

Reflections of Redemption

Essays on the Weekly Torah Reading and Moshiach,
Based on the talks of the
Lubavitcher Rebbe,
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

Reprinted for Parshat Vayikra, 5785
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ben Horav **Yitzchok Elchonon Halevi** הי"ד
Shagalov

Passed away on 21 Tamuz, 5766

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by
Rabbi Dovid Yisroel Ber Kaufmann, Ph.D

Vayikra

WHAT WILL WE SACRIFICE?

There is an essential difference between mitzvos in general and the sacrifices: mitzvos emphasize the person fulfilling G-d's command; sacrifices emphasize the object through which G-d's Will is fulfilled. A mitzvah should be performed with hidur mitzvah, in the most beautiful manner possible. Even so, this cannot achieve atonement or a reconciliation after a transgression. Sacrifice and teshuvah, tzedekah and Redemption, go hand-in-hand.

The Book of *Leviticus* begins by defining what types of sacrifices should be brought and how they are to be offered. Since Moshiach will rebuild the Temple and restore the sacrificial service, obviously any discussion about the Temple or sacrifices deepens our understanding of what will be required of us and what life will be like in the era of Redemption. Such a discussion also helps us prepare for the coming of Moshiach. Needless to say, the sacrifices must be seen as having more than just historical or theoretical interest. Rather, the restoration of the Temple service is an imminent reality.

Still, it may be difficult to see the current relevance. Simply understanding the details and technical aspects of the sacrificial service is not sufficient. In order to recognize that, in a spiritual sense, the Temple exists even now, that we can bring actual sacrifices today, we must internalize the meaning, the inner truth of the sacrifices. This inner realization inevitably manifests itself externally: we must first see the Temple and sacrifices as real, albeit not yet revealed. In this way we work towards the full revelation, the materialization, of the Third *Beis HaMikdash*, the Third Temple.

That said, we can look at the significance of the fundamental difference between sacrifices and mitzvos. True, the various sacrifices are counted among the six hundred thirteen mitzvos. Nevertheless, the essential nature of sacrifice differs from the essential nature of mitzvos.

The difference lies in which each emphasizes. A mitzvah emphasizes the action of a person. The **person** fulfills G-d's command. The object with which the mitzvah is performed is only a tool, of no inherent interest or value. True, the thing itself may become invested with some holiness, but that is a byproduct. The person has only one intention – do what G-d asks. The “drawback” of a mitzvah, if we can speak this way, is that there is a **someone** who does the mitzvah. Although a mitzvah is an act of compliance with G-d's Will, there is still an individual, an ego performing the act.

On the other hand, by definition a sacrifice sanctifies the **object**. The sacrifice becomes holy by being offered on the altar. Sacrifices emphasize the status of the object, the material being sacrificed. Whether the sacrifice comes to fulfill a vow or some obligation, it is made holy by being given away, sacrificed to G-d. The human element is only a preparation and precondition. While the person's intention is important, a sacrifice has significance only when it is offered on the altar.

We can look at it this way: every other mitzvah, and all the accessories with which it is performed, remain the property of the person performing the mitzvah. The only mitzvah which involves something being “given away” to G-d is a sacrifice. So, in general *the focus of mitzvos is on the person, while the focus of sacrifice is on the thing itself.*

This difference in emphasis also explains an important distinction in halachah: Jewish law distinguishes between *hidur*

mitzvah and bringing a sacrifice from the best of one's possessions. The concept of *hidur mitzvah* – of beautifying the mitzvah, doing it in the most magnificent and impressive manner possible – applies to the person. By making a beautiful sukkah, for example, the person adorns himself before G-d. When the Jew presents himself before the Almighty, he appears decorated with a resplendent mitzvah. That is the concept of *hidur mitzvah*.

Naturally, this is a way of honoring G-d. Just as one appears before a human dignitary dressed in the finest, most fashionable clothes, so one should appear before G-d dressed in the finest, most dignified mitzvos. After all, mitzvos are called the 'garments of the soul.'

However, a mitzvah, even a *hidur mitzvah*, cannot bring about a reconciliation or atonement. After a transgression, a mitzvah by itself cannot appease or conciliate. For that we need a sacrifice. The precursor to Redemption is *teshuvah*. And sacrifice is the essence of *teshuvah*.

A sacrifice by definition belongs to G-d. True, the person sanctifies it, but to be a sacrifice, the object must be offered on the altar. A person may declare that such and such will be sacrificed, dedicating it for that purpose. But the object does not become a sacrifice to G-d until actually brought on the altar.

This explains why a sacrifice must be from the best of one's possessions. The most complete and perfect way to give something to G-d is to give the finest of what we own. In simpler terms, the sacrifice must not only be fit for the altar, it must be **worthy** of the altar. It must reflect an ultimate and absolute commitment to G-d, a willingness to devote ourselves – who we are and what we own – first and foremost to G-d.

Similarly, everything that can be compared to the altar must reflect the same resolve and realization. For example, when

building a synagogue, it should be nicer than one's own home. The poor should be fed with the sweetest and tastiest food from one's table. The best, the "fattest," should be sanctified and dedicated.

Specifically, matters of *tzedekah*, such as providing food and clothing for the poor, affects atonement. Sacrifice and *teshuvah*, *tzedekah* and Redemption, go hand-in-hand. The proof of our repentance is a willingness, even a desire, to sacrifice the choicest products of our fields, the first fruits of our labor. We must give away our selves, our very essence, to G-d.

By subduing our desires, our material appetites, by being generous with what we sacrifice, we make ourselves pleasing and acceptable to G-d.

Indeed, a proper sacrifice, one that reconciles and atones, may be equated with the subjugation of the *yetzer hara* – our evil inclination, our egotism and selfishness.

We derive this principle, that one should sacrifice the best of one's possessions, from the meal offering and which grade of olive oil can be used with it. Olive oil was graded according to which pressing – first, second, third, etc. – it came from. Only certain grades were used in the menorah, but all grades were permitted with the meal-offering. Nevertheless, one who wishes to subdue his *yetzer hara* and act generously will bring from the best of his possessions. One will sacrifice the clearest and purest of his "oil," his essence.

Why the meal offering, the offering of the poor? In describing the meal offering, the Torah says, literally, "when a soul wishes to draw close." That is, when a poor person, who has nothing to give but flour and water and a little oil, when such a person brings an offering, G-d accounts it as if he had offered his very soul. Such a person does not consider himself, but only the offering, the

transformation of the physical into the spiritual. The *teshuvah*, the sacrifice, of such a person is of the highest order.

Surely the relationship to our times, to the coming of Moshiach is clear: when the reason for the destruction and exile ends, automatically and immediately the consequence ceases to exist. Both the destruction of the Temple and the exile are negated, and instantly the Jewish people are redeemed through Moshiach.

We must ask ourselves: are we giving the best of our possessions? Which part of our day, which part of our energy, attention and ambition, are we dedicating to Torah, to preparing the world for Moshiach? What are we sacrificing on the altar – not yet the physical altar in the Temple, but the spiritual altar within us? *Hidur mitzvah* does not suffice. The concern must be giving the best of ourselves to *tzedekah* – to feeding those hungry for Torah, to clothe those naked of mitzvos. In that way, we make ourselves worthy of Redemption.

(Based on Likkutei Sichos 27:8-15)

The Announcement Of The Redemption

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With respect to Gideon, we find that: "In his days¹ the Jewish people were in distress. The Holy One, Blessed be He, sought a person who would find merit in them. When He found Gideon to be meritorious, because he found merit in them, an angel immediately appeared to him, as it says: "And the angel of G-d appeared to him and said to him, 'Go with this power, with **the power of the merit you have found in my children.**" "Said the Holy One, Blessed be He, it is within your capacity to find a defense for Israel. **In your merit they shall be redeemed.**"²

...The merit which will hasten the Redemption is the following:

Even in the Talmudic era it has been said that "all the deadlines have passed."³ Certainly now that we have endured a lengthy and arduous exile, the duration of which has exceeded 1,900 years, **and he has still not arrived...** And in regard to Teshuvah ("It depends only on Teshuvah³) [repentance, return, a prerequisite for Redemption], they have already done Teshuvah. Indeed, there is no Jewish person who has not entertained a thought of Teshuvah, (not just once, but) several times in the course of his lifetime. This [thought of Teshuvah] can transform "instantaneously"⁴ a perfectly wicked person into a perfectly righteous individual, in accordance with the Talmudic ruling⁵ that one who would betroth a woman "stipulating that I am a (perfectly⁶) righteous individual, even if he

1. *Tanchuma, Shoftim 4.*

2. *Yalkut Shimoni, Shoftim 62.*

3. *Sanhedrin 97b.*

4. *Zohar I, 129, end side a.*

5. *Kiddushin 49b. Rambam, Hilchos Ishus, 8:5. Tur, Shulchan Aruch, Even HoEzer, 38:31.*

6. Based on the version cited on *Or Zarua 112.*

were previously a perfectly wicked person, she is betrothed, for perhaps he had a thought of teshuvah."

Considering the above, it is with utmost certainty that our righteous Moshiach must arrive **here and now, immediately, [mamosh] in the most literal sense.**

Now, this exercise of finding merit⁷ in and of itself should suffice to bring about the Redemption. Moreover, in addition to the finding of merit, the imminence of Moshiach's arrival constitutes a **definitive ruling issued by many rabbis and halachic authorities.** Further, since Torah "is not in heaven,"⁸ this ruling issued by the earthly courts "obligates," so to speak, and affords a unique privilege to, the heavenly courts. **And so it will be confirmed!**

* * *

In our day and age, after G-d has vented His rage with the destruction of the Holy Temple, and after all of "our deeds and actions throughout the duration of exile,"⁹ and after all the decrees of oppression and persecution - may Hashem, indeed, shield us and protect us from them - the Jewish people have endured throughout the protracted and arduous final exile, particularly the Holocaust of the very last generation, the process of refinement and purification has, without any doubt, been achieved in full, "enough and even too much." Consequently, the [current¹⁰] "siege of the Babylonian

7. [i.e., that we have already passed all the deadlines as well as satisfying the condition of Teshuvah. Translator's note.]

8. Netzavim, 30:12. See Bava Metzia 59b.

9. Tanya, beginning of chapter 37.

10. [The Hebrew term Samach, which means "besieged," can also be rendered "supported." This talk was delivered on the fast day Asara b'Teves (the Tenth of the month of Teves), the anniversary of the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonian king. The Rebbe here is alluding to the threats of the modern day Babylonian dictator, which are actually the events which serve as preludes to the Redemption. Translator's note.]

king"¹¹ has acquired an exclusively **positive** connotation, one that is **visibly and manifestly good, even to eyes of flesh**. In the words of our sages:¹² The Holy One Blessed be He says to Israel, "My children have no fear. All that I have done¹³ I have done exclusively for you... the time of your Redemption has arrived."

The emphasis of this generation - particularly this year, the year designated as "It shall be a year of wonders I will show him" - should be placed on the concept of G-d's support of those who have fallen,¹⁴ to strengthen and encourage the Jewish people, emphasizing particularly the support and encouragement acquired through faith in the coming of Moshiach and the implicit trust that "behold he (our righteous Moshiach) is coming."¹⁵ This should be accompanied with enhanced preparation for his arrival by way of teshuvah [repentance, return] and observance of Torah and mitzvos. In the words of the pronouncement of my sainted father-in-law - the leader of our generation: "immediate Teshuvah, immediate Redemption."¹⁶ "Return, O, Israel, unto G-d your G-d; prepare yourselves and your family to greet our righteous Moshiach, who shall arrive soon, in the most literal sense."¹⁷

*(From the talks of Shabbos Parshas Vayechi
(and Asara b'Teves, may it be transformed into joy) 5751)*

11. *Yechezkal* 24:2.

12. *Yalkut Shimoni, Yeshayahu* 499.

13. This includes the efforts of the Babylonian King, who is merely an ax in the hands of the one who chops with it. [i.e. He is G-d's instrument.]

14. [The phrase *סומך נופלים* - "supports the falling" - is similar to the expression mentioned before - *בבל מלך בסמך* - the Babylonian King besieged," which the Rebbe interpreted in a positive vein to mean that "he supported." Translator's note.]

15. *Shir HaShirim* 2:8. See *Shir HaShirim Rabbah* on this verse (2:8(b)).

16. In his *Igros Kodesh*, vol. 5, end of p. 361 ff., 377 ff., 408 ff. and in other places.

17. *Hayom Yom* - 15 Teves.

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All of the signs mentioned by our sages indicate that we are currently situated **at the very end of the period of exile**. We have "passed all the deadlines."¹ We have also performed Teshuvah [repentance, return, a prerequisite for Redemption]. Indeed, my sainted father-in-law, the leader of our generation, declared (several decades ago) that we have already concluded all the service [necessary for Redemption], including the "polishing of the buttons,"² and we now stand ready ("All of you stand ready") to greet our righteous Moshiach.³

* * *

Despite the difficult and protracted final exile, which has lasted more than 1,900 years (in stark contrast to the duration of the Egyptian bondage which lasted 210 years), the nature of "the Children of **Israel**" has essentially **transcended exile**. Thus, every additional moment we remain in exile is a form "having **now come** into Egypt,"⁴ "as if they had that very day entered into Egypt."⁵

The Jewish people, therefore, stand with firm faith and conviction that G-d will immediately fulfill his promise that "I have indeed remembered you"⁶ by bringing the genuine and complete Redemption, especially when hearing from the Moses of our generation,⁷ my sainted father-in-law, the leader of our generation, that we have already concluded all matters of Divine service and

1. *Sanhedrin* 97b.

2. Talk of Simchas Torah, 5689.

3. Cf. *Hayom Yom*, among others, 15 Teves.

4. *Shemos* 1:1.

5. *Shemos Rabbah*, beginning of our Parsha (8:14), *Tanchuma*, loc. cit. 3.

6. *Shemos* 3:16.

7. See *Bereishis Rabbah* 56:7: "There is no generation in which there is none like Moses." See also *Zohar* 3:273a. *Tikkunei Zohar* 69 (112, beginning of side a. 114, beginning of side a). *Tanya* chapter 44. Ibid. *Iggeres HaKodesh*, elucidation of sec. 27, end.

are presently standing ready to greet our righteous Redeemer [Moshiach]. This is particularly true now that we have reached the milestone of forty years⁸ concerning which the Torah says, "G-d gave you a heart to know and eyes to see and ears to hear."⁹ Additionally, we are now situated in the fifty first year [5751], which in Hebrew forms the acrostic (It shall be a year of) wonders which I will show him [נפלאות אראנני - Niflaos Arenu].

The Jewish people should, therefore, be encouraged and their spirits uplifted by declaring that G-d says daily, and literally, anew, that, **"I have indeed remembered you,"** and that your righteous Moshiach "stands behind the wall"¹⁰ and that "this one is coming."¹¹ Accordingly we should prepare ourselves to greet him by increasing our observance of Torah and Mitzvos, **in consonance with the ruling of the Rambam**¹² (whose anniversary of passing is the 20th of Teves, the night after this Sabbath), that through "one Mitzvah, one can favorably alter the balance for oneself and for the entire world, causing oneself and them salvation and deliverance."

(From the talks of Shabbos Parshas Shemos, 19 Teves 5751)

8. [I.e., forty years since the passing of the Previous Rebbe, a milestone which enables us to fully realize the intention and depth of the teachings that were said forty years earlier. - Translator's note.]

9. Tavo 29:3 [Moses said this to the Jewish people who were about to enter into the Promised Land, explaining that they were now capable of realizing that which they were taught by G-d forty years earlier. Translator's note.]

10. Shir HaShirim 2:9.

11. Ibid 8. See Shir HaShirim Rabbah on this verse (ch. 2:8(b)).

12. Hilchos Teshuvah 3:4.

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