

Let Us Sacrifice To Our God

Every school child knows the story. God told Moses to go speak to Pharaoh. Moses came to the evil Pharaoh and spoke the iconic words, "Let my people go!" But with all due respect to wonderful kindergarten songs, a simple perusal of our *parsha* reveals that this is actually *not* what *Moshe Rabbeinu* said. Throughout the whole Exodus story, *Moshe* is asking *Paroh* for *three days* of worship in the desert. "Send out My son (the Jewish people) and he will serve Me! (*Shemot* 4:23)" Throughout *Parshat Va'era*, *Moshe* and *Paroh* engage in intense negotiations regarding who will be included and where this worship will occur. But there is never a word uttered regarding permanent freedom from bondage.

The commentaries struggle to understand why *Hashem* didn't simply command *Moshe* to ambitiously ask for total freedom. After all, God presumably could have forced *Paroh* to accept any terms and conditions after the intense affliction of the ten *makkot*. There are many beautiful answers and approaches to this question. But instead of discussing why *Hashem* didn't demand more, I would like to call attention to what *Hashem* did ask for. Sacrifices. "Let us sacrifice to our God."

In a certain sense, sacrifices in the *Beit HaMikdash* are the crowning conclusion of the redemption process. It isn't a coincidence that the song of *Dayenu*, in which we delineate an extensive list of miraculous acts of kindness, culminates with the building of the *Beit HaBechira* in Jerusalem. This is why *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* deliberately emphasizes the bringing of *korbanot* when demanding the freedom of *Klal Yisrael*.

The *Rambam* famously suggests a very technical and practical reason behind the sacrificial order. In the *Moreh Nevuchim*, he explains that *Hashem* gave us this *mitzvah* in order to replace the obsession with sacrifices to idols that existed in all pagan religions at the time of *Matan Torah*. But the *Ramban* vigorously argues, noting that the concept of *korbanot* stretches as far back as *Adam HaRishon* when he was first created, long before the advent of idol worship. And as the *Rambam* himself notes in *Hilchot Beit HaBechira* (2:2), a prominent list of biblical characters brought *korbanot* on the *Har HaBayit* prior to the construction of the *Beit HaMikdash*: *Adam*, *Kayin* and *Hevel*, *Noach*, and *Avraham* and *Yitzchak* at the *Akeidah*. It is only appropriate that man achieve atonement in the place of his creation at the very spot of the *mizbeach*.

Why are *korbanot* so important that they deserve such a prominent place in the exodus story? And why is Jerusalem the ultimate destination for the sacrificial service? On a simple level, the *korban* represents total and complete submission to the Divine Will. The animal metaphorically replaces the Jew bringing it; the Jew is symbolically sacrificing himself and dedicating every body part and organ to the service of the divine. The *korban* is a physical manifestation of a Jew's loyalty to the entire Torah and its moral tenets. This makes it the crowning culmination of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* and *Matan Torah*. And there is no other place in the world better suited for spiritual self-nullification to the Divine than the city of Jerusalem.

This is why the value of *korbanot* is so vulnerable to hypocritical behavior and immorality. The prophet *Yirmiyahu* (7:22-23), frustrated with an obsession over sacrifices without fulfilling the basic moral tenets that Judaism is built on, lambasts *Klal Yisrael*: "For neither did I speak with your forefathers nor did I command them on the day I brought them out of the land of Egypt,

concerning a burnt offering or a sacrifice. But this thing did I command them, saying: Obey Me so that I am your God and you are My people, and you walk in all the ways that I command you, so that it may be well with you." What good is your physical demonstration of self-nullification to My will when you actively subvert my commandments? The whole point of the exodus was for the Jewish people to submit themselves to God, as expressed through the sacrifice of *korbanot*. Without consistent loyalty to the Torah's tenets to back them, the sacrifices become vain and empty expressions of hypocrisy.