

Parashat Vayikra 5782, 2022:

Korbanot for Our Time

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, Chana bat Shmuel, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, Chaya Sarah bat Reb Yechezkel Shraga, Shmuel Yosef ben Reuven, Shayndel bat Mordechai Yehudah, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof, Pittsburgh, and Jersey City, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Mordechai HaLevi ben Miriam Tovah, Yocheved Dafneh bat Dinah Zehavah, and the health and safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Many Torah-observant Jews are deeply conflicted regarding the reinstatement of *korbanot*.

Although they view the binding character of these *mitzvot* with the same respect they have for other commandments, their alienation from this form of service to Hashem engenders a disconnect between what He has commanded and their personal beliefs. In my estimation, this is based on a fundamental lack of understanding of the inherent meaning and purpose of the *korbanot*. As such, we are fortunate that in his *Commentary on the Torah on Sefer Vayikra* 1:2, Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch *zatzal* (1808-1888) offers a trenchant analysis of this subject that is as relevant today as it was in the late 19th century.

Rav Hirsch begins his discussion of the word “*korban*” by suggesting, “We have no word that really represents the idea which lies in the expression *korban*.” He notes that defining *korban* as “sacrifice” fails to convey its true meaning. In addition, since it “...implies the idea of giving something up that is of value to oneself for the benefit of another, or of having to do without something of value...” it is actually diametrically opposed to the essence of a *korban*. Even the term, “offering,” fails to communicate what the Torah means by *korban*:

In addition, the underlying idea of “offering” makes it by no means an adequate expression for *korban*. The idea of an offering presupposes a wish, a desire, a requirement for what is brought, on the part of the one to whom it is brought, which is satisfied by the ‘offering’. One cannot get away from the idea of gift, a present. But the idea of a *korban* is far away from all this.

If a *korban* is neither a sacrifice nor an offering, how is it to be defined? Rav Hirsch suggests the following:

It is never used for a present or gift, it is used exclusively with reference to man’s relation to G-d and can only be understood from the meaning which lies in the root *krv*. *Krv* means to approach, to come near, and so to get into close relationship with someone. This at once most positively gives the idea of the object and purpose of *hakravah* (drawing close) as the attainment of a higher sphere of life.

This concept of *korban* as the vehicle whereby one obtains “the attainment of a higher sphere of life” is the essence of Rav Hirsch’s explication of our term. Approaching Hashem in a true I-Thou relationship through a *korban*, therefore, “...rejects the idea of a sacrifice, of giving something up, of losing something, as well as being a requirement of the One to Whom one gets near...” Instead, the *makrivim* (the ones who bring the *korban*) have an overwhelming desire to draw near to their Creator and, therefore, desire something representative of themselves to “come into a closer relationship to G-d...” From this perspective, the *korbanot* emerge as a symbolic fulfillment of the well-known second verse of the *Shema*: “And you shall love the L-rd, your G-d, with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your means.” As such, the purpose of a *korban* is to enable “*kirvat Elokim*, nearness to Hashem,” that will lead to “the attainment of a higher sphere of life.”

This idea is given powerful voice by *Dovid HaMelech* when he declares, “*kirvat Elokim li tov*” (“Closeness to G-d is what is truly good for me,” *Sefer Tehillim* 73:28). With Hashem’s help and our fervent desire, may we be *zocheh* (merit) to draw ever nearer to Him, and may we encounter His Divine Presence in the third *Beit HaMikdash* soon, and in

our days. *V'chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

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Please contact me at rdbe718@gmail.com to be added to my weekly email list.

*** My audio *shiurim* on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at:
<http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpvd>

*** I have posted 164 of Rabbi Soloveitchik's English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link: [The Rav](#)