

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת שמיני

ואל בני ישראל תדבר לאמר קחו שעיר עזים לחטאת ועגל וכבש בני שנה תמימים לעלה
“And to the Children of Israel speak as follows: Take a he-goat for a sin-offering, and a calf and a sheep in their first year - unblemished - for a burnt-offering” (9:3)

The Toras Kohanim asks: Why did the nation as a whole need to offer more sacrifices than Aharon? Why did they have to bring a goat and Aharon did not? In order to answer this question, we must first understand the reason for the goat sacrifice. Chazal explain that since Yosef's brothers slaughtered a goat after selling him and dipped his coat in it in order to fake his death, the people were to bring a goat as a sacrifice to atone for the sale of Yosef. The question is why was there a need to atone for the sale of Yosef at the time of the inauguration of the Mishkan? The Meshech Chochma answers that the brothers were upset that Yosef was telling stories about them to their father. They felt that he deserved to be sold because he did not approach them directly. Had he done so, they would have accepted his rebuke. This was the brothers' claim of innocence. However, at the time of the Golden Calf, Chur tried to rebuke the people and convince them not to follow through with their evil plans. Even though he had rebuked them directly, they killed him. This retroactively showed that the brothers' claim of innocence in their sale of Yosef was not justified at all because their descendants had received direct rebuke and still killed the person who said it. Now they needed to seek atonement for the sale of Yosef once again.

ויאמר משה אל אהרן קרב אל המזבח ועשה את חטאתך ואת עלתך וכפר בעדך ובעד העם ועשה את קרבן העם וכפר בעדם כאשר צוה ה' את משה
“Moshe said to Aharon: Come near to the altar and perform the service of your sin-offering and your burnt-offering and provide atonement for yourself and for the people; then perform the service of the people's offering and provide atonement for them, as Hashem has commanded” (9:7)

The Daas Zekainim writes that as Aharon approached the altar, the Satan caused him to see the altar as a calf to remind him of the sin that he had committed. When Aharon was reminded of his sin, he became hesitant. This is why Moshe had to encourage him to continue and to bring the sacrifices. The Satan makes things appear to us in a distorted fashion. We have to be ready for him and not allow ourselves to be fooled. The Mincha Belula writes that the yetzer hara exploits that which is on a person's mind. Things appear to us based on what our thoughts are occupied with. Our perspective of the world around us reflects our mindset. Aharon followed the dictum of the posuk in Tehillim: "My sin is always before me" (51:5). He always had the Golden Calf on his mind and it weighed heavily on him. This is why he saw his sin reflected in the altar. A person should not forget the sins that he did in the past and let bygones be bygones. He should remember them, regret them and repent for them.

ויאמר משה אל אהרן הוא אשר דבר ה' לאמר בקרבי אקדש ועל פני כל העם אכבד וידם אהרן
“Moshe said to Aharon: Of this did Hashem speak, saying: I will be sanctified through those who are nearest Me, thus will I be honored before the entire people; and Aharon kept silent” (10:3)

There is a puzzling Midrash on this posuk which asks: "What is so special about Aharon

remaining silent? What could Aharon have said? He could have said the posuk, 'On the eighth day, he shall circumcise the flesh of his foreskin (13:3).'" What is this Midrash saying? The sefer Yeshuos Malko explains that a person created uncircumcised so that an action is necessitated in order to perfect the body. This action symbolizes that just as we have to actively do something in order to perfect our physical selves, we also need to work to perfect ourselves spiritually. This ability to work and accomplish is the essence of a human being. This was the attitude of Nadav and Avihu on the day of the dedication of the Mishkan. They saw that there were miracles happening but they felt that they needed to do something on their own because man's task is to be proactive in this world. However, this was a special day when the Divine Presence was revealed and it was not the right time and place for the personal intervention of men to bring their own fire. Aharon could have protested their deaths by pointing out the concept of circumcision and how man is meant to strive to serve Hashem. However, he chose to remain quiet and did not try to defend the reasoning of Nadav and Avihu. This is what was so significant about Aharon's silence

כי אני ה' אלקיכם והתקדשתם והייתם קדשים כי קדוש אני ולא תטמאו את נפשתיכם בכל השרץ הרמש על הארץ

"For I am Hashem your G-d - you shall sanctify yourselves and you shall be holy, for I am holy; and you shall not contaminate yourselves through any crawling thing that creeps on the ground" (11:44)

Why does the posuk use the seemingly redundant wording of "you shall sanctify yourselves and you shall be holy?" The Torah Temimah quotes Yoma 39b that if a person sanctifies himself a little bit, Hashem assists him that he can grow a lot. This is related to the idea that one mitzvah leads to another mitzvah. A person has to be the one to take that first step on his own if he wants to grow. Hashem says that if a person make that initial attempt to become holy, he will become holy, because he will receive special providential assistance. The opposite is also true, as we see from the end of the previous posuk, which also uses a repetitive language and says "do not become impure from them and become impure." This means that if a person chooses to start down the wrong path, Hashem will not stop him. This is related to the concept of a sin leading to another sin. The Midrash Tehillim comments on the posuk "Hashem is your shadow on your right hand" (Tehillim 121:5) that Hashem acts toward a person like a shadow. Just as a shadow mirrors the moves of the person, Hashem acts toward us the way in which we act and he leads us in the way that we move. Hashem's influence on us will follow the direction in which we lead it just as a person's shadow follows every move he makes.

Parshas Parah

Why does the Torah contain so many laws regarding contact with a dead body? A corpse represents an inability to accomplish. When a person is alive, he can work and achieve. He has the ability to perfect himself physically and spiritually. When a person dies, he can no longer do these things. When a living person comes into contact with a corpse, he can be affected by the inactivity that the corpse stands for. After touching a dead body, one must go to great lengths to rid himself of these feelings. We should appreciate life. When we are alive, we should make the most of it. Wicked people are referred to as dead even when they are physically alive because they are not using their lives productively. We should strive to be truly alive in the full sense of the word and make the most out of every moment in this world.

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