

Atonement For The Situation

Our Torah-portion concludes with the following Mitzva:

"If a slain person be found in the land which the L-rd, your G-d is giving you to possess, lying in the field, [and] it is not known who slew him, then your elders and judges shall go forth, and they shall measure to the cities around the corpse. And it will be, [that from] the city closer to the corpse, the elders of that city shall take a calf with which work has never been done, [and] that has never drawn a yoke, and the elders of that city shall bring the calf down to a rugged valley, which was neither tilled nor sown, and there in the valley, they shall decapitate the calf. And the kohanim, the sons of Levi, shall approach, for the L-rd, your G-d, has chosen them to serve Him and to bless in the Name of the L-rd, and by their mouth shall every controversy and every lesion be [judged]. And all the elders of that city, who are the nearest to the corpse, shall wash their hands over the calf that was decapitated in the valley; And they shall announce and say, 'Our hands did not shed this blood, nor did our eyes see [this crime].' 'Atone for Your people Israel, whom You have redeemed, O L-rd, and lay not [the guilt of] innocent blood among your people Israel., And [so] the blood shall be atoned for them. And you shall abolish the [shedding of] innocent blood from among you, for you shall do what is proper in the eyes of the L-rd."

Unusual to Rashi's, "I have come but for the simple meaning of the Scripture," and hence, does not involve his commentary with giving a reason of a Mitzva, or its details, yet here Rashi comments on the words, "Shall decapitate," "He breaks its neck with a hatchet [i.e., from the back]. The Holy One, blessed be He, says, 'Let the calf which is in its first year and has, therefore, produced no fruits, come and be decapitated at a place [the valley that was not tilled] which has not produced fruits, in order to atone for the murder of this man, whom they [the murderers] did not allow to produce fruit [i.e., to perform mitzvot].'" Why? Additionally, why the sudden unusual verbiage of, "The Holy One, blessed be He, says," when from the perspective of the "Simple meaning of the Scripture," it is obvious who says any and all commandments?! Lastly, should Rashi have not explained the reason upon the verse's, "shall take a calf," "a rugged valley, which was neither tilled nor sown," or, at the beginning or at the end of the entire commandment?! The reason Rashi gives, seemingly, is definitely not connected to the detail of, "Shall decapitate"?!

Explanation: Rashi is charged here to explain the Simple Meaning of the Scripture to the young child, being that this "sacrificial offering" seems to be contraire to all the other "sacrificial offerings" of the Torah, which are either for the sake of: (i) Atonement of sin, (ii) gratitude, which are both brought only in the Holy Temple, or (iii) purification of impurities (such as the two turtle doves of for the leper), brought outside of the Holy Temple, where the impure was sent.

Note: The two exceptions of where atonement sacrificial offerings were brought specifically outside of the Holy Temple were: (a) The Yom Kippur goat that was sent to the cliff, however, the services of atonement was done by the High Priest in the Holy Temple, and the sending, it to the cliff outside of the Holy Temple --which was not a sacrificial offering service--, was but symbolic of the people's sins being sent away, and (b) the Red Heifer, which in essence --according to the Simple Meaning of the Scripture-- was but the preparatory service so that we should afterwards have the 'Sprinkling Waters' service with which to purify the impure, and nevertheless, the red Hewifer was(1) performed by a kohain, and (2) facing toward the Holy Temple.

Contraire here to the usual laws of sacrificial offerings is that the atonement sacrificial offering of the Decapitated Calf was: (i) Place: Neither in, nor facing, the Holy Temple, and, (ii) Person: Was not decapitated, nor were the hands of the elders washed, by a kohain. Therefore, Rashi must explain that we are dealing with a new and unprecedented form of atonement, mandated here by, "The Holy One, blessed be He, says." And Rashi purposefully teaches this in connection to, "Shall decapitate," being that this detail is an essential detail in this new form of atonement!

The Torah-law of slaughtering an animal, in which the oxygen to the brain, and the nervous system through which the brain feels pain, is immediately shutdown, so that there is no pain to the animal. Decapitation, from the back of the neck, smashing through the spinal bone, is crueler. (Note: Which in Exodus 13:13 this form is used as a punishment for the owner choosing not to give his first born donkey to the kohain.) Thus, Rashi is emphasizing that here, we are not speaking of the regular atonement sacrificial offering which mandates compassionate slaughtering, rather than, the more cruel decapitation, done with a hatchet (unlike the unique process of decapitating of a turtle dove with a thin sharpened thumbnail, which is not as painful, being the softness of its spine, etc.)

* * *

Concerning the reasoning behind this unique mitzva of the Decapitated Calf, we find three teachings:

- (i) Guide to the Perplexed (by Maimonides): The process is all about making public commotion, in getting all to search out who and where the murderer is. Hence: (i) The process of measuring to see which is the closest city to the murder scene, even when it is obviously clear which the closest city is. (ii) the place of the procedure is in Nachal Eitan, which according to Maimonides is a strong flowing ravine (and not land), in which the law mandates that there be no future, "tilled nor sown," forcing the owner to look harder. However, there is no concern that this be a land that in its past was, "neither tilled nor sown," and (iii) the atonement is brought about by the people doing the process, in which the people are

clearly denouncing the act of murder, and are searching to bring the culprit to justice.

- (ii) Nachmanides (and Maimonides in his *Mishneh Torah*): The process of the *Decapitated Calf* is as that of the other two *Atonement Sacrificial Offering* preformed outside of the *Holy Temple*, and as an *Atonement Sacrificial Offering*, this procedure, as well, is, "In the category of Statutes (versus the mitzvot in the categories of *Judgments* or *Testimonies*)," which have not a reason understood by human intellect. Hence, (i) The process of measuring to see which is the closest city to the murder scene, even when it is obviously clear which the closest city is, without any logical reason for doing so. (ii) the place of the procedure is in *Nachal Eitan*, the law would thus mandate that this place presently be of the best of fields, in which to do the **Statute Commandment**, and the verses, "neither tilled nor sown," therefore must be speaking of futuristic and (iii) the atonement is brought about by the work of the process, which is simply what G-d is mandating in his **Statute Commandment**.
- (iiI) Rashi: The process of the *Decapitated Calf* is as that of a new unprecedented atonement process, dictated to us by, "The Holy One, blessed be He, says." (Maybe, Rashi simply sees that the atonement Sacrificial Offering is for doing something you shouldn't. Hence, the people of the city, their elders, etc., are seeking atonement for not providing food and security to the traveler. The murderer isn't seeking atonement, presently. Hence, (-writer of this article)) Rashi sees this as an atonement for the situation, (and not for the committer of the sin,) hence, the new atonement process, which aligns with what happened: "Let the calf which is in its first year and has, therefore, produced no fruits, come and be decapitated at a place [the valley that was not tilled] which has not produced fruits, in order to atone for the murder of this man, whom they [the murderers] did not allow to produce fruit [i.e., to perform mitzvot]." Hence, (i) The process of measuring to see which is the closest city to the murder scene only when it is not obviously clear which the closest city is. (ii) the place of the procedure is in *Nachal Eitan*, **situation** would thus mandate that this place be, "a place [the valley that was not tilled] which has not --in the past-- produced fruits." and (iii) the atonement is brought about by the **Situation Re-Creation** of the process.

* * *

Lesson: So, here we have a person who was killed in the field, and who had no, "fruits of Good Deeds," meaning food or protection. Spiritually this means that he was barren of Torah-study, which is mystically compared to food to be digested and internalized. Likewise, he is barren of mitzvot-observance, which is mystically compared to a protective surrounding, as the mitzvot are the encompassing and protective Will of G-d. Additionally, he was not in the city, which is the place of civilization for the human, created in the image and likeness of G-d. On top of this, where we don't have the murderer, and all we have is to focus on the victim, thus, seemingly, we have the teaching (-Shabbat 55a), "There is no death without sin," and for these reasons, one may consider, while the murderer did wrong, and must be brought to justice, however, why should we occupy ourselves with situation of the victim, other than to try and bring the murderer to justice?!

And the lesson here is that even for such a person, not only his fellow men of the closest city, but the Elders of the city, and even the High Court from the Holy Temple are all mandated to be involved in the situation that happened to this person! More than this, the Sages are being held accountable for not providing this person with "Food -Torah-study," and, "Protective Garments -Mitzvot-observance" to have protected this individual even when he is in the Field! And so too, the High Court from the Holy Temple are being held accountable (-Tana D'vei Eliyahu Rabba Chapter 11), "They had a great Sanhedrin that Moses and Joshua and Phinehas ben Eleazar left for them. They (the High Court) should have gone and tie iron ropes around their waists and to raise their clothes above their knees. And travel to all the towns of Israel, one day to Lachish, one day to Bethel, one day to Hebron, one day to Jerusalem, and also to all the places of Israel, and teach."

This lesson is pertinent to us in this month of the year, *Elul*, when, "The King (G-d) goes into the field, to greet all with a shining face of countenance," to then have all the people in the field, "And when the King returns to the city, they follow Him," in the time of the High Holidays, and fulfill G-d's request to us that we, "Coronate Me over you," on *Rosh Hashanah*, reaching on *Yom Kippur* to, "Atonement for Your people Israel," bringing about that each and every one is inscribed and sealed immediately in the, *Book of the Completely Righteous*.