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# Vayikra: Korbanos - Great and Small

Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson  
 From the Sichos in English Collection

According to Jewish law,<sup>1</sup> if an individual vows to bring a larger animal for a sacrificial offering and instead brings a smaller one, e.g., he brings a calf instead of a cow, he does not fulfill his obligation. Conversely, if he vows to bring a smaller animal and brings a larger one in its stead, then he fulfills his obligation.

How can a person who vows to bring a smaller animal possibly fulfill his vow by bringing a larger one, when the verse specifically states:<sup>2</sup> “Keep the pledge that you have vowed to G-d your L-rd”? If he brings a larger animal, is he “keeping his pledge”?

In terms of man’s spiritual service, this law will be better understood by first examining the general idea of sacrificial offerings, or *korbanos*:

The word *korbanos* derives from the Hebrew root *karov*, to draw close.<sup>3</sup> Thus, we find that at the beginning of the Torah portion of *Vayikra*, the Torah introduces the concept of *korbanos* with the statement:<sup>4</sup> “A man who offers (*yakriv*) of you an offering to G-d.” It would seem that the order of the words should be reversed — “A man of you (i.e., from among you,) who offers....”

The Alter Rebbe explains the verse thus:<sup>5</sup> “A man who offers,” i.e., in order that a man come closer to G-d (*yakriv*, “who offers,” literally means to “draw close”) must bring “of you an offering to G-d.” That is, he must bring the offering of himself ; he must sacrifice his personal “animal” — the desire for evil that is called the “animal soul” — and thus draw all of himself closer to G-d.<sup>6</sup>

Herein lies the difference between *korbanos* and all other *mitzvos*. All other commandments are specific in nature, each one connecting a different part of the individual to G-d. *Korbanos*, however, are all-encompassing — a person thereby gives himself altogether, and draws himself entirely closer to G-d.

This comprehensive aspect of *korbanos* is also embodied in the explanation of the *Rambam* as to why *korbanos* are able to bring about atonement:<sup>7</sup> While bringing an offering, a person must have his past sins in mind; he will thus realize that the things being done to the animal soul by right should have been done to him. It is only because of G-d’s mercy that an animal is substituted in his stead.

Accordingly, an offering takes the person’s place because the person is thereby drawing himself entirely closer to G-d.

This also explains why the section concerning offerings begins with free-will offerings,<sup>8</sup> and only then goes on to detail the laws of obligatory offerings. It is because the main purpose of *korbanos* — to draw oneself closer to

G-d — is better accomplished by bringing offerings out of free will than by bringing them because we are commanded by G-d to do so.

In light of the above, we can understand the spiritual basis of the statement that “one who vows to bring a smaller animal for an offering and brings a larger one in its stead fulfills his obligation.”

When a Jew vows to bring an offering, he is not so much out to fulfill a vow as he is endeavoring to draw himself closer to G-d. Thus, the actual performance of the vow is encompassed in the general command to bring an offering, which unites the entire Jew with G-d.

When a person vows to bring an offering, he is in fact demonstrating his willingness to give himself to G-d. Thus, his delight in being able to give even more of himself by bringing a larger offering in no way contradicts his vow.

When a person is ready to offer himself entirely to G-d, then, although he begins “small,” he is assured that he will ultimately attain “greatness” — every fiber of his being will become great, as he will be wholly united with G-d.

Based on *Likkutei Sichos*, Vol. XXVII, p. 1-7

#### FOOTNOTES

1. *Rambam, Hilchos Maaseh HaKorbanos* beginning of ch. 16.
2. *Devarim* 23:24.
3. See *Sefer HaBahir*, sect. 46. See also *Zohar*, Vol. III, 5a; *Sheloh, Mesichtah Taanis* (211b); *Pri Eitz Chayim, Shaar HaTefillah*, ch. 5.
4. *Vayikra* 1:2.
5. *Likkutei Torah* beginning of *Vayikra*.
6. See *HaYom Yom* p. 36.
7. *Vayikra* 1:9.
8. *Rashi, ibid.* 1:2.

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