

Relating to animal sacrifice in modern times is difficult. Yet, this week, we begin *sefer Vayikra*, a large portion of which discusses *korbanot*. Since we believe that Torah speaks to us in every generation, we must attempt to find some meaning within this week's *parsha*, as well as *sefer Vayikra*, that speaks to us in the twenty-first century.

Let's look at the second *pasuk* of this week's *parsha*: "Speak to the Israelites, and tell them the following: When one of you brings an offering to God, the sacrifice must be taken from mammals - cattle, sheep or goats." Later on in the *parsha*, we learn that bird and meal sacrifices can be brought as well. In order to eliminate this contradiction, tradition teaches us that the phrase "from mammals" is reinterpreted to qualify the first clause ("When one of you brings a mammal offering..") rather than limiting the class to only mammals. However, the simple translation, which is supported by the *trup*, is that sacrifices must be brought from *bakar* (cattle) or *tzon* (sheep and goats.)

When we look at the use of *tzon* and *bakar* elsewhere in the Torah, we see that livestock was the primary measure of wealth in biblical times. When our forefathers are described as wealthy, *tzon* and *bakar* are listed first, then other property such as gold, silver, servants, etc. (see, for example, *Bereshit* 24:35 and 30:43.) Stated another way, the descriptions usually go something like this: "He was very wealthy - he had a lot of livestock, and, oh, by the way, he also had gold, silver, servants, etc."

Synthesizing these two ideas, we see that one purpose of bringing a sacrifice was to take something of extreme value and to give it up entirely to *Hashem* in order to serve a higher purpose. Through this activity, one was able to bring oneself closer to *Hashem*. (The root of *korban* is "*kuf resh vet*" which has a connotation of closeness.) For someone poor, who was unable to afford a livestock offering, a bird offering was an alternative – after all, to someone poor, who might not even know where their next meal is coming from, a bird represents an entire meal, and thus is of extreme value to that poor individual.

In *gemara Masechet Taanit* 27b, we learn that our sages of blessed memory instituted *tefilah* as a replacement for *korbanot* once the Second Temple was destroyed. I suggest that *tefilah* as a replacement for *korbanot* makes perfect sense, especially in the context of life in the twenty-first century.

Some time ago, I was sanding a floor, and went to Berman's Hardware in Highland Park (long since closed) to rent a floor sander. While renting the sander, I discussed do-it-yourself home improvement with one of the proprietors. Something he said has stayed with me to this day: "Sometimes it makes sense to pay someone else to do the work for you - after all, you can always make more money, and you can never make more time." In this age of financially strapped

two-income families, we find that time, rather than money, is our most precious commodity. *Hashem* asks us to set aside this precious commodity, time, for Him on a daily basis to bring ourselves closer to Him.

There is a principle that one is not allowed to derive personal benefit from *hekdesh*. The act of deriving benefit from *hekdesh* is called "*me'ilah*" (misappropriation.) The punishment for intentional *me'ilah* is very severe - in *Sanhedrin* 83a, *Rabanan* hold that one is liable for *malkot* (lashes) and *Rebbi* holds that one is liable for *mitah biyedei shamayim* (death at G-d's hand.)

As we look at *tefilah* as willingly giving up our time to bring ourselves closer to *Hashem*, we can also look at talking or engaging in other activities in shul as a form of *me'ilah*. When we engage in an activity where the essence of that activity is to give up our time in the service of *Hashem*, it makes no sense to then sit in *shul* and ask our neighbor the doctor for medical advice or discuss the New York Yankees with our friends. The time we spend in *shul* has already been made *hekdesh* - it is G-d's time. How can we misappropriate that time for some other, personal, purpose?

This perspective on *tefilah* – that the essential part of *tefilah* is giving up our time – allows us to have a greater appreciation for those who make an effort to come to *shul*, even though they cannot even read Hebrew. Since they make an effort to attend *shul*, and give up their time to do so, the activity that they are engaged in by merely sitting quietly in *shul* is already on the same level as someone who is a fluent Hebrew reader and speaker.

May it be *Hashem's* will that by developing a greater sense of appreciation for all members of our community, and recognizing that all who come to shul – regardless of background, education, or affiliation – are engaged in the same essential activity, we will hasten the redemption.

*Shabbat Shalom*

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<i>hekdesh</i>	Something set aside for a higher/holy purpose
<i>korban(ot)</i>	Sacrificial offering(s)
<i>masechet</i>	Tractate
<i>parsha(t)</i>	Weekly Torah portion
<i>pasuk, pesukim</i>	Biblical verse (sentence)
<i>sefer</i>	The book of
<i>shul</i>	Synagogue (Yiddish)
<i>tefilah</i>	Prayer
<i>trop</i>	Cantillation marks