

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of  
Avrohom *ben Ya'akov a"h*

a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

## All the Way to Paris

## PARSHAS VAYIKRA 5778

A curious shift occurs in the *passuk* that introduces the theme of sacrificial offerings at the beginning of this week's *parshah*. The *passuk* states: אָדָם כִּי יִקְרִיב מִכֶּם קֶרְבָן לַד' מִרְהֲבֵהֶמָּה – “When a man from amongst you shall bring a sacrifice to Hashem from the beasts – from cattle or sheep shall you bring your sacrifice” (*Vayikra* 1:2). The verse begins in the singular form: “*Adam ki yakriv* – when a man brings,” and ends in the plural: “*takrivu es karbanchem* – (all of) you shall bring your sacrifice.” Why is that? Furthermore, what are we to make of the seemingly superfluous word “*mikem* – from amongst you”? Seemingly, the Torah could have simply stated: “*Adam ki yakriv korban...* – when a man brings a sacrifice”; why the emphasis on “a man from amongst you”?

### All for One

The Alshich understands these particulars as pointing to a fundamental idea – namely, the connectivity of Klal Yisrael. As Chazal famously state: “*Kol Yisrael areivim zeh lazeh* – All Yisrael are responsible one for the other” (*Sanhedrin 27b*). Thus, the Gemara there asserts that each Jew is responsible for the deeds of another; when one person sins, it is considered as if all of Yisrael has sinned. Now, a primary function of sacrifices is to elicit atonement for the sinner. But if one man's sin is accounted to the whole nation, then, in theory, it is the whole nation that is obligated to bring a sacrifice. Reflecting this reality, then, the Torah reveals how to handle the situation. In fact, it is a great manifestation of Divine kindness; for when an individual brings his sacrifice, Hashem considers it as being brought *on behalf of the entire nation*. And so the verse begins in the singular but ends in the plural, underscoring the fact that a sacrifice brought by the individual is accounted as having been brought by the collective body of Yisrael. In other words, it is not merely an individual's sacrifice, but really “*mikem*” – coming from all of you.

Elsewhere, Chazal expound on the far-reaching effects of *teshuvah* (repentance). The Gemara states: גְּדוּלַת תְּשׁוּבָה שְׁבַשְׁבִּיל יָחִיד שֶׁעָשָׂה תְּשׁוּבָה מוֹחֲלִין לְכָל הָעוֹלָם כּוּלוֹ – “Great is *teshuvah*; for on account of a single person who repents, the entire world is forgiven (for their sins)” (*Yoma 86b*). At face value, this seems to be a mystifying assertion; why should one person's repentance have any bearing on the rest of the population? But the matter is illuminated based on the Alshich's teaching above. As the *Panim Yafos* explains: We have seen that one person's sin is really accrued to the whole people because of the “*kol Yisrael areivim*” principle; thus, when one person sins, it is really a sin of the whole collective. And so when this one person repents, he repents not only for his sin, but for that of the greater body.

The takeaway from the above, of course, should be somewhat sobering. We see how much our deeds and actions are intertwined with the rest of the people. The effects are not confined merely to the perpetrator, but reverberate throughout the entire nation.

It was in this context that R' Yisrael Salanter, the great disseminator of *mussar* (ethical teachings), issued one of his classic pronouncements. One time, he delivered to the members of the prestigious Kovno *kollel* an impassioned and lengthy dissertation on the topic of Shabbos observance. But the audience was somewhat mystified by the event, as the *kollel* counted as its members very illustrious personages, the likes of R' Itzele Petersberger and R'

Naftali Amsterdam. For them, keeping Shabbos was the most basic and obvious of endeavors; the prospect of violating the day's sanctity was the farthest thing from their minds. Why, then, would they need to be lectured so intently on this subject? When this question was presented to R' Yisrael, he was adamant that the matter was completely relevant to the assembled. "You must know," he explained, "that the entirety of Judaism is dependent on your conduct. If a Jew in far-off Paris abandons Torah observance, it is because someone here treated the Shabbos with a certain laxity" (*Otzros HaTorah*).

### **Power of Torah**

Of course, the above holds true in the positive sense, as well; our *mitzvos* and good deeds have a most salutary effect on the rest of Klal Yisrael. And this is especially the case when it comes to the vital effort of Torah study, as borne out by the familiar Mishnah (*Pe'ah 1:1*):

אלו דברים שאדם אוכל פרותיהן בעולם הזה והקורן קצמת לו לעולם הבא. כבוד אב ואם, וגמילות חסדים, והקבאת שלום בין אדם לחברו ותלמוד תורה כנגד כולם.

"The following are the mitzvah-items for whose fulfillment one enjoys the 'fruits' in This World, while the 'principal' is preserved for him in the World to Come: Honoring parents, acts of kindness, bringing peace between man and his fellow, and Torah study is equal to them all."

Referring to the items listed in this Mishnah, the Gemara states that they all share a certain characteristic; that is, they each are "*tov laShamayim v'tov labriyos* – pleasing to Hashem and beneficial to mankind" (*Kiddushin 40a*). This assertion is readily discernable in most of these examples: honoring parents, acts of kindness, and promoting harmony are obviously beneficial to one's fellow in addition to a fulfillment of the Divine will. But how is Torah study considered an entity that is "*tov labriyos*"? R' Elchanan Wasserman understands that this speaks to the supreme potency of Torah as a source of blessing – and life – for the world. For it is the Torah learning of the Jewish people that sustains the world and actually prevents its dissolution (perish the thought). In this sense, then, there is no asset more aptly considered as beneficial to mankind than the study of Torah (*Kovetz Ma'amarim*).

There is an anecdote involving the venerated R' Chayim Brisker, who echoed the sentiment of R' Yisrael Salanter expressed above, but in a manner unique to the wide-ranging and salutary effects of Torah study. A visitor to the Volozhin *yeshivah* once witnessed the scene of R' Chayim engaging with his students in the elucidation of a passage in the Rambam's writings. He was taken by the brilliance displayed by the sage and the exceedingly elevated and vibrant quality of his students' involvement. The visitor remarked to R' Chayim how he felt it a shame that he and his group were located in this remote hamlet of Volozhin. If they were situated in a more cosmopolitan area like Paris or Berlin, they could use their considerable talents to influence the "enlightened" Jewish communities of those places and thus stem the tide of assimilation.

R' Chayim responded: "You are mistaken. It is precisely by learning here in Volozhin that Jews are prevented from abandoning their Judaism in Paris and Berlin!" (*Otzros HaTorah*).

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