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ויקרא

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קרבתו The True Meaning Behind

By Ozzie Vidan

With this week's פרשה, פרשת ויקרא, revolving around קרבנות (sacrifices), this question always comes around: What is the true purpose of קרבנות? Why are they significant?

Over the centuries, different rabbis have offered their opinions to this question, such as רמב"ם, רמב"ן, רב פניקוס, and רב הירש. Firstly, רמב"ם's famous opinion was that קרבנות were used to eradicate the mistaken beliefs of the idol worshippers of the time, who also sacrificed animals to their god. Since the way people worshiped their gods was through קרבנות, the Jews would not know any other way to worship ה' if ה' told them to stop giving קרבנות. It was what society was used to. If ה' told them to stop giving קרבנות it would be like a נביא telling us that we can no longer daven and fast! Therefore, ה' allowed us to keep giving קרבנות, but with some modifications: we can only use sheep, cows, and goats. These animals were worshiped by the pagans, so by giving them to ה' we would be showing them that these animals aren't special.

רמב"ן whole heartedly disagrees with רמב"ם and has three main criticisms for his opinion. first, that קרבנות are described as having a ריח ניחוח, a pleasant smell for ה'. קרבנות should have a more intrinsic value than to just to make pagans stop believing in idols. Two, רמב"ן thinks that this will make the pagan problem worse because they will think that sheep, cows, and goats (all of which they worshiped) are good enough even for our God. Three, רמב"ן gave קרבנות in עין גן which was before עבודה זרה, which means קרבנות cannot be a recreation to עבודה זרה. רמב"ן's own opinion is that animals resemble humans and when we see the animal burning on the altar we should think that this should have been us. The animals atone for our sins by dying instead of us. (This opinion doesn't really make sense because there is more than just a sin offering)

רב הירש says that the words "offering" and "sacrifice" are not translations of the word קרבן. The root of that word is actually קרב, to become close. He says that the only way to achieve true happiness is to become closer to ה', by bringing קרבנות, you are becoming closer to Him. This is further symbolized by the four letter name of ה', that represents mercy, and is used exclusively for קרבנות. The name אלוקים is never used in context with קרבנות because it represents justice. רב הירש also says that we should not look at קרבנות as being cruel, we should think that the animals are achieving their true purpose. This is what the animals were created for.

רב פניקוס's opinion is really a combination of רמב"ן and רב הירש. Rav Pincus believes that the true purpose and significance of sacrifices may not be fully comprehended by those who have never experienced them. He also suggests that sacrifices represent the highest form of gift-giving, symbolizing an individual giving themselves to ה' in order to draw closer to Him. He says that we don't fully understand קרבנות because we never actually experience them. That is why some people would think that they are cruel nowadays. He also says that the highest level of gift giving is an animal gift. It symbolizes that the person giving it is like he is giving himself to the other person. Sacrifices fall under this category - it is like giving yourself to ה', so you can become close to him.

The true purpose of קרבנות has been debated by various rabbis over the centuries. רמב"ם believed that it was to eradicate the mistaken beliefs of idol worshipers, while רמב"ן thought that animals were sacrificed to atone for human sins. רב הירש saw קרבנות as a means to become closer to ה', while Rav Pincus believed that it symbolized giving oneself to ה'. While there are differences in opinion, all of these rabbis agreed that קרבנות had significant spiritual meaning and allowed the us to connect with ה'.

קרבן שלמים The Modern Day

By Ephraim Fischer

In this week's פרשה, we receive the instructions regarding all of the different קרבנות. In particular, I'd like to discuss the קרבן שלמים. When this קרבן is introduced, it is called a "זבח". This is opposed to all of the other קרבנות which are each called a "קרבן". Why is it that just the שלמים was called a זבח?

הקבלה brings down that the reason why this is called a זבח is because the שלמים is a קרבן which the owner eats with his family and friends, and through this festive meal they thank ה' for all that He has done. You also must eat the שלמים with many people so that there are no leftovers from the קרבן. The word זבח is typically used to connote festive meals, which is why it is used here; in order to show that this קרבן is a festivity that should be shared with everyone.

After hearing this, one may be inclined to think that this קרבן is not as important as all of the other קרבנות. After all, it's a festive קרבן, meant for a meal with your family and friends, so why should it be as important as all of the other קרבנות? This could not be any further from the truth. While the שלמים may be on the level of קדשי קלים, lighter holiness, it is still brought to serve ה'. This is shown to us by אונקלוס, who translates the words "זבח שלמים" as "נְכִסְתָּ קֹדֶשׁ־אֵא", the holy offering. The באורי אונקלוס brings down that the reason it is translated this way is because the word "שלמים" has so many different meanings. רש"י says that שלמים comes from the word "שלום" because this קרבן brings peace to the world. רמב"ם says that it comes from the word "שלם", to be full. רשב"ם adds that it may come from the word "ישלים", to fulfill, because the person giving it makes a vow to give a קרבן, which they now have to fulfill. Because of all of these meanings, if אונקלוס had just translated שלמים into its Aramaic translation of "שלמין", it would not give justice to all of the different meanings of its Hebrew name. Therefore, אונקלוס translated it as נְכִסְתָּ קֹדֶשׁ־אֵא in order to reflect its function as a קרבן: To be sacrificed for ה' alone. Despite the fact that we enjoy eating this קרבן with our friends and family, the reason why we are bringing it is in order to give thanks to ה'.

This brings us back to the reason why the שלמים is called a זבח. The entire reason why we have this festive meal, where all of our friends and family are, is in order to thank ה'. This festive meal, this זבח, is not only to satiate our hunger, or to congratulate whoever has just endured this incredible experience. Rather, it's to thank ה' for helping us through whatever we have just experienced. The קרבן שלמים shows us that everything we experience truly comes from ה'.

We can learn from the קרבן שלמים that we must incorporate ה' into our daily lives. Whatever we experience, whenever we're alive comes from ה'. This is shown by the קרבן שלמים, which is brought by someone who has just experienced something great. They don't chalk it up to pure coincidence or people who helped guide them through this experience; they go straight to thank ה' and tell everyone else what good ה' did for them. We too can give a קרבן שלמים every day if we are aware that ה' is present in all of our lives, at every moment. רב אביגדור מילער famously said that the reason why ה' gives us bad things is because we aren't aware of him in our daily lives. We don't appreciate all of the good that ה' gives us until it's too late. He said that every morning we should wake up and shout "מודה אני לפניך!", "I thank You, ה' for giving me life this morning!" to start our days by recognizing that it was ה' who has given us everything in our lives. May we all merit to recognize ה' in our daily lives and give a קרבן שלמים wherever we are.

Editors: Binyamin Orkaby and Ephraim Fischer
Faculty Advisor: Rabbi Jaffe



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