

The Transformation of the Sacrifice

This weeks reading is from Parashat Vayikra (*Vayikra / Leviticus 1:1-5:26*). Moshe begins in Leviticus detailing the sacrifices, how one is to bring the atoning sacrificed at the Tabernacle and for what reason. In *Vayikra / Leviticus 4 and 5*, Moshe makes a very important distinction between unintentional and intentional sin. It appears as if the sacrifice of atonement works only if sin is unintentional. This is a most significant statement because it demonstrates that the Lord God in heaven desires that we do not sin, and that we have the attitude that we will go through life not sinning, however, when one does find that he has violated one of the commands, he is to go before the Lord, with a repentant heart, and seek forgiveness. This week we learn about the Whole Burnt Offering (*Olah Korban, 1:1-17*), the Grain Offering (*Minchat Korban, 2:1-14*), the Peace Offering (*Shelamim Korban, 3:1-17*), the Sin Offering (*Khatat Korban, 4:1-35*), and the Guilt Offering (*Asham Korban, 5:1-26*).

This is the first Torah portion in the book of Leviticus (Vayikra, וַיִּקְרָא) whose name is derived from the first word in this book וַיִּקְרָא meaning “*And He called.*” The translation of the Hebrew word “*Vayikra*” (וַיִּקְרָא) to English “*Leviticus*” is by reason of the Greek translation and the name of the book as Λευϊτικόν (Leuitikón). The English translation is a transliteration of the Greek as a reference to the Levites, the tribe of Aaron, from whom the priests descended. The name of the book of Leviticus may be a reference specifically to the Levites, however the opening verses are addressed to all of God’s people (*1:2*, בְּדִבְרֵי אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם אָדָם, כִּי-יִקְרִיב מִכֶּם קָרְבָן לַיהוָה מִן-הַבְּהֵמָה מִן-הַבֶּקָר וּמִן-הַצֹּאן תִּקְרִיבוּ אֶת-קָרְבַּנְכֶם: even though some passages do address the priests specifically (*6:8*). Most of Leviticus (*chapters 1–7, 11–27*) consist of the Lord speaking to Moshe who is then commanded to repeat to all Israel what he said. In *Vayikra / Leviticus*, the Lord instructs Israel and the priesthood on how to make offerings in the Tabernacle and how to conduct themselves while encamped around the Tabernacle.

This week we will discuss *Vayikra / Leviticus 4:1-6* and the concept of “*unintentional sin.*”

ספר ויקרא פרק ד *Vayikra / Leviticus 4:1-6*

א וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה
לֵאמֹר: ב דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
לֵאמֹר נָפֶשׁ כִּי-תַחַטָּא
בְּשִׁגְגָה מִכָּל מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר
לֹא תַעֲשִׂינָהּ וְעָשָׂה מֵאֲחַת
מֵהֵנָּה: ג אִם הִכְהִין הַמְּשִׁיחַ
יַחַטָּא לְאַשְׁמַת הָעָם וְהִקְרִיב
עַל חַטָּאתוֹ אֲשֶׁר חָטָא פֶּר-בֶּן-
בָּקָר תָּמִים לַיהוָה לְחַטָּאת:
ד וְהִבִּיא אֶת-הַפֶּר אֶל-
פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לִפְנֵי יְהוָה
וְסָמַךְ אֶת-יָדוֹ עַל-רֹאשׁ הַפֶּר
וְשָׁחַט אֶת-הַפֶּר לִפְנֵי יְהוָה: ה
וְלָקַח הַכֹּהֵן הַמְּשִׁיחַ מִדָּם הַפֶּר
וְהִבִּיא אֹתוֹ אֶל-אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד: ו
וְטָבַל הַכֹּהֵן אֶת-אֶצְבָּעוֹ בְּדָם
וְהִזָּה מִן-הַדָּם שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים
לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֶת-פְּנֵי פֶרֶךְ
הַקֹּדֶשׁ:

4:1 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 4:2 'Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'If a person sins unintentionally in any of the things which the Lord has commanded not to be done, and commits any of them, 4:3 if the anointed priest sins so as to bring guilt on the people, then let him offer to the Lord a bull without defect as a sin offering for the sin he has committed. 4:4 'He shall bring the bull to the doorway of the tent of meeting before the Lord, and he shall lay his hand on the head of the bull and slay the bull before the Lord. 4:5 'Then the anointed priest is to take some of the blood of the bull and bring it to the tent of meeting, 4:6 and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle some of the blood seven times before the Lord, in front of the veil of the sanctuary (NASB).

In *Vayikra / Leviticus 4:1-6*, we read the Lord speaking to Moshe saying, ב דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר נָפֶשׁ כִּי-תַחַטָּא בְּשִׁגְגָה מִכָּל מִצְוֹת יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא: *4:2 'Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'If a person sins unintentionally in any of the things which the Lord has commanded not to be done, and commits any of them, (NASB)* Note how the MT states “*say to each soul*” (לֵאמֹר נָפֶשׁ) indicating on an individual basis, if one commits an שִׁגְגָה inadvertent sin (תַּחַטָּא) meaning that the sin he committed was not known to him. Then he is to bring an offering before the Lord for his sin. The Rabbis divide the Torah maybe into a composition of positive and negative commands. On this basis, Judaism has the following approach to understanding inadvertent sin.

Shney Luchot HaBrit, Vayikra, Torah Ohr 50

The Rekanati (page 111) on Leviticus 4:2 דבר אל בני ישראל כי תחטא בשגגה מכל מצות ה' אשר לא תעשינה, "Speak to the Children of Israel; if a person commits an unintentional sin involving any of the negative commandments, etc.," comments that we must realize that anyone committing a transgression of any of G'd's commandments is called a sinner; חוטא, to the extent that the particular commandment depended on him to fulfill it. Since negative commandments fall under the heading of שמירה, have to be observed by not violating them, a transgressor has to bring a sacrifice to atone for his sin in a manner appropriate to the nature of his error. It is fitting therefore that the animal chosen for such a sin offering be a female sheep or a female goat. [The sinner should have remained passive like a female, whereas he actively violated the commandment. Ed.]

The first thing Shney Luchot HaBrit establishes in the commentary is when one violates a negative command, one needs to realize that he is a sinner. The negative command is a reference to something that is meant to be fulfilled where the rabbis say this refers to something that is to be observed (שמירה). Notice the connection to “fulfill” and “observing,” “obeying,” and “keeping” found within the word Shomer (שומר). This does shed some light on Yeshua’s words in *Matthew 5:17*. The Rabbis comment on the type of sacrifice (male/female) is then related to the nature of the one who committed the sin, the one who actively violates the command should bring a passive sacrifice because the sin was committed in a passive way (unintentionally).

Rashi on Leviticus 4:2, Part 1

מכל מצות ה' [IF A SOUL SIN IN ERROR] AGAINST ANY OF THE COMMANDMENTS OF THE LORD — Our Rabins explained (Sifra; Shabbat 69a) that a sin-offering (of which this chapter speaks) is brought only for such a thing the willful committal of which is forbidden by לאו

(a negative command) and is subject to the penalty of excision).

Rashi comments on the soul that sins in error, and that the soul that sins is a reference to the willful committal of sin where the one who is willful in his actions is responsible for the penalty of the disobedience. Note that whether one intentionally or unintentionally sins, he is wilfully committing the sin. This supports our interpretation on Parashat Vayikra, that of the differences between knowingly and unknowingly sinning, that a sacrifice was brought for unintentional sin and there is no sacrifice for intentional sin. (see *Hebrews 10:26*)

Rashbam on Leviticus 4:2, Part 1

אשר לא תעשינה, all the negative commandments violation of which carries the karet penalty when the violation was deliberate. There are only two positive commandments for which there is a karet penalty, where for the mere deliberate omission of performing the commandment the penalty is equal to corresponding negative commandments. They are Pessach, failing to bring or participate in eating of that offering at the right time, and failure to circumcise oneself if this rite has not been performed on one as a baby.

Rashbam says that all the negative commands carry a penalty. There are two positive commands that also carry a penalty, (i) failing to participate in Pesach festival, and (ii) failing to circumcise oneself if this had not been done as a baby. Note that the Torah also commands each person, male and female to circumcise his or her heart. The circumcision of the heart is a Torah reference to being humble before the Lord and to obeying God's commands.

Daat Zkenim on Numbers 15:27, Part 1

אם נפש אחת תחטא בשגגה, "if a person (soul) will commit a sin through an error, etc;" the author draws the reader's attention to the fact that on Leviticus 4:2 he had already explained that the effect on the soul of a person committing a sin through error, i.e. psychological effect is more

profound than the effect on his body. This is why the Torah used the term נפש, “soul,” rather than איש or אדם which we might have expected.

Daat Zkenim states that the one who commits an unintentional sin does so to the detriment of his soul having a psychological effect, which is said to have a more profound effect upon the person than upon his body. This observation by the rabbis is true, because sin has the potential to become habitual in nature. If a sin becomes habitual, it is very difficult to break requiring drastic action, both on the part of the sinner, and on the part of the Lord helping to overcome the sin, to repent, and to turn from the sin. The rabbis say that the Hebrew text explains this saying *“This is why the Torah used the term נפש, “soul,” rather than איש or אדם which we might have expected.”*

The rabbis help us to understand the importance and significance of the sacrifices. In Midrash Rabbah Shemot, Parashat 51, Part 4, the rabbis discuss the meaning of *“the Tabernacle of the Testimony.”* They say the Tabernacle of the Testimony is a reference that the Torah is the testimony of God to all the world. The testimony of God reveals to us that there is salvation in Israel. The Lord’s response to the question on the meaning of the Testimony is, *“As you live, I will cause My Shechinah to dwell in their midst, for it says, And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them (Shemot / Exodus 25:8).”* The *“Tabernacle of the Testimony”* describes the *“dwelling place of the Testimony of God.”* If we consider these words for a moment, from the perspective of the Apostolic Writings (NT), keeping His word hidden in our hearts, abiding in the Word and in Yeshua the Messiah, we have a Torah based understanding that the Lord, His glory, will dwell in our midst, similar to what we find occurring in the book of Leviticus. The Testimony of the Tabernacle, according to the rabbis in Midrash Rabbah, is paralleled to all the world (all of creation) knowing of the forgiveness that God has given to Israel. The idea of forgiveness and salvation being found in Israel is a very significant concept. This is the heart of Simchat Torah, the joy of the Torah, in Parashat Vayikra. The Lord our God loved us so much, that He provided a way for the Salvation of Israel!

One of the ways God reveals His love for us in the Hebrew Scriptures, is how He works in our lives to confirm the covenant (the Salvation) that

He has made. In Parashat Ekev, *Devarim / Deuteronomy 8:18* the Scriptures say the Lord enables us to live and work so that He can establish and confirm His covenant in us.

Devarim / Deuteronomy 8:11-18

8:11 'Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today; 8:12 otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, 8:13 and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, 8:14 then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. 8:15 'He led you through the great and terrible wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water; He brought water for you out of the rock of flint. 8:16 'In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end. 8:17 'Otherwise, you may say in your heart, 'My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.' 8:18 'But you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. (NASB)

Devarim / Deuteronomy 8:18 translates literally to say, “You remember the covenant of the Lord Your God, He is giving you the ability/power to make wealth, for the purpose of rising up His covenant which he swore to your fathers, this day.” The Lord God preserves us by giving us the power to live and to earn a living. The our Father in heaven gives us the power to overcome sin in our lives. Is this not one of the greatest messages in the Scriptures that should encourage us to live in a manner worthy of our calling that brings glory to His name? This message goes even deeper while studying the book of Revelation which says, *12:11* says καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐνίκησαν αὐτὸν διὰ τὸ αἷμα τοῦ ἀρνίου καὶ διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς

μαρτυρίας αὐτῶν, καὶ οὐκ ἠγάπησαν τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτῶν ἄχρι θανάτου. (יהם :למות :נצחהו למען דם השה ולמען דבר עדותם ולא אהבו את נפשם עד למות: *12:11 And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death. (NASB)* John says that they, the people of God, overcame the deceiver (the dragon, HaSatan) by the “*blood of the lamb*” (αἷμα τοῦ ἁγνίου, למען דם השה) by the way of the covenant that God has made. In addition to this, they also overcome by the “*word of their testimony*” (διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς μαρτυρίας, ולמען דבר עדותם). The phrase “*Word of their Testimony,*” is filled with rabbinic and Torah based principles. We are called to bear the testimony of God. When we give our testimony before men, we speak of how the Lord has worked in our lives, He has changed and transformed our hearts, the way we think, what we do, and how we interact with others. We speak of how the Lord has helped us to walk in righteousness, holiness, truth, and justice according to His Word. The Lord God Almighty is working in our lives! The “*Word of their Testimony*” reveals the power of God that gives each of us the ability to live for Him. He gives us the ability to work for the very purpose of “*Establishing His covenant*” (למען הקים את-בריתו) as it says in Parashat Ekev. So when the Scriptures say “*they overcome by the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony,*” based upon the Torah text from *Devarim / Deuteronomy 8:18*, we literally overcome with God’s help. This is similar to what the psalm states, *89:21 With whom My hand will be established; My arm also will strengthen him. (NASB)* “*With whom My hand will be established;*” this seems to be a way of saying that such is the man who has set the Lord God in heaven as His Rock, and is the One in whom he trusts. This is a promise of God’s gracious presence in the life of the one who has placed his faith in the Messiah Yeshua, and who seeks to walk in the Father’s ways. “*My arm also will strengthen him,*” is a statement of the Lord working in the life of the believer, His support and holding him up by His power and grace. The Targum states, *89:22 Whom my hands are ready to help; truly my arm will strengthen him. (EMC)* saying the hand of the Lord will help which is confirmed by saying His hand will strengthen him.

The Torah and all of Scripture, teaches us about the physical and spiri-

tual aspects of our lives. The example taken from Parashat Vayikra, we read **א וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: ב דַּבֵּר אֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר נֹפֵשׁ כִּי-תִחַטָּא 4:1** *Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 4:2 'Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'If a person sins unintentionally in any of the things which the Lord has commanded not to be done, and commits any of them, (NASB)* If one sins, according to the covenant, he is to bring a sacrifice. The efficacy of this action is something that requires faith, repentance, and obedience. On a spiritual level, one receives the forgiveness of sins. But it isn't simply a matter of bringing a sacrifice, one must have a repentant heart, and seek the Lord for the forgiveness of sin. The Torah principle at work here is the manner in which one is seeking the Lord for forgiveness, the sacrifices, and turning from sin (Teshuvah, repentance). These concepts are emphasized in the rabbinic concept put forward in *Midrash Tehillim 50, Part 2* (מדרש ב תהלים פרק נ סימן ב). *Midrash Tehillim 50, Part 2* opens saying, *"I do not reprove you for your sacrifices (Tehillim / Psalms 50:8)."* The homiletic introduction to the Midrash states, *"Rabbi Nakhman taught in the name of Rabbi Berechiah, If a man intends to do a righteous act, the Holy One blessed be He, writes it down before Him, as if already done, for the verse goes on to say your rising thoughts are continuously before Me."* Rabbi Nakhman says that he learned from Rabbi Berechiah that if a man has the *"intention"* to perform a righteous act, the Lord writes it down as if he had already performed the act. According to this interpretation, the rabbis suggest that the spiritual supersedes the physical. This sort of interpretation is not restricted to *Tehillim / Psalms 50*, we also know that rabbi Yochanan Ben Zachai, taught the idea that *"G'millut KhaSadim"* (*deeds of loving kindness*) may substitute for the blood atonement. The rabbinic teaching is that when one reads the commandments in the Torah regarding atonement, if a man reads with the correct intention, it is as if he has performed them. For example, the Lord says the following in the Tanach:

Hosea 6:6 *For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.*(KJV) **ו כִּי חֶסֶד חָפְצָתִי וְלֹא-זָבַח וְדַעַת אֱלֹהִים מַעֲלֹת:**

Hosea 14:2 *Take with you words, and turn to the LORD:*

say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips. (KJV) ג
קָחוּ עִמָּכֶם דְּבָרִים וְשׁוּבוּ אֶל־יְהוָה אִמְרוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ כָּל־תְּשׁוּאָה עָוֹן וְקָח־
טוֹב וְנִשְׁלָמָה פְּרִים שְׂפִתֵינוּ:

In the Hebrew Bible, sacrifice always involves transformation and the most common way to transform something as a “*sacrifice*” is to destroy it. Similarly in the person who is bringing the Sacrifice, he is transformed too, in repentance he turns from his sin and walks in the way of God. The Scriptures tell us when the Lord received a sacrifice the smoke of the burning was a “*pleasing aroma*” (*Vayikra / Leviticus 1:13*). By the smoke of the transformed sacrifice, the Lord God enjoyed a fellowship meal with human beings. This the same may be said of our lives, in the transformation we become objects of praise unto the Lord (see *Romans 12:1-3*).

The major point that comes out of Parashat Vayikra is the idea that the Lord desires to dwell among His people (see *Parashat Bechukotai*). Vayikra / Leviticus details the importance of sin and impurity if one desires to go up to the Tabernacle to worship the Lord. In both the Tanach and the Apostolic Writings, it is said that we become unclean by the sin that is in our hearts (*Mark 7*). Simchat Torah, the Joy of Torah, is found in the knowledge that the Lord God, our Father in heaven, loves us to the extent that He has provided a means for the forgiveness of sins and provided a means for us to become clean on the inside. Within the Sacrificial system, we are given a picture of an intimacy that surpasses our understanding, God’s love motivates our love and trust in Him, which produces a deep connectedness that no one had seen before. And it is in Yeshua the Messiah that we have these things, the Lord Himself dwells within the Tabernacle of our bodies, by His Spirit. Halleluia!



