

Gratitude from the Torah

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Parashat Vayikra

How Does the Mincha Offering Teach Us to Cultivate an Attitude of Gratitude?

How Can the Torah be Eternal if Animal Sacrifices May Never Return?

We have begun the difficult book of Vayikra, most of which is dedicated to describing the various types of sacrifices, many of which seem obscure and irrelevant in our time. There is even a *Machloket* (dispute) about whether animal sacrifices will be reinstated when the Temple is rebuilt. Possibly Rav Kook holds that eventually, we will only bring the mincha offering, as written at the end of the Ashkenazi Amidah prayer:

ספר מלאכי פרק ג פסוק י וְעֲרְבָה לַהֲשֵׁם מִנְחַת יְהוּדָה וִירוּשָׁלַם כִּימֵי עוֹלָם וְכַשְׁנִים קִדְמֹנִיּוֹת:

“Then the mincha offerings of Yehudah and Yerushalayim shall be pleasant to Hashem, as in the days of old and former years” (*Malachi* 3:4). “In the future, the abundance of knowledge will spread to and penetrate even animals... and the sacrifices, which will then be from grain, will be as pleasing to G-d as in days of old in yester year [when there were animal sacrifices]” (*Olat Reiyah*, vol. 1, p. 292). If most of the sacrifices were only temporary, how do we reconcile the multitudes of Torah verses describing the details of the various sacrifices with our belief that the entire Torah is eternal? (Rambam, *The Thirteen Principles of Emunah*, Principle 9). Many greater and wiser people have pondered this question, which is too great for me to fully grasp. Yet, I do believe that all the minutiae of the sacrifices have layers of deeper mystical meanings regarding the inner work of effecting true atonement, which in essence is achieving closeness to Hashem. The word atonement can also be read as, at-one-ment – reflecting the Hebrew word for sacrifice *קִרְבָן*/*korban* – ‘close.’ Since the offering brings us closer to G-d, its root is *קָרַב* /*kuf-resh-beit* – ‘coming near’ (R.S.R, Hirsch). Whereas in the past we could come close to Hashem through our holy intention joined with the detailed exterior service of the sacrifice, when the Temple will be rebuilt we will with Hashem’s help undergo a paradigm shift through which we may attain the same spiritual elevation and oneness with Hashem – or perhaps even higher – solely through our holy intention without necessarily needing to go through all rectifications enacted by the actual animal sacrifices. I believe that the inner layer of each of the Torah verses describing the details of the sacrifices will be revealed to pertain to the various steps of the spiritual work necessary to reach such refined soul rectification. Thus, every Torah verse describing the sacrifices is pregnant with an inner meaning pertaining to all eternity.

Stepping Into the Journey of Perfecting Our Attribute of Gratitude

Although the details of the spiritual rectification that will take place during the Third Temple Time are still concealed from us, I believe we are called upon to begin to enact the inner work necessary to prepare for the ultimate oneness with Hashem. Its various steps will be revealed according to our level of climbing the spiritual ladder of cleaving to Hashem. Some sacrifices come to atone and cleanse us from wrongdoing, as to be one with Hashem we must eradicate the Amalek within including its various ego elements that act as blocks and barriers from attaining oneness with Hashem. Other sacrifices are expressions of gratitude, which include innumerable levels to be developed. It is vital to begin the journey of perfecting the attribute of gratitude, especially in our time of ingratitude with its pitfalls of taking our blessings for granted. Now is the time to practice gratitude, reverence, and gift-giving, which are powerful tools for expressing our deepest feelings for everything we have and are. It is well known that since the destruction of the Temple, our prayers have become the substitute for

sacrifices as it states "...May You forgive all iniquity and accept good, and let our lips substitute for bulls [i.e., let our prayers substitute for sacrifices]" (*Hoshea* 14:3-4). Yisrael said, "Master of the Universe, when the Beit Hamikdash stood, we would offer sacrifices and be atoned for. Now we have only prayer" (*Midrash Bamidbar Rabbah* 18:17). Our prayer book is replete with sentiments of gratitude to Hashem – the ultimate source of our existence. It takes deep spiritual work to tune into this, rather than just paying external lip service. It is truly a meditative challenge to rise every single morning, and not only recite *Modeh Ani*, "I am grateful" to G-d but to sincerely feel gratitude in the deepest recesses of our hearts for bringing life to us every single day. When we thank G-d for sustaining the world with goodness in *Birkat HaMazon*, (Grace after Meals) we have the opportunity to tap into immeasurable gratitude for Hashem's kindness, and mercy through which He sustains us. No matter how hard we work to put a meal on the table, we are challenged to recall that at the end of the day, everything we have, and our entire life is only by Divine grace. When we recite *Modim Anachnu Lach*, (We are grateful to You) in the daily Amidah prayer let us infuse our words as we bow deeply to Hashem to tune into the words we are reciting and truly thank G-d "for our souls, which are in Your keeping; for the signs of Your presence we encounter every day; and for Your wondrous gifts at all time."

The Mincha Offering Reflecting the Ultimate Purpose of Sacrifices Eliminating Pride

ספר ויקרא פרק ב פסוק א וּנְפֹשׁ כִּי תִקְרִיב קִרְבָּן מִנְחָה לַהֲשֵׁם סֹלֶת יִהְיֶה קִרְבָּנוּ וַיִּצֶק עָלֶיהָ שֶׁמֶן וַיִּתֵּן עָלֶיהָ לְבֹנָה:

"If a **נְפֹשׁ/nefesh** – soul brings a meal offering to Hashem, his offering shall be of fine flour. He shall pour oil over it and place frankincense upon it" (*Vayikra* 2:1).

The Torah uses the word **נְפֹשׁ/nefesh** – soul regarding the mincha meal offering. This expression isn't used for any of the other voluntary sacrifices. Now, who usually donates a meal offering? A poor person [because flour is less expensive than birds or animals]. [Hence,] the Holy One Blessed is He, says: "I account if for him as if he has sacrificed his very soul!" - [BT, *Menachot* 104b]; (Rashi, *Vayikra* 2:1). The pauper is considered as having offered his *nefesh* – his entire being – to the Almighty, due to the difficulty his offering entails. Although a person of average means who offers a bull as a sacrifice could incur an expense proportionally equivalent to that of a poor person bringing a mincha, the difference between the two lies in their feelings of pride in their offering. Whenever we do something exceptional in public, our altruism is compromised, if only very slightly, by the admiration we receive. When people see us bring a large, respectable voluntary offering, it is hard to avoid feeling a degree of pride or at least a slight tinge of gratification over the respect we earn among peers and onlookers. Thus, even an idealistically driven offering may be less than perfectly sincere, given the justifiable pride that we may feel. Conversely, the pauper may feel embarrassed as he makes his way to the *Mikdash* with a meager sacrifice of oil and grain, and he needs to muster courage and resolve to overcome these feelings and proceed with his offering. Perhaps this is why the pauper's mincha offering is considered as if he sacrificed his *nefesh*. Hashem cares about the level of sincerity rather than the value of the sacrifice itself. The pauper's mincha offering is pure and genuine, devoid of any ulterior motive accompanying the larger sacrifices. The pauper gains no social benefit or admiration, but brings his offering with pure, untainted sincerity. Feelings of pride undermine the sacrifice's very purpose, as it is meant to express a keen awareness that we can get closer to Hashem, and a sincere desire to disintegrate the barrier of pride and self-importance that block us from completely cleaving to Hashem. (The *Beit*

Yisrael (Rav Yisrael Alter, the fourth Rebbe of Ger).

Cultivate an Attitude of Gratitude Even During Times of Hardship

The *Chatam Sofer* asks why the pauper didn't choose to offer the sacrifice of a small bird – a dove or pigeon – which likely would have been the least expensive offering. The mincha offering included a sizeable portion of flour, as well as olive oil and frankincense, which all together likely cost more than a small bird. Then why does the Talmud cited by Rashi assume that the poor would offer mincha sacrifices rather than bird sacrifices? *Chatam Sofer* suggests that the Talmud refers to a pauper who does not even have money for his basic necessities and relies upon charity for his sustenance. His only access to food is agricultural gifts such as *leket*, *shichecha*, and *pe'a* – the portions of the fields that the owners are required to leave for the needy. As this is the pauper's sole source of sustenance, his only option for offering a sacrifice is a mincha, which he brings from the grain that he collected from what the landowners left for the poor. Since he does not have money to purchase a bird, the only sacrifice he can offer is a mincha. For this reason, the pauper is considered as having sacrificed his soul to G-d, as he takes a portion of his meager eating rations, to offer a sacrifice to the Almighty. Generally, people enduring difficult challenges are too embittered and distraught to recognize and feel grateful for the good things in their lives to make altruistic sacrifices. If a beggar – who is forced to collect the gleanings of other people's crops to survive – still feels moved and inspired to offer a portion of what he has to Hashem as an expression of his devotion, then how much more reason do we have to feel grateful for our blessings even in times of hardship. When the pauper allocates a portion of the grain he received through charity for a sacrifice, he shows gratitude for what he has received. This should inspire us to recognize and appreciate our blessings even if they at first seem meager, and to cultivate an attitude of gratitude for what we have even during times of hardship (Rav David Silverberg, *Parashat Vayikra, The Israel Koschitzky VBM, Torat Har Etzion, SALT 2018*).

Gratitude Focus for the Week of Parashat Vayikra – Some Tips for Cultivating Gratitude During Hardships

"It's easy to feel grateful when life is good, but when disaster strikes, gratitude is worth the effort (Robert Emmons, *Gratitude Works*). Research on gratitude has shown me that when life is going well, gratitude allows us to celebrate and magnify goodness. But what about when life goes badly? Amid the war in Israel, how do we feel grateful under such dire circumstances? Although gratitude doesn't come easily or naturally in times of crisis, it is precisely under crisis conditions that we have the most to gain from a grateful perspective on life. An attitude of gratitude can help us cope with hard times. In the face of demoralization, gratitude has the power to energize. In the face of brokenness, gratitude has the power to heal. In the face of despair, gratitude has the power to bring hope.

- **Remember the Hardships** – Trials and suffering can actually refine and deepen gratefulness if we allow them to show us not to take things for granted. During the good times, people may take their blessings for granted and believe that they are invulnerable. In times of uncertainty, though, we realize how powerless we are to control our own destiny. If you begin to see that everything you have, everything you have counted on, may be taken away, it becomes much harder to take it for granted.

- **Think about How Far You Have Come** – No matter how you're feeling about life you can practice gratitude by asking yourself some basic questions:

What have I received from ____?

What have I given to _____?

What troubles and difficulties have I overcome?

The last question forces you to remember the hard times and reflect on them. Think about how far you've come. The contrast between good and bad sets you up for finding gratefulness during difficult times.

- **Develop Gratitude During Grief** – If you're, G-d forbid, dealing with an unimaginable loss of a family member, a chronic or life-threatening disease, divorce, unemployment, or depression, it's likely difficult to find something that's positive in your life. However, if you search with strong intent, you will find at least one blessing or kindness on which you can focus. By allowing yourself to turn to gratitude, you can find hope amid despair.

- **Recall the Good Times** – Reflect on your life when you felt a deep sense of gratitude, then write about it in your gratitude journal. You may focus on more than just one event and write about numerous moments of gratitude. Focus on the gratitude takeaways, even if you're facing a challenging time or circumstance. Out of something terrible – an ailment or adversity – came something good, like a new opportunity or new perspective on life.

- **Help Those Less Fortunate Than Yourself** – Showing kindness to people in greater distress than yourself distracts you from your own hardships and causes you to feel gratitude for your blessings which may seem greater in comparison to those less fortunate. The Talmud tells the story of Rabbi Akiva and his holy wife Rachel, the daughter of the wealthy Kalba Shavua, who disowned her when she betrothed herself to Rabbi Akiva. It was during the winter, but they only had straw to sleep on, and Rabbi Akiva had to pick out the straw from his hair. "If only I could afford it," said he to her, "I would present you with a golden Jerusalem." Later Eliyahu came to them in the guise of a pauper and cried out at the door. "Give me some straw, for my wife gave birth and I have nothing for her to lie on." "See!" Rabbi Akiva observed to his wife, "There is a man who lacks even straw" (*Babylonian Talmud Nedarim 50a*).