

Korach: Firstborn in Body - Firstborn in Spirit

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

Firstborn in Body — Firstborn in Spirit

The section of *Korach* lists the gifts that are to be given by the Jewish people to the *Kohanim*, the priests. These include the firstborn of certain animals, as well as the redemption moneys for the “firstborn of man,” and other firstborn.¹

The Torah goes on to state:² “You must not, however, redeem the firstborn of an ox, sheep or goat.” Rather, these animals are to be brought as an offering to G-d, with the flesh belonging to the *Kohanim*, similar to the Wave Peace offerings.

*Rashi*³ notes that the verse is telling us that the offerings of firstborn animals are similar to Peace offerings: just as Peace offerings are eaten by the *Kohanim* for two days and one night, so too with regard to the Firstborn offerings. Thus, *Rashi* notes, the Firstborn offerings are unlike Thanksgiving offerings, that are eaten for only one day and night.

In the *Sifri*⁴ and *Gemara*,⁵ there is an opinion that the verse comes to preclude our likening the Firstborn offerings to the Sin offerings and Guilt offerings that are also eaten by the *Kohanim*, but are only eaten for one day and night. *Rashi*, however, makes no mention of the above, stating only that the Firstborn offerings should not be compared to the Thanksgiving offerings.

The simple explanation for this is that *Rashi* bases his commentary on the statement which specifically mentions that only a portion of the Firstborn offerings belong to the *Kohanim*, while the Sin offerings and Guilt offerings belong entirely to them.

We may, however, say that *Rashi* is alluding to something more profound:

The term “firstborn” denotes the Jewish people, referred to in the *Torah* as, “My son, My firstborn, Israel.”⁶ The term “firstborn of man” refers to the Jews’ G-dly soul, while the firstborn of an animal — a kosher animal — alludes to the Jews’ “animal,” or natural, soul.

Rashi need not mention that the Firstborn offerings are dissimilar to Sin offerings and Guilt offerings, for as the verse relates to the simple and intrinsic aspect of the Jew, there is no thought that a Jew — in and of himself — has the capacity for sin.

With regard to the Jews’ G-dly soul, even the lowest level of this soul, the *Zohar*⁷ states that the possibility of sin is an enigma and a mystery. *Rashi* expresses an even greater novelty: even the Jews’ animal soul will not sin on its own.⁸

Rather, the “firstborn” is likened to the *Peace* offering: the G-dly soul descended within the animal soul and the physical body in order to bring about *peace* in the world — to transform the animal soul, the physical body, and the world as a whole, into a dwelling for G-d.

It is, however, necessary for *Rashi* to negate the comparison with a Thanksgiving offering, for while a Thanksgiving offering is also a Peace offering, it comes after an individual has been miraculously saved from a life-threatening situation.

In terms of man’s spiritual service, this refers to a person who is severely tested with regard to his spiritual service, placing his spiritual life in jeopardy. Yet, the person succeeds in extricating himself through a “miracle,” i.e., a manner of spiritual service and self-sacrifice beyond his level of comprehension, and far beyond his “natural” manner of service.

We may thus think that, although a Jew is not subject to “Sin and Guilt offerings,” i.e., he may not actually sin, he may nevertheless — because of his body and animal soul — be subject to spiritual tests, so that the “peace” he accomplishes in the world is bound up with “thanksgiving” — for it involves a level of service beyond the norm — a “miracle.”

Rashi therefore negates this notion as well, for a Jew’s simple faith in G-d is so strong and permeates him so completely that he is always at one with G-d. He will thus never encounter situations from which he must extricate himself through “miraculous” means; every Jew’s very nature ensures constant unity with G-d.⁹

Based on *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. XXIII, pp. 134-140

FOOTNOTES

1. *Bamidbar* 18:15-16.
2. *Ibid.* verses 17-18.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Zevachim* 57a.
6. *Shmos* 4:22.
7. III, p. 13b, 16a.
8. See *Tanya*, chs. 1, 7, 8.
9. See *Tanya*, chs. 24, 25.

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