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HUMILITY AS SACRIFICE

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto Shlita)

The passage that states, “Vayikra [And He called] to Moses ... When a man among you brings an offering to the L-RD” (Leviticus 1:1-2) contains several difficulties:

1. We know that the commentators have pondered the meaning of the small letter aleph in the word vayikra. Why did Moses use a small aleph? Their answer is that he did so because of his great modesty, which the Torah testifies to by stating: “Now the man Moses was exceedingly humble, more than any person on the face of the earth” (Numbers 12:3). Since it is difficult to understand how Moses’ modesty could allow him to write such a passage, we must explain that G-d obliged him to write it (Yalkut Shimoni 839). Yet in that case, why didn’t G-d also oblige him to use a normal-sized aleph in the word vayikra, thus ignoring his desire to use a small one?

2. We must also ponder the connection that exists between the end of Pasha Pekudei and the beginning of Pasha Vayikra, as well as why the latter begins with the mitzvah of offerings.

3. The phrase “When a man among you brings an offering to the L-RD” needs to be clarified. Rashi explains that the word adam (man) calls to mind the first man (Adam), whose offering could in no way have been stolen. We are thus enjoined to refrain from offering anything that does not belong to us, for Hashem detests a burnt offering that stems from robbery (Isaiah 61:8). Yet in that case, it is difficult to understand why the Sages did not draw this lesson from Cain and Abel, who both offered a sacrifice to G-d, as it is written: “Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and from their choicest” (Genesis 4:4). They obviously did not offer products stemming from robbery, since the whole world belonged to them and they had divided it (Bereshith Rabba 22:16). It would have been more logical to draw the aforementioned lesson from here, for there is no verse that attests to Adam having offered a sacrifice. There is only a Midrash that describes Adam’s offering of a bull on the altar (Vayikra Rabba 2: 8). Why then did the Sages try to find a proof with Adam rather than with Cain and Abel, given that Scripture explicitly states that they offered a sacrifice?

4. We also need to understand what could lead a person to offer a sacrifice that is the product of robbery, since he is only offering it because he regrets his sins and seeks to atone for them. By bringing a stolen sacrifice, he seriously aggravates his situation.

We will attempt to clarify these points by first citing the Ramban on the meaning of sacrifices in general. In his commentary to Leviticus, the Ramban writes: “All these acts [pertaining to a sacrifice] are per-

formed in order that when they are done, a person should realize that he has sinned against his G-d with his body and his soul, and that his blood should really be spilled and his body burned, were it not for the loving-kindness of the Creator, Who took from him a substitute and a ransom, namely this offering, so that its blood should be in place of his blood, its life in place of his life” (Ramban on Leviticus 1:9). This means that when a man sees an animal being slaughtered, carved up, and its blood spread upon the altar, he should tell himself that all this should have been done to him because of his sins, and that G-d in His mercy accepts an animal in his place. These thoughts should bring about his complete and wholehearted repentance.

Actually, a man who sins does so because of pride, since it would be impossible for him to sin if he recognized his true place. The Talmud states, “A man only sins if a spirit of folly seizes him” (Sotah 3). Thus when he offers a sacrifice and sees everything the Kohanim must do to the animal, he repents and submits himself to G-d.

Consequently, when a man is humble and performs the mitzvot without any boastful thoughts, Scripture considers him to be continuously offering his soul to G-d. This is the meaning of the expression, “When a man among you [mikem: Literally ‘of you’] brings an offering to the L-RD.” A man should arrive at a spiritual level whereby all his good deeds are done solely for the glory of G-d – without any ulterior motives – through submission. Thus a man who is tired because he did not sleep at night – who only slept a little in the morning – yet gathers all his strength to serve his Creator when he realizes that the time has arrived for reciting the morning Shema or morning prayers, such a man has offered himself entirely to G-d. The same goes for one who has fasted the entire day, since the loss of blood and fat resulting from his fast is considered as a sacrifice. In addition, the Sages have said that whoever manages to conquer his evil inclination is considered to have offered G-d a sacrifice. Such a person in fact offers himself entirely, for man’s evil inclination strengthens itself more each day and tries to kill him (Sukkah 52a), as it is written: “The wicked one watches for the righteous and seeks to kill him” (Psalms 37:32). When someone devotes all his energies to conquering it, at that point it is considered as if he had simultaneously sacrificed himself and his evil inclination to G-d. This is the meaning of the expression, “When a man among you [mikem] brings an offering to the L-RD.” If a man offers himself (mikem) as a sacrifice – himself along with his evil inclination (which is also part of the idea of mikem, since it is constantly within a man,

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well-established and hidden in his heart [Sukkah 52a] – this represents a superior offering.

From everything that we have said, it follows that only a person who submits himself to G-d and behaves humbly is considered as having offered himself along with his evil inclination as a sacrifice. The actions of such an individual have the value of an offering, and this principle – that humility itself is considered as a sacrifice – remains valid in our day; and not only humility, but also prayer (Berachot 26b). Since the main element in repentance is confession (Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah 81), admitting our sins when praying to G-d leads to the submission of all the Creator's worlds and protects us from all sins.

If everything that we have said up to this point is accurate, the issues we raised at the beginning will now be perfectly clear.

We are familiar with the teaching that states, “Man is led by the way that he himself wants to take” (Makot 10b), which is illustrated by the passage: “Concerning scorners, He scorns them; but to the humble He gives favor” (Proverbs 3:34). For good or for evil, Divine Providence helps a man to follow the path that he desires. If a man yearns to constantly submit himself to G-d – to behave in accordance with the verse that states, “I have set the L-RD before me always” (Psalms 16:8), and to conduct himself humbly, like a servant before his master – Providence helps him to fulfill this yearning and he encounters no obstacles in his path. It is written at the end of Parsha Pekudei, “Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting, for the cloud rested upon it, and the glory of the L-RD filled the Sanctuary” (Exodus 40:35). He could only enter when Hashem called him (which answers our second question). It is plainly obvious that all the Children of Israel watched him up to the very point that he entered the tent to speak to G-d (ibid. 31:8), the result being that Moses garnered great honor at that point. He believed that Hashem spoke with him alone, to the exclusion of all other people, despite the extremely lofty spiritual level of the Children of Israel in the desert (they are called Dor Deah, a generation that conducts itself completely in accordance with its knowledge of G-d [Vayikra Rabba 9:1]). It is possible that in Moses' immense humility, his heart broke within him, like a servant who yields to his master, and instead of writing Vayeker (“And He happened upon”), he wrote Vayikra (“And He called”). The former is the same term that the Torah uses concerning Balaam: Vayeker E-l Bilam (“And G-d happened upon Balaam” – Numbers 23:4). G-d appeared to Balaam at a moment of impurity and “by chance,” and Moses believed that G-d appeared to him also by chance, without this indicating his special choosing (see Rashi on this verse). Yet G-d did not go along with Moses' reasoning, for it is not proper to make people believe that the leader of the Children of Israel received prophesy solely “by chance.” Such a demonstration of humility would have harmed the honor of the entire people.

Nevertheless, since Moses constantly behaved with humility and submissiveness (“Now the man Moses was exceedingly humble” – Numbers 12:3), he in fact wrote Vayikra (“And He called”). However Moses used a small aleph to underline that even though G-d demonstrated His favor by appearing to him (Torat Kohanim 1:2-3), he still did not feel worthy of this honor. Instead, Moses would have preferred for all the Children of Israel to hear everything that G-d said, since all of them were worthy. The small aleph signifies that every Jew, even if he is not great, can merit hearing Hashem's voice. This is what is stated by the verse: “Was it only to Moses that the L-RD spoke? Did He not speak to us as well?” (Numbers 12:2) – G-d can speak to anyone! Hashem replied that this is true, and in his humility Moses understood this perfectly well. Therefore since G-d leads a man in the way that he wants to go, He allowed Moses to use a small aleph. Proof of this is that even when G-d told him to write, “Now the man Moses

was exceedingly humble,” He agreed to let him omit the letter yud in the word anav (“humble”), which is what Moses desired because of his self-effacement. Furthermore, Moses wrote “the man Moses” instead of simply “Moses” so that we should be unaware that he was speaking of himself, and in order to make us believe that he was speaking of someone else called Moses. All this stemmed from Moses' extreme modesty, aware as he was that G-d could speak to any Jew.

We now fully understand why Parsha Vayikra begins with the subject of sacrifices. It was in order to show the Children of Israel that in being submissive to G-d, a person resembles one who offers himself as a sacrifice. In addition, watching an animal being slaughtered brings about humility, which in turn encourages a person to sacrifice himself – himself and his evil inclination – to Hashem in an act of absolute devotion and self-effacement.

Having said all this, we now understand why Rashi wrote that we should not bring a sacrifice that stems from robbery. We asked if one could conceive of bringing the product of robbery as an atonement sacrifice without making matters worse in the process. According to what we have seen, however, it is clear that when a man comes to the Temple with his sacrifice, he should do so in a spirit of submissiveness. He should prepare himself to repent in light of everything that occurs to the animal being slaughtered. Prayer, which stands in place of sacrifice (Berachot 26b), demands preparation. This was understood by men of earlier generations, who would spend an hour preparing themselves before prayer in order that it be favorably accepted (ibid. 30b). Similarly, in the time of the Temple it was necessary to prepare oneself before offering a sacrifice so that it could be favorably accepted, and the person who neglected this step seized and stole, as it were, the favorable view that Heaven could have of him. In such a case his sacrifice resembles the product of robbery, for by not coming to the Temple wholeheartedly, nothing in him would break when his sacrifice was being offered, this being so detrimental that he might stumble from one sin to the next. This could occur because he lacked the preparation that enabled him to repent beforehand so that his sacrifice would be pleasing to Hashem.

This is what the Torah alludes to by saying, “When a man among you brings an offering to the L-RD,” namely that he should not bring the product of robbery, which means that he should prepare himself beforehand and repent of his sins. This fully explains why Rashi finds his proof with Adam, who did not bring a product of robbery, even though we do not find any written evidence that he offered a sacrifice. Actually, the first man did not need to bring a sacrifice. When he sinned and was driven out of the Garden of Eden (Sanhedrin 38b), it was actually himself that he offered to G-d in an act of repentance, accompanied by extreme submissiveness on his part, this taking place on Shabbat (Bereshith Rabba 22:28). Adam then recited: “A psalm, a song for the Sabbath day” (Psalms 92:1) and confessed his sin. He even separated himself from his wife for 130 years (Eruvin 18b). He therefore did not need to offer a sacrifice, for he had found in himself the path of repentance, and he could not have brought anything that stemmed from robbery because everything in the world belonged to him (which means that his “sacrifice” carried no element of “robbery” since it contained humility and was carefully prepared). He yielded to Hashem without resorting to offering a sacrifice because he had accomplished in his own person the idea expressed by: “When a man among you [mikem: ‘of you’] brings an offering to the L-RD.”

Every man should thus learn on his own to be humble and to take note of his infinite tininess before Hashem, for humility and repentance stand in place of sacrifice, and through them it is as if a person offers his very life.

IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM RABBI RAPHAEL ENCAOUA

In 1912 Morocco became a French Protectorate, and it was the French (with Marshal Lyautey at their head) who were the real leaders of the country. The French demanded that the Jews name a committee to represent their community, and at its first session it was decided to ask Marshal Lyautey to establish the position of Moroccan Chief Rabbi to represent the Jewish community before the new government. In addition, it was decided that this position would be entrusted to Rabbi Raphael Encaoua, who was then the head of the Rabbinical Court of Sale.

The French authorities agreed to these requests, and representatives of the Jewish community went to see Rabbi Raphael Encaoua to inform him of his nomination. When he heard this, however, he jumped up and angrily exclaimed, "And who made me the Chief Rabbi of Morocco, since there is Rabbi Shlomo ben Danan in Fez, and in there is a Gaon in Marrakech, and there is the Chief Rabbi of Meknes, and in Sefrou there is...! How could you have even thought to choose me instead of one of these Torah greats?"

The members of the committee attempted to justify themselves by saying that it was Marshal Lyautey who had appointed him to the position. However he began to scold them: "How could a non-Jew have chosen me from among all these great sages? Only the Rabbanim are qualified to choose the most eminent among themselves. For that reason, you must tell Marshal Lyautey that I am not suitable for the job," he humbly concluded.

The committee members went back to Marshal Lyautey and told him that Rabbi Raphael did not accept the position and that he should choose another man. When Marshal Lyautey heard what Rabbi Raphael had said, he decided that he alone would make the best Chief Rabbi of Morocco. And if he absolutely refused to take the position, Morocco would have no Chief Rabbinate.

Once again the committee members went to find Rabbi Raphael and informed him of the governor's decision, explaining to him that this position was very important for the Jews of Morocco and that no one had the right to renounce it. The Rav asked that he be given some time to think about it, and after a week he went to Fez and met with Rabbi Shlomo ben Danan, the head of the rabbinical court. Rabbi Shlomo was an extremely learned Posek, and he had written several books of Halachah, including his responsum Bikesh Shlomo and Asher LiShlomo.

Rabbi Raphael told him that he had been offered a position that he was not entitled to. However he felt that it was suitable for him, Rabbi Shlomo, which is why he came to see him,

for he tried to convince him to become the Chief Rabbi of Morocco. He suggested that Rabbi Shlomo be the first to sign all rulings that would emerge from the country's top rabbinic court. The difference in salary between the position that he presently held and that of Chief Rabbi would be refunded to him as well, for Rabbi Raphael (who would obtain this difference from the government) would reimburse it to him. As regards outside appearances, Rabbi Raphael would be the Chief Rabbi of Morocco, and those rulings issued by the Rabbinical court that were translated into French would be signed first by Rabbi Raphael, then by Rabbi Shlomo.

After hours of discussing the matter, with each trying to convince the other that, in fact, the other was greater and better qualified for the position, Rabbi Raphael's opinion eventually won out. However Rabbi Shlomo only agreed on condition that the difference between his present and new salary would go to paying the expenses incurred by his move from Fez to Meknes, and other such costs. That condition was agreed to.

After several years, people noticed that all the rulings of these two Tzaddikim were unsigned. Apparently, there was a difference of opinion over who should sign first. As for the money that Rabbi Raphael reimbursed to Rabbi Shlomo, the latter protested it should actually go to Rabbi Raphael, yet because of the costs that he incurred by moving, he found himself obliged to use it.

The following story illustrates Rabbi Raphael's great modesty:

Someone once saw Rabbi Raphael going to pray in another synagogue in order to pay tribute to an important family. Naturally, his arrival in the synagogue was viewed with great honor, and when the Torah reading began the Chazan called out: "May our teacher and Rav arise, the crown of our head, the Gaon and flawless Dayan, a man humble and righteous..." along with other such accolades.

Rabbi Raphael did not move from his place when he was called up. Since everyone believed that he had not heard the Chazan's invitation, he was told that he had been called up to the Torah. He softly replied that he had heard what the Chazan had said, but that such a description did not refer to him. The Chazan was describing someone else, and Rabbi Raphael refused to move until the Chazan called out again and invited Rabbi Raphael Encaoua, without further qualification, to come up to the Torah.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY FROM THE MAGGID OF DUBNO

It is written, “These are the accounts of the Sanctuary . . . that were rendered at Moses’ bidding” (Exodus 38:21). The Midrash states: “Our Sages have taught that to collect money, we do not appoint a single person for the task, but at least two. Now Moses was the only treasurer, yet despite everything he called others and made them responsible to count for him, as it is written: ‘These are the accounts of the Sanctuary.’ It is not written, ‘that Moses counted,’ but rather, ‘that were rendered at Moses’ bidding’ – by Itamar. Concerning this it is written: ‘They did not make an accounting with the men into whose hand they gave the money to pay out to the workmen, for they acted with integrity. The money of guilt-offerings and the money of sin-offerings was not brought to the Temple of the L-RD’ [II Kings 12:16-17].”

It is surprising that the Midrash tries to prove that Moses wanted to have the offerings counted for him by using a passage that says exactly the opposite! In addition, it is very unlikely that someone would have suspected Moses, the man of G-d, of having stolen any of the money at his disposal, for concerning Moses Scripture testifies: “In My entire house he is the trusted one” (Numbers 12:7).

To better understand this, let us illustrate by using the following parable:

A man had a daughter who was extraordinarily beautiful and possessed exquisite character traits. All he wanted was to have the opportunity to give her a large dowry, but each time that a prospective suitor was presented to her, she found a fault with him, so perfect that she herself was. One day, a matchmaker from a distant land came and proposed a match with the son of a famous wealthy man. However the father thought to himself, “Who knows if this young man is good-looking enough for my daughter?” He considered how he was going to bring it up with the matchmaker, for he couldn’t say that before agreeing to the match, he wanted the young man to come and let his daughter see him. Such an important man would consider that as an insult. He therefore resorted to a ruse. He told the matchmaker, “My friend, you should realize that my daughter is marvelous in my eyes, but who knows if she’ll please the young man that you’re proposing for her? No one wants to make unnecessary expenses, and I also don’t want to commit myself before being sure that this match will be successful. Therefore let the young man come over and see my daughter for himself. Then if she pleases him, we can finalize the match.” Naturally, it was the opposite that he had in mind, for he only wanted the young man to visit so that he could see if his daughter liked him.

This is what happened with Moses, the man of G-d. Since he was to employ each offering in relation to the purity of its giver’s heart, he needed everyone to gather around him so that he could evaluate how each one’s offering would be used. However Moses was too modest to say that, so he had to reverse things by stating: “Because you have given a great amount of silver and gold, at least come and count it with me!” This gave him the opportunity to observe the Children of Israel at his leisure and to plumb the depths of each one’s heart.

This is what the Midrash expresses with subtlety: “These are the accounts of the Sanctuary . . . that were rendered at Moses’ bidding.” It is not written: “that Moses counted,” but rather, “that were rendered at Moses’ bidding.” The Midrash underlines that he asked them to come

so that he could take an accounting of the offerings in their presence. To explain Moses’ intention, the Sages added that concerning this it is said, “They did not make an accounting with the men into whose hand they gave the money to pay out to the workmen, for they acted with integrity.” In other words, the Sages wanted us to understand that there is no reason to believe that the basis for having others count the money was because Moses was viewed with suspicion. The basis for that lay elsewhere: “The money of guilt-offerings and the money of sin-offerings was not brought to the Temple of the L-RD,” meaning that Moses just wanted to verify if, among the offerings, there were any that had been given without completely pure intentions. This is hinted at by alluding to the phrase, “The money of guilt-offerings and the money of sin-offerings.”

THE STORY OF THE WEEK RABBI AKIVA EIGER HEALS AN INCURABLE MAN

Rabbi Akiva Eiger was in the habit of visiting all the sick in town. One day he went to visit someone who had caught a very rare and incurable disease. Now on that day the king’s physician was in town, and when Rabbi Akiva learned of this, he rushed messengers to ask that he visit the sick man. The physician accepted and went to his bedside, and Rabbi Akiva Eiger followed.

The physician asked him, “Why have you asked me to come here? You know very well that this illness is incurable!” Rabbi Akiva Eiger replied, “And if the king catches this disease, would you also tell him that it’s incurable?”

The physician reflected a little: “I actually remember that the king once caught this illness, and I told him that it was incurable, for there existed only one remedy, but it was very, very difficult to obtain. It consists of a rare bird that must be caught in a remote desert region and then fed to the patient. Only the king had the means to obtain this bird, and he sent entire legions of soldiers into the desert. It was a very difficult task indeed, but they managed to trap one of the birds. The king then ate it and was cured. However, how can an ordinary man obtain this bird? That’s why I’m telling you that this disease is incurable!”

The physician left and Rabbi Akiva went home and immediately began praying. He said, “Master of the universe, all Jews are Your children. They are also Your kings and princes, and now one of Your children needs such a bird. Please send it to us!”

Not long afterwards, a bird struck the window of Rabbi Akiva’s home, and he immediately ordered that it be caught. He commanded that the wings be kept, but that the rest of the bird be cooked and fed to the sick man. That was done, and the man fully recovered.

After a certain time, the king’s physician once again came to town. Rabbi Akiva Eiger hurried to send him the wings as proof that he had obtained the rare bird. When the physician saw them, he exclaimed, “Only the Rabbi could have done such a thing!”