

The Path To Follow

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Rabbi David Pinto Shlita

The Burnt Offering – Constant Elevation

It is written, "Command Aaron and his sons, saying: 'This is the law of the burnt-offering: The burnt-offering shall be on the hearth, upon the altar, all night until morning, and the fire of the altar shall be burning on it'" (*Vayikra* 6:2). Rashi cites the Midrash (*Torat Kohanim, Tzav* 6:1) in stating, "Scripture especially needs to urge where monetary loss is involved." The commentators (see *Siftei Chachamim*) explain that the *kohanim* derived no benefit from the burnt-offering, which was dedicated entirely to Hashem. Under such circumstances, the Torah was concerned that the *kohanim* would become weary of offering sacrifices, which is why it warned them by using the word *tzav* ("command"), a term of encouragement, enjoining them not to show any slack in this regard. This is surprising. Did the *kohanim* perform their service in the Temple only to receive a reward, such that Scripture had to encourage them in cases where they would not derive any benefit from a sacrifice? We also need to understand why Scripture mentions the law of the burnt-offering, from which the *kohanim* derived no benefit, before the sin-offering, which the *kohanim* did benefit from. Normally, when a king of flesh and blood orders his servants to do something, he begins with easier tasks and then proceeds to more difficult ones, so that they have no difficulties obeying his orders. Therefore why did the Holy One, blessed be He, not do the same with the *kohanim*? Why did He instead begin with the difficult part, the burnt-offering that they did not benefit from, and only then mention the sacrifices that they would benefit from?

We may explain this according to the words of the Ramban, who wrote about why Hashem commanded the Children of Israel to offer sacrifices to Him: "A person must 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 lovingkindness 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 *Vayikra* 1:9). Today, since the Temple and the altar no longer stand because of our many sins, what can procure atonement for man, a life for his life? The answer is that when a person sanctifies his senses – his deeds, words, and thoughts – Scripture considers him to have brought a burnt-offering in the Temple and considers his blood to have been

sprinkled upon the altar. In fact when the Temple stood, that was the goal of the sacrifices: To elevate a person's senses in order to sanctify them, for that is how sin is forgiven.

Given that every person who elevates himself in the service of G-d must sanctify himself and his entire body for Hashem, including his thoughts and secrets, the Torah says with regards to the burnt-offering: "When a man among you offers an offering to Hashem, you shall bring your offering of the cattle, of the herd, and of the flock" (*Vayikra* 1:2). What is the meaning of the expression, "When a man among you offers an offering"? This teaches us that even when there is no Temple, a person can be forgiven for his sins in the same way as the burnt-offering atoned for sin in the Temple. How? Since a person is offering himself entirely to Hashem, he can elevate himself in Torah and the fear of Heaven, and his sins will be forgiven. Since the Torah states, "When a man among you offers" concerning the burnt-offering, and since the burnt-offering atones for the thoughts of the heart (*Yerushalmi, Yoma* 8:7), it follows that a burnt-offering only procures atonement when it is accompanied by repentance.

Not only that, but a person must even sanctify "the cattle" – meaning the animalistic side of his soul – to Hashem, as it is written: "Sanctify yourself in what is permitted" (*Yebamot* 20a), something that goes beyond the strict requirements of the law. By acting in this way, a person can devote himself entirely to Hashem; his sins will then be forgiven, and he will no longer commit them. This is because a person only falls into sin if he contemplates it beforehand, as Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair said: "A man should not indulge in [perverse] thoughts by day, which might lead him to uncleanness by night" (*Ketubot* 46a). We also read, "Unchaste imagination is more harmful than sin itself" (*Yoma* 29a). Thus when a person sanctifies his thoughts, he becomes like a burnt-offering and will not fall into sin.

This explains why the Torah mentions the burnt-offering first. It is because one is only saved from sin by sacrificing and devoting himself entirely to Hashem, to the point that he does not turn away from Him in his thoughts. The burnt-offering is therefore more important than the other offerings, because it enables a person to be completely devoted to Hashem. His physical life is also elevated when he sanctifies himself in

what is permitted, over and above the requirements of the law per se, and he raises himself to a considerable extent. If he reaches the level of a burnt-offering, he will no longer sin and will not need a sin-offering.

How does a person know if he has managed to sanctify himself and become a burnt-offering that is entirely devoted to Hashem? It is by the fact that he is constantly putting an effort into elevating himself in the service of G-d, without being content on what he did yesterday, but by constantly adding to his service. This is what the Torah alludes to by saying, “This is the law of the burnt-offering [*olah*]: The burnt-offering [*olah*],” meaning that the whole nature of the offering is an elevation (*oleh*), an elevation towards Hashem. If a person does not sense a spiritual elevation within himself – and if rather than asking himself if he has truly served Hashem correctly yesterday and if he should add to his service of today, he instead thinks: “Why do I need to sanctify myself more than necessary? There’s no end to this! I pray, I study, and I pay attention to not sinning, which is enough!” – such a person should realize that he has not yet reached the level of a burnt-offering for Hashem. He should know that he has not sacrificed his animalistic side for Heaven. If he had become spiritual, it certainly would not have prevented him from elevating himself in the service of Hashem in areas that go beyond the requirements of the law. Furthermore, by the fact that he neglects the service of Hashem and does not renew it each day, his service will become mere habit and he will never elevate himself in the fear of Heaven. In fact it is impossible to arrive at an elevated level all at once. Baby steps are required, which is why it is written: “This is the law of the burnt-offering [*olah*]: The burnt offering [*olah*]” – one step (*aliyah*) after another is needed, until one reaches the highest levels.

The Sages have pondered the meaning of the verse, “Then you will return and see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves G-d and one who does not serve Him” (Malachi 3:18). They say, “One who serves Him and one who does not serve Him both refer to those who are perfectly righteous. However one who studies a chapter 100 times cannot be compared to one who studies it 101 times” (*Chagigah* 9b). One who studies 100 times is only studying to remember what he learned, whereas one who studies it more does so out of a love for Heaven, and he toils in the study of Torah. Such a person is called a servant of G-d. The term *mikem* (“among you”) has a numerical value (including the term itself) of 101, telling us that a person can reach the level of being a burnt-offering for Hashem when he toils in the study of Torah. If he does this, he is promised that he will be able to transform the material and animalistic side of his soul into something spiritual. They will ascend before Hashem like a sacrifice, for the Torah is a remedy against the evil inclination (*Kiddushin* 30b). Even when the altar has been destroyed and there are no longer *kohanim* to offer sacrifices, a pleasant fragrance will ascend before Hashem, the fragrance of a person who sanctified his body and all his senses in order to serve the Creator. The Holy One, blessed be He, will be filled with compassion for him, and He will forgive all his sins.

The Perpetual Fire is a Spiritual Fire

The Sages teach that Moshe said to the Holy One, blessed be He: “Sovereign of the universe, You have said to make an altar of *shittim* wood and to cover it with copper. You have told me that a perpetual fire must burn upon the altar. Will the fire not melt the copper and burn the wood?” The Holy One, blessed be He, replied: “For you fire burns wood, but a spiritual fire does not do the same. See how many angels are before Me, angels that are made of fire, as it is said: ‘The flaming fire His attendants’ [*Tehillim* 104:4]? How many storehouses of snow and fire are mixed with one another, as it is said: ‘Fire and hail, snow and vapor’ [*Tehillim* 148:8]? There is water in the heavens, as it is said: ‘Heavens of heavens, and waters that are above the heavens’ [v.4]. Yet the water does not extinguish the fire, and the fire does not consume the water. Why? Because the Holy One, blessed be He, has made peace among them. Therefore since I told you that a perpetual fire must burn upon the altar, must you fear that the fire will burn the wood? In the Sanctuary, even inanimate things can come to life, for the staff of Aaron, which was a dry piece of wood when it was brought into the Holy of Holies, produced flowers and buds. Likewise the cedars that Hiram the king of Tyre sent to King Solomon for the construction of the Temple produced a pleasant fragrance. This wood was dampened, and from it emerged fruit, as it is written: ‘Planted in the house of Hashem, in the courtyards of our G-d, they will flourish’ [*Tehillim* 92:14-15]. They continued to yield fruit, until Manasseh came and brought a statue into the Holy of Holies, at which point the *Shechinah* departed and the fruit dried up, as it is written: ‘The flower of Lebanon languishes’ [*Nachum* 1:4]. You as well, Moshe, when you entered the place of fire and walked among the angels of fire, should have been burned, especially since you approached Me, as it is written: ‘Moshe approached the thick darkness’ [*Shemot* 20:18], and I am a consuming fire, as it is written: ‘For Hashem your G-d is consuming fire’ [*Devarim* 4:24]. Were you burned? Therefore the altar of burnt-offerings will also not be burned, despite the fact that it is written that a perpetual fire will burn upon it. The copper will not melt, nor will the fire consume.”

– Midrash Aggadah, *Shemot* 27:2

Guarde Your Tongue

Even in Cases of Tremendous Loss

Even if accustoming ourselves to not speaking ill of a Jew will lead to a tremendous financial loss – for example, if we find ourselves under the authority of completely impious people who, when they see someone whose mouth is not as open as their own, consider him a fool and may even fire him, with the result being that he will have nothing with which to feed his family – even then it is forbidden. As with all other prohibitions, we are obligated to surrender all our money in order not to transgress it.

– Chafetz Chaim

Radiating like a brilliant stone set among jewels, which illuminates its surroundings with a beautiful light, was the magnificent and illustrious Rav of Jerusalem, the *gaon* Rabbi Shalom Messas *Zatzal*. Besides his extraordinary gifts in Torah and teaching, he was known for his immense intelligence and his great clarity and purity of mind. Yet the greatest of his lofty traits was his humility. From his home and office, there emerged a light that illuminated the holy city like a blazing torch for a quarter of a century.

For 25 years, Rabbi Shalom Messas reigned over Jerusalem and carried the responsibility of the holy city upon his shoulders. During the entire time that he served as the Rav of Jerusalem, his home was a beacon for the inhabitants of Zion. He rendered *halachic* decisions on numerous issues, and his name was known by all. His fine character traits and great deeds for both the community and individuals attracted, as if by magic, the love of all the residents of the country for him.

During the years that he served as Rav, Rabbi Shalom imprinted the seal of his enthusiastic personality upon the holy city by means of his humility, modesty, and remarkably simple and principled way of life. Rabbi Shalom was a symbol and an example for his flock, and although he lived in Jerusalem, his reputation preceded him throughout the Diaspora.

Descend Towards the People

We shall cite an incident that will enable us to clearly see his great stature, an incident that Rabbi David Hanania Pinto *Shlita* described during the eulogy that he gave at his funeral:

"A few years ago, I was in Morocco with my entire family for Passover, and we were staying at the home of Rabbi Yehoshua Dahan. One day during *Chol HaMoed*, I received a telephone call from France. It was from the great Rav, the *tzaddik* and friend of the Pinto family, the *gaon* Rabbi Shalom Messas, the Rosh Av Beit Din of Jerusalem. He wanted to speak with me urgently.

"I took the telephone and began by greeting Rabbi Shalom Messas. The Rav told me that he wanted a blessing for his wife, who was ill and scheduled to undergo an operation on the following day. I immediately expressed my great surprise to the Rav, for I was an unimportant man, whereas he was a great Rav! Who was I to give *him* a blessing?

"However Rav Messas said to me, 'I am who I am, but you have the great merit of your ancestors. We all know who Rabbi Haim Pinto was. That's why I want you to awaken Heaven's compassion for my wife. We believe in the merit of Rabbi Haim Pinto, in the merit of your holy ancestors, which is why I'm asking you to awaken the merit of your ancestors and to pray for the complete healing of my wife.'

"I replied, 'Since the Rav is greater and older than me, and he has nevertheless negated himself before me, it means that he is much greater than me. Therefore, because the Rav is addressing someone who is unimportant, Hashem will provide his wife with an immediate healing.'

"I said something else to the Rav: 'I remember what Hashem told Moshe: "Descend towards the people" – a descent required for an ascent. Likewise the Rav is descending from his greatness and asking for things from people who are smaller than him. By this merit, Hashem will help you.'

"Afterwards, Rabbi Yehoshua told me that he knew that Rav Messas' wife was ill. However a great miracle had occurred. She underwent

the operation on the following day, but to their great surprise the doctors found nothing wrong with her, even though all prior tests had clearly shown that she was gravely ill. At that point everyone realized that her healing had occurred by the merit of the *tzaddik* Rabbi Haim Pinto."

His Life

Rabbi Shalom Messas was born in Meknes, Morocco on Shevat 22, 5668 to the *gaon* Rabbi Maimon *Zatzal*, the author of *Otzrot Shamayim*.

In his youth, Rabbi Shalom studied Torah and served the Torah scholars of Israel in that generation. While still young, he was known as being extremely well-versed in the Talmud and Halachah, and in short time he was considered a great *posek*. His main teacher in Talmud and the *poskim* was the great *gaon* Rabbi Yitzchak Assabag *Zatzal*, whom the Rav would frequently mention with love and reverence.

In Morocco, Rabbi Shalom established the *Dovev Siftei Yeshenim* company, whose aim was the publication of manuscripts from great Moroccan Jewish figures. He did this because of the tremendous pain he experienced in seeing the manuscripts of great rabbis being abandoned, with no one doing anything about them. In 5704, after having overcome typhus, Rabbi Shalom took it upon himself – just as Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai had done upon emerging from a cave – to undertake important measures for the good of the community. He therefore established, along with his teachers and friends, and through great personal effort, the *Keter Torah* yeshiva in Meknes. Both materially and spiritually, he was the living embodiment of the yeshiva, which trained rabbis and *talmidei chachamim*.

It was in Meknes that he also directed the Talmud Torah, a school that enrolled more than 2,000 students. The Rav, who was known for his gentle manners, was loved and respected by his students and the leaders of the community.

In 5707, he was examined according to the laws of the Moroccan state by Rabbi Shaoul ibn Danan (the Chief Rabbi of Morocco and the Av Beit Din of the appeals court, as well as the author of *Hagam Shaoul*) to become the *dayan* of Casablanca. In 5720, at the age of 52, Rabbi Shalom Messas became the Chief Rabbi and Rosh Av Beit Din of Casablanca, and later of all Morocco.

In 5734, his cousin the *gaon* and *tzaddik* Rabbi Yosef Messas *Zatzal*, the Chief Rabbi of Haifa, passed away and Rabbi Shalom was later offered the position. Due to pressure from individuals such as the Lubavitcher Rebbe (Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson *Zatzal*), he declined the offer. Afterwards, however, discussions began on bringing him to Eretz Israel.

In 5738, Rabbi Shalom Messas arrived in Jerusalem to become its Chief Rabbi. The *gaon* Rabbi Ovadia Yosef *Shlita* played an active role in bringing him from Morocco to Jerusalem, deeply aware of his greatness and ability to unite such diverse communities as those of Jerusalem. The main condition that Rabbi Shalom Messas had for accepting the position was that his appointment should not arouse any strife.

In Nissan of the year 5763, on Shabbat HaGadol, Rabbi Shalom Messas passed away at his home. Although he had reached a very advanced age, being 95 years old, he still retained complete clarity of mind. May his memory be a blessing.

Most Holy?

It is written, "This is the law of the guilt-offering; it is most holy" (*Vayikra* 7:1).

If someone thinks that he is flawless and free of all sin, it means that he has not taken upon himself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven.

In his book *Nezer Yosef*, Rabbi Yosef Lalzer *Shlita* states that this is alluded to in the verse: "This is the law of the guilt-offering." What causes a man to sin and become guilty (*ashem*)? It is the thought that he is "most holy" – the notion that he is completely righteous – which leads him to sin.

Singular and Plural

It is written, "This is the law of the burnt-offering, the meal-offering, the sin-offering, the guilt-offering, the inauguration-offerings, and the peace-offerings" (*Vayikra* 7:37).

This verse is surprising, for it begins with the singular ("the burnt-offering, the meal-offering, the sin-offering, the guilt-offering"), but ends with the plural ("the inauguration-offerings, and the peace-offerings").

All this, writes Rabbi Yosef Karo *Zatzal* in his book *Ohr Tzaddik*, is because the Holy One, blessed be He, does not want His people Israel to sin. He therefore mentions the expiatory offerings (the burnt-, meal-, sin-, and guilt-offerings) in the singular, desiring that a person not sin and thus have no reason to bring such an offering.

Yet in regards to the inauguration and peace-offerings, it would be wonderful for them to be constantly brought, thereby bringing Hashem satisfaction: "A pleasing odor to Hashem." These offerings are mentioned in the plural, with the hope that they will be brought in abundance in order to fulfill Hashem's will.

One Sash Fits All

It is written, "He girded them with a sash and wrapped turbans upon them" (*Vayikra* 8:13).

This is surprising: Why is the sash mentioned in the singular, while the turban is mentioned in the plural? In his book *Meshech Chochma*, Rabbi Meir Simcha HaCohen *Zatzal* of Dvinsk says that this is because, as the Rambam explains (*Hilchot Klei HaMikdash* 8:9), the sash was 32 cubits long and 23 inches wide. Therefore all the sashes had the same dimensions. Such was not the case for the turbans and other priestly garments, which were made to measure for each individual *kohen*.

This is why the verse mentions the sash in the singular, for there was only one size of sash, and it was used for all the *kohanim*. Yet in regards to the turbans, they were made in various sizes according to the requirements of each individual *kohen*.

The Joy of a Jew

One of my sons mentioned two reasons for why Hashem commanded the bringing of offerings.

The first is in order to nourish the *kohanim*, who ate the meat of the offerings. The second comes from the fact that because a person must bring offerings for his sins – and animals are very costly – he will not be so quick to sin because doing so will entail a financial loss. Before sinning, he will think about the fact that sinning will obligate him to bring an offering that will be expensive, and this will distance him from sin.

I replied that these two reasons contradict one another, for if a person is careful to distance himself from sin, he will not bring any offerings, and the *kohanim* will not have anything to eat! If one says that the *kohanim* would eat from the voluntary offerings and thank-offerings, does a person bring a thank-offering every day? He only brings one when he has been saved from a misfortune.

That said, when a person distances himself from sin, his heart will open and overflow with joy because he is living a life of holiness, a life separated from sin. He will then thank Hashem every day, and out of this joy he will bring many thank-offerings and sacrifices to Hashem, Who enables him to depart from sin. It is from these offerings that the *kohanim* would nourish themselves.

Thus King David said, "A psalm of thanksgiving. *Hariou* [Call out] to Hashem, all the earth. Serve Hashem in joy; come before Him with joyous song. ... Enter His gates with thanksgiving, His courts with praise" (*Tehillim* 100:1-4). What connection is there between serving Hashem in joy and the thank-offerings? From the fact that a man is separated from sin, the term *hariou* can be understood as being from the root *ra* ("evil"). That is, from the fact that materiality is evil in the eyes of man and he distances himself from it, he will instantly attain joy. Now once joy has entered him, he will immediately go to the Temple in order to bring a thank-offering to Hashem for having enabled him to depart from sin and serve Him in joy.

