it is then that he reaches the "flame rises on its own". Of this it is said in a deep sense, "I have seen those who ascend" – those who merit the unending spiritual growth of a flame reminiscent of the *Menorah's*, which "rises on its own".

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⁶ *Succah* 52a

⁷ *Rashi*, *parshas Behaaloscha* (*Bamidbar* 8:2)

INSIGHTS ON SEDER, HAGADDAH & ELIAHU

1) The *Shelah HaKadosh* says that the *Seder* should be conducted with seriousness and with no idle chatter, and that if a person is careful with this, he merits many high levels, atonement for all sins, etc. How can a person fulfill this *Shelah HaKadosh* in a family setting where he needs to make a relaxed and light atmosphere by talking and laughing with them? Is this *avodah* of the *Shelah HaKadosh* only for rare individuals to practice?

ANSWER

Any words spoken to the family which create a pleasant atmosphere of enjoying Yom Tov are not in the category of idle chatter. Rather, such chatting is a *mitzvah*. It is just that “Where there is celebration, there should also be seriousness.”

QUESTION

2) What is the *Hagaddah*? Is it all a form of *tefillah*, or is it a way to tap into the holiness of the festival, or is it for the purpose of bringing out certain points in our soul? Or is it simply to tell over the miracles and to sing praises of Hashem, which is what it simply sounds like?

ANSWER

Each person connects to the

Hagaddah on his own level. The *Hagaddah* speaks to anyone on any level, and each person can connect to it from where he is and on his current level.

QUESTION

3) Since the “Baal Tzefon idol” represents the 50th level of *tumah* (spiritual defilement), and Internet is the 50th level of *tumah*, can we say that the Internet was hidden inside the “Baal Tzefon” idol? Was the technology for Internet contained in potential form inside the Baal Tzefon idol, and it is just that it wasn’t actually released onto the world until later?

ANSWER

Yes! It was there *b’koach*, in potential form, but not yet in the *poel* (active form).

QUESTION

4) Why does Eliyahu come between the third and fourth cups? Since Eliyahu heralds the Redemption and he represents the bridging point between this world and the next, shouldn’t he come after the fourth cup? Is it because the first 3 cups represent the world before the Geulah whereas the 4th cup represents the Geulah, thus Eliyahu comes between the 3rd and

4th cups because that represents the bridging point to the time of Geulah?

ANSWER

Eliyahu comes between the third and fourth cups because the first cup represents the letters *hey* and *yud* of Hashem’s Name of *havayah*, which did not become separated by the Creation, whereas the third and fourth cups represent the letters *vov* and *heh* in Hashem’s Name of *havayah*, which become separated in our Creation – and therefore Eliyahu, whose role is to bring peace, comes to make peace between the letter *vov* (which corresponds to *Zeir Anpin*, which contains the six *Sefiros* of *Chesed* until *Yesod*) and the letter *heh*, which corresponds to *Nukva* (the *sefirah* of *Malchus*).

QUESTION

5) When we pour the cup for Eliyahu, does Eliyahu actually visit the house by the Seder? Or are we pouring the cup [and standing up for him] only in his honor, but he doesn’t actually come?

ANSWER

It depends how meritorious (worthy) the leader of the house and family members are.

QUESTION

6) Does Eliyahu come to a house where there is Internet?

ANSWER

No.

QUESTION

7) The *Sefas Emes* says that unlike in the first *Geulah* (from

Egypt) where four-fifths of the Jewish people died out in the plague of darkness and didn't go out from Egypt, the final *Geulah* will be a complete redemption, where every single Jew will go out. Why then did the Rav say that those who are connected to the 50th level of *tumah* won't be *zocheh* to *Geulah*, *chas v'shalom*.

ANSWER

The *Sefas Emes* wrote those words because that was the level of his generation [where the entire generation was worthy]. *Halevay* (certainly it is our hope that everyone will be *zocheh* to *Geulah*) that this should happen, and *Amen*, may that become Hashem's will.

CHOL HAMOED TRIPS

QUESTION

On Chol HaMoed, many people go to parks and supermarkets, amusement parks, zoos, trips, hikes, etc. Is there anything wrong with having a little of this? Should we send our children to go to these places so that they shouldn't feel bored and thereby enjoy the Yom Tov? Or should we withhold chil-

dren from all of this, because it can cause them to go to places that are inappropriate?

ANSWER

One should find the most refined kind of place possible in this generation to go to, relatively speaking, in order to calm their [children's] souls. At the same time, one also needs

to gradually educate their children to live a life of an inner world: to get the child accustomed to searching for an inner kind of life. A child should be trained to always examine each thing he/she encounters, by breaking up a matter into details and seeing the different factors involved in everything.

WHAT TO SAY AT THE SEDER

QUESTION

Regarding the Pesach seder, in a family that includes boys and girls of all different ages, is it better to focus on conveying the simple meaning of the Hagaddah, relaying parables and stories, which would disappoint the older children [because the older children won't enjoy this]? Or, is it better to focus on more intellectual-type insights of the Hagaddah, which the younger children

won't understand?

ANSWER

One needs to run the Seder with wisdom, and to be attentive at all times to the level of concentration [of the family]. Accordingly, one can then decide what kinds of insights can be relayed.] (Editor's Note: The Rav once delivered shiurim in Argentina, where he gave about 20 shiurim in different communities, of all different types.

Some communities requested of the Rav to give in-depth shiurim, whereas other communities wanted the Rav to say a story and then deliver lessons from it. One Friday morning there, the Rav was invited to give a shiur on that week's parsha. The Rav prepared the shiur, but when he began to deliver the shiur, he saw that the crowd wanted a more interactive, give-and-take kind of experience, rather than listening to a lecture, and that it wouldn't

be possible to give a derasha which required concentration and listening. Immediately the Rav changed the derasha to a give-and-take discussion on

the parshah. In the course of delivering the derasha, the Rav pointed out several in-depth insights that sparked interest in the crowd, and the crowd be-

came very involved, animatedly responding to the Rav's words. The crowd did not realize that the Rav had quickly 'changed gears' for them(.

AFIKOMAN

QUESTION

Is the custom of "stealing the afikoman" a contradiction to the spiritual lessons of the night of the Seder? Is it possible to forego this custom somewhat? Or, to the contrary, is this a custom that only creates a positive experience at the Seder which can bring the family closer to fulfilling the mitzvos

[of the Pesach Seder] with greater joy?

ANSWER

The custom should not be foregone. However, one should find a positive point in this custom which he can focus on [for the family] and emphasize at the Seder. For example, one can explain to the family that

taking the afikoman is a parable of how we need to search in our own "hidden places" [to do soul-searching]. This is actually the deeper intent of the ceremony of "Tzafon" at the Sefer, which, on a deep level, is about the "light which is hidden for the tzaddikim in the future" [the ohr hatzafun, the "hidden light."]

QUESTION

Many parents are exhausted by the time they come to the seder on Pesach night, after having worked so hard to prepare the seder. Many people have a hard time physically with the night of the seder and sometimes people feel emotionally drained about the whole thing. What

is the advice for how to come to the Pesach seder relaxed and happy?

ANSWER

1) One needs to go through the days preceding Pesach amidst an inner awareness [Ed: that these are days of preparation for Pesach, as opposed to just tak-

ing care of chores].[1] 2) One needs to get chores done, then take a break, and then return to the chore at hand, repeating the cycle. One needs to take breaks so that he can get back his yishuv hadaas (settled mind). 3) One needs to infuse inner meaning into the external, physical actions. [1] Editor's Note: Refer to Pesach Talks

ABUNDANCE OF KOSHER L'PESACH PRODUCTS

QUESTION

Today there are hundreds and thousands of products that fill the kosher supermarkets which are labeled as "Kosher for Pe-

sach", listed as mehadrin (the strictest standards of kashrus). What should be the inner attitude towards this? Are we supposed to be bringing all of these products into our homes

so that the family can have more simchah (for, as the Rambam says, that one gladdens his children on Yom Tov by giving them candies, nuts, and sweets)? Or, are we supposed

to cling to the custom of the previous generations, by not bringing in anything from the outside into our homes [as in the dictum, “Chadash (in this context, ‘new items’) is prohibited by the Torah?”]

QUESTION

Many parents are unable to cope with the tasks of Erev Pesach, when cleaning for Pesach is in full swing. Little children run around “between their parents’ feet” and don’t pay atten-

QUESTION

I don’t understand the Rav’s style in sefer Bilvavi Mishkan Evneh teaches that we need to develop our emunah in a question-and-answer format by asking ourselves questions how the world got created and then clarifying that Hashem created it, etc. This sounds like an intellectual and philosophi-

QUESTION

I one time had an experience during hisbodedus when I was davening, where I felt the ohr EinSof, the infinite light. I didn’t consciously try to get there, it happened unexpectedly. Only later when I learned

ANSWER

It is proper to live as close as possible to the way that the previous generations lived. At the same time, one also needs to act according to his current

KIDS DURING CLEANING

tion to what is going on. How can we deal with this?

ANSWER

During all these days, a special day must be allocated for proper activity with one’s children.

BILVAVI-STYLE EMUNAH

cal approach towards emunah, which is very different from the emunah I was taught as a child, which is that we need to simply believe that Hashem is here, there, everywhere and without clarifying how this is true and without getting into questions.

ANSWER:

It is like when we say the ques-

RETURNING TO A HIGHER EXPERIENCE

some sefarim did I realize what I experienced. How can I return to such an experience?

ANSWER:

It is similar to the night of Pesach, which is a high level that we experience and the day

madreigah (spiritual level), and he must also take into account the madreigah that his family is on, and to cater to their personalities.

In addition, each day should have a certain amount of time, in the midst of cleaning, allocated solely to the children. This “rest period” is not only for the children but also for the parents themselves.

tions of the Mah Nishtanah by the Pesach seder, which is in question-and-answer format. We are not asking the questions because we are honestly questioning it and looking for an answer [rather, we already know the answer and we are just clarifying it to ourselves so that our knowledge can internalize.]

after it is gone, and we need 49 days afterwards of purifying our middos in order to return to it, so that we will be able to live with it correctly.

QUESTION

In Bilvavi Part 2 (Chapter 28) the Rav talks about the concept of *temimus* (simplicity), that a person who is a *tamim* (whole-hearted believer in Hashem) doesn't ask questions on Hashem, and instead accepts how everything is from Hashem. The Rav also explains there that even a *tamim* (or *tam*) asks questions, because otherwise he would just be like the child who doesn't know how to ask (like we say in the *Hagaddah*), and it is just that the person who is a *tamim* doesn't ask questions, even though he knows how to ask, and this is because he is a *tamim* towards Hashem. I don't really understand this. In the *Hagaddah* it says that a *tam* does have a question, and the *tam's* question is: "*Mah Zeh*", "What is this?" So the *tam* certainly does ask questions. Can the Rav please explain to me more about this?

THE SIMPLE SON'S NOT-SO-SIMPLE

ANSWER

The *tam* doesn't ask "Why" or "What's the reason?" Rather, the *tam* asks "What's going on over here, so I can know what I'm doing?" That is the *tam's* question of *Mah Zeh*, "What is this?" He is only asking "What", he wants to know the entire process from A-Z so that he can know how to act properly and in the best way possible [For example, when a child becomes *Bar Mitzvah* and he is learning how to put on Tefillin, he asks what to do and how to put it on. He is asking these questions only because he wants to know how to fulfill the *mitzvah*].

There is also a deeper understanding: There is a *tam* who is one of the four children in the *Hagaddah*, who asks "What is this?", and he is the third son listed [which shows that he is on a lower level than the wise son and even lower than the wicked son]. But there is also a kind of *tam* who is on a high-

er level than all of these, and he is the kind of *tam* which means *shaleim*, whole. This is a higher level of a *tam* and he doesn't have any questions at all. Instead, he is simply drawn towards his root.

So there are two levels of a *tam*. There is a *tam* that we mention in the *Hagaddah* on the night of Pesach, where we discuss questions and answers, and there is also a higher-level *tam*, who is on the level of *Toras Hashem Temimah*, "the Torah of Hashem is wholesome" (and a hint to this is that the letters of the word *tam* are also an acronym for "*Matan Torah*", the giving of the Torah). However, this higher level of *tam* disappeared after the breaking of the first set of *Luchos*. After the *Luchos* were broken, we are now on the level of asking questions for the sake of getting answers, and this is the level that is reflected when we learn *Shas*, where we involve ourselves with questions and answers.

