

# Terumah: Sacrifice - The Ultimate Virtue

- Nisson Shulman.

Pasuk hakolel yoter, et hakeves haechad... Knowing Hashem not enough. Must serve and love fellow humans. That too, is not enough. Must be ready to sacrifice. Yitro - bein adam lamakom, Mishpatim - bein adam lahavero, Teruma - readiness to sacrifice. Story of Russian Countess. Application to Israelis today.

Terumah: Sacrifice - The Ultimate Virtue

1. There is a strange Midrash on this week's sidrah. Ben Zoma omer, matzinu pasuk hakolel yoter baTorah; "Shma Yisrael, Hashem E-henu, Hashem echad". Ben Nanas omer, matzinu pasuk hakolel yoter, "Veahavta lereacha kamocho". Ben Pazi omer, matzinu pasuk hakolel yoter, "Et hakeves haechad taase baboker, veet hakeves hasheni ben haarbayim". Whereupon Rebi, Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, rose and declared, "Ben Pazi is right. The most inclusive passage is the one which states the requirement to sacrifice"; "Amad Rebbi al raglav, veamar halakhah keBen Pazi; sheneemar, et kol asher Ani mareh otcha, et tavnit haMishkan veet kol kelav, ken taasu".
2. I suggest there are fundamental principles of Judaism between the lines of this discussion, principles that teach lessons for all our history and especially for our times.
3. Ben Zoma felt that the most important foundation of Judaism is to know Hashem and accept his dominion, expressing the relation of man to his Maker – Shema Yisrael Hashem E-henu, Hashem echad.
4. Ben Nanas doesn't disagree. "You are right, Ben Zoma. In order to live a proper life, one must first recognize the guide of life and the author of life. One must know Hashem. But the purpose of life, that for which we were created, is more inclusive than the knowledge of Hashem. That purpose is the love we must show for Hashem's creatures. The most inclusive passage in the Torah is therefore that which commands man to love his neighbor – Veahavta lereacha kamocho. We serve Hashem best by serving His creatures. We worship in His sanctuary when we respect and honor our fellow-men. We are closest to His holy throne when we are at one with our fellow human beings.
5. This is basic to Judaism. Even Ben Zoma who states the fundamental of Shema, agrees that eizehu mechubad hamechabed et habriyot. All our sages assume that prayer and study, important as they are, are not ends in themselves. They have validity only if they cultivate a spirit of Godliness among out people, and this spirit is expressed and emphasized by Ben Nanes.
6. But Ben Pazi says even this is not enough. There is more – much more – to Judaism than the knowledge of Hashem and the profession and expression of love for our fellow man. For none of this would ever mean anything or amount to anything without the one last foundation stone, the ability and willingness to make sacrifices; et hakeves haechad taase baboker, veet hakeves

hasheni bein haabayim. Learn to live through hard times – the evenings of life, and of Jewish history, when sacrifice is required for the sake of being faithful Jews. Learn to conquer even happy times, the morning of success, when the temptations are almost irresistible. Study – the mind – and love – the emotion – are roads to doing, to action. Doing is important, and doing requires sacrifice. The Mitzvot are not expressed in terms of intellectual attainment, nor in terms of emotional commitment, but rather in terms of performance; the countless acts of daily Jewish living with which the Jew crowns his day and his life. The Mitzvah is the performance of Torah, and performance is the real test of Judaism. If the Jew is ready to sacrifice, then his Torah study and acknowledgment of Hashem's dominion will have meaning in his daily life. His love for fellow man will be expressed in maasim tovim. And in fact, that Jew will be better trained to face the enormous sacrifices needed to survive a painful history and a challenging present.

7. This is expressed in today's Torah portion. First the Aron Kodesh was built. The Aron, in which were the tablets of the commandments and the Torah, symbolized the knowledge of Hashem, Shma Yisrael. Then the Menorah was constructed, lighting a life of love towards all people. Then the Shulchan which expressed hospitality and brotherly love. And finally the mizbeach, symbol of sacrifice, for sacrifice is necessary if the mishkan is to stand and survive.

8. This thought is also expressed in the order of the three sidrot that we have read in shul during the last three weeks as they follow each other in succession. First, we read Yitro highlighting the maamad har Sinai when we received the Torah. That Sidrash symbolizes the knowledge of Hashem expressed by Ben Zoma's pasuk, Shma Yisrael. Then we read Mishpatim dealing with laws between man and his fellow man. These laws express Ben Nanes' pasuk, Veahavta lereacha kamocho.

And finally, we read today's portion, including the construction of the sanctuary, and which stands for sacrifice, the only way Judaism is to survive and the only way we will be able to fulfill the commandments of Hashem and ultimately to achieve our destiny. (Obviously Teruma is a pre-requisite to Tetzave.)

9. That is what our rabbis meant when they said, Al shelosha devarim haolam omed, al haTorah, veal haavoda veal gemilat hasadim. Torah, knowledge of Hashem. Gemilat Hasadim, great good deeds to our fellow humans. Avodah, the service, the sacrifice, the willingness to give up and do without for the sake of our people, our land, our heritage our God.

10. That is why Rebbi, Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, rose and declared, Ben Pazi is right. The two previous statements are foundations of Judaism. But sacrifice is the road to survival as Jews and realizing our destiny.

11. STORY: In Russian literature there is a story of a wealthy Baroness who one frosty night was driven to the theater where a play written by a great humanitarian was being shown. Leaving her footman with the carriage, she ascended to her theatre box. The play was beautiful and moving, portraying an unfortunate maid, and how her wicked employers took advantage of her. The Baroness was moved to tears over the plight of the unfortunate maid, raged at the wickedness and thoughtlessness of the employers, wept at the tragedy and misery of the poor girl, finally applauded the author of the play for putting before a thoughtless world such noble sentiments

preaching kindness and love for all people of whatever class. Then she left the theater and returned to her carriage to find that the footman she had left on the box had frozen to death in the frost, waiting the three hours it took for her to return from the play.

So this woman was able to feel great emotions, think great and noble thoughts, but when it came to expressing this in practice, how faulty she was. Judaism tells us that if we are to preach love, then we are to practice it. If we are to know God, we are to observe His commandments. And if we are to survive as a people, it is only going to be through such sacrifice as only the idealistic and the devoted can make.

12. David Gelernter, a contributing editor to “The Weekly Standard”, put the obligation before Jews to seek that idealism and the willingness to sacrifice, as a case for Israel to seek positive values, rather than only negative ones. He writes:

“THERE ARE LARGER questions about Israel's role in the world that have been pressing for years, but nowadays seem to grow more acute by the hour. The axioms that underpinned Zionism have been turned inside out. Modern Israel was conceived as a safe haven for Jews. It had other reasons for existing—but safety, and the dignity that only comes with safety, were Zionism's emotional mainsprings. In recent decades, though, especially since the end of Soviet tyranny, the safe-haven idea has lost cogency like an unwound watch running down. In the last few years, Israel has started to look (on the contrary) like the most dangerous place for Jews in the world--if we exclude the small Jewish communities that still exist in Arab countries. Israel must change the way in which it explains itself.

“When we look at Israel today, it is crucial that we not allow Palestinian barbarism to distract us from another part of this picture: the everyday heroism that lights the whole place up from end to end. A large proportion of Israelis have relatives or connections abroad, mainly in the United States, and they could run to safety if they wanted to. Who would blame them? Who would even have the theoretical right to blame them? But overwhelmingly they have chosen to stay and stand fast. The whole population, man, woman, and child, is holding (is refusing to abandon) a dangerous forward position under fire. It's hard for Israelis to praise Israeli courage, but Americans ought to.

“Why do they do it? Partly for powerful negative reasons. It isn't easy to leave home; and many Israelis are determined that Jews will never again be driven from their homes into alien lands by thug mobs. But there is more to Israel than resolve in the face of a uniquely tragic history. Israel still pays its way using the world's only emotional currency denominated entirely in negative numbers. It needs a new currency with positive markings.

“Israeli thinkers ought to speak less about the tragedy (or the ordinariness) of Israel's 3,000-year history, and more about its luminous greatness; ought to talk up the nation's brilliant prospects, and the central role it has played from Moses to Wittgenstein in creating and molding Western civilization. They don't like to talk this way, but they ought to steel themselves and do it anyway. “The Jew is a desert region,” Wittgenstein wrote, “but underneath its thin layer of rock lies the molten lava of spirit and intellect.” Israeli thinkers have talked enough desert; it is time to talk lava. Much of the world is at a spiritual low point right now, dragging its belly on the ground.

Israel has known before what to do about that. Israel has addressed the whole world and wrought spiritual revolutions, and ought to do it again now.”

And his words can be summed up in one sentence; the willingness to sacrifice – Et Hakeves haechad taase baboker veet hakeves hasheni bein haarbayim.