

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 22

Vayikra, Sicha 1

The Midrash:

The ancient custom was for children to be initiated into Torah study with the book of Vayikra which discusses the sacrificial rites. Why this dense, complicated portion? The Midrash explains, “the children are pure and the sacrifices are pure. Let the pure come and occupy themselves with the pure.” (Vayikra Rabbah 7:3)

The Question:

The expression “pure” is never used as a legal classification regarding sacrifices. Animals designated for sacrifices are classified as “complete,” “defective,” “preferred,” but never “pure.”

The only exception is regarding sacrifices that were offered prior to the Giving of the Torah. At that time, the Talmud states, people could offer any “pure” animal but not any “impure” animal, that is, any animal that would later be classified by the Torah as kosher. (Zevachim 115a) The Talmud finds

proof for this in Noach’s offering of sacrifices after the flood, which were brought from pure animals only. (Bereishis 8:20)

But what relevance does the pre-Giving of the Torah sacrifices have with the sacrifices in the book of Vayikra?

The Explanation:

Sacrifices affect atonement for a person who has sinned. It does this by reflecting and calling attention to the elemental bond between G-d and the Jew, a bond that transcends the normative boundaries of obligations and prohibitions. Thus, a sacrifice reveals that G-d and Jew are always one.

This theme of sacrifices, however, is obscured once sacrifices become another commandment, another part of the normative relationship between a Jew and G-d. It is in the sacrifices prior to the Giving of the Torah where this theme is most blatant.

Noach did not fulfill the Torah in all its detail as did the forefathers. Yet he did observe the basic distinction between pure and

impure regarding sacrifices. This implies that sacrifices, more than any other mitzvah, are relevant prior to the Giving of the Torah. Based on the above, this is understood. Sacrifices are, in essence, a “pre-Giving of the Torah” construct. They call back to the bond between G-d and the Jew that exists “prior” to the structure of mitzvos.

The maturation process from child to adult mirrors the trajectory of G-d entrusting the Jewish people with the mitzvos. A child begins life with little expectations or responsibilities, as they begin to grow, a certain degree of maturity is expected from them, and once they reach the age of bar or bat mitzvah, they are fully responsible to fulfill the commandments. Similarly, at humanity’s early stage, during Noach’s lifetime, no human beings were expected to live according to the Torah’s blueprint. The forefathers and mothers were not obligated either, but they chose to observe the Torah, reflecting an advanced maturity. And then, once the Torah was given, all Jews are responsible to the mitzvos.

A child, then, aligns with the pre-Giving of the Torah era. The innocence of the child evokes the elemental bond between the

Jew and G-d. This is why the child begins his studies with sacrifices, because they reflect the purity of the child’s soul.

This is why the Midrash links children to the subject of sacrifices with the unusual phrase, “let the pure come and occupy themselves with the pure.” The Midrash is pointing to the dimension of sacrifices that precede the Giving of the Torah, when the only pre-condition for sacrifices was that they be “pure.” It is these sacrifices which most fully express the “childlike” purity that sacrifices reveal.

This is also why the Midrash continues to say that the world exists only in the merit of the children’s reading of the sacrificial portion. When adults read this portion, their close analysis and understanding of the laws obscures the elemental bond that sacrifices are meant to reveal. By applying their own intellect to the sacrificial rites, adults make sacrifices into another “comprehensible” subject. When children read these verses, however, their lack of understanding reveals the essential connection between G-d and the Jewish soul. And what that bond is revealed, the world is sustained.
