

(Dvar Torah continued from front page...)

term korbanot until Leviticus, these three offerings were made by Israelites and non-Israelites alike long before the Torah was given. In other words, Olah, Minchah, and Shlamim are just an earlier (and arguably more primitive) symbolic language for certain timeless and universal human-spiritual feelings. By considering both their specific characteristics, and the stories in which they appear, we can understand what each one seeks to express.

The Olah - fully consumed on the altar - acknowledges our fundamental imperfection and lack of standing: that if God's judgement was not tempered with mercy, or held in check by covenant, or if God did not find us pleasing, we would not, and should not, exist. When Noah makes such an offering after exiting the Ark, he is acknowledging that though he may have been the most righteous in his generation, he still has the same flawed nature that prompted God to destroy the world. And when God commands Avraham to offer up Yitzhak as an Olah, it is to emphasize that sparing "the righteous" was more about God's choice to be merciful than the strength of Avraham's argument.

The Minchah is similar, but without the same degree of self-negation Yaakov sends a Minchah to Esau to dissuade him from seeking vengeance. And years later, Yaakov and his sons send one to Yosef in the hope that he will spare Binyamin. A Minchah is therefore less an act of surrender, and more a way to curry favor with a more powerful, and potentially angry party.

But whereas the Olah and Minchah come from a place of yirah (fear/awe), Zevach/Shlamim is rooted in ahava (love). It is a recognition of the wholeness and well-being that comes from being in relationship. One makes an offering, but much of it is returned to the owner to enjoy and share with others. Thus Yaakov does a zevach with Lavan, essentially saying: "I took advantage of you, but you took advantage of me. Let's acknowledge that we benefit each other."

This brings us to Har Sinai. In Exodus 24:5, as part of the Naaseh V'Nishma ceremony of accepting the covenant with God, Moshe and Bnei Yisrael offer up **both** Olot and Zevachim. And Yitro, when he comes to Moses after Har Sinai, also offers both! They grasp the powerful dichotomy of the Sinai experience: that the power and fury of that moment produced **not only** a recognition of our nothingness vis-a-vis God, **but also** the empowering dignity of being in covenant with a God who wants us as partners.

In life, all of us move between these two extremes - the sense that our existence means nothing, and the sense that it is deeply important. It is our blessing as Jews to have inherited a tradition that provides us with the symbolic language we need to grasp this, wrestle with it, and find the meaning within it.

For Discussion: When is Jewish practice for you most like an Olah - an offering of surrender and self-negation? When is it most like a Shlamim - an offering of wholeness, thanksgiving, and mutual benefit?

Fuchsberg Jerusalem Center for Conservative Judaism

Agron Street 8 • P.O. Box 7456 • Jerusalem, Israel 94265

Tel: 972-2-625-6386 • israel@uscj.org • uscj.org • conservatveyeshiva.org



TORAH SPARKS

Parashat Tsav

Shabbat Hagadol

March 24, 2018 | 8 Nisan 5778

Annual | Leviticus 6:1-8:36 (Etz Hayim p. 613-625; Hertz p. 429-438)

Triennial | Leviticus 7:11-7:38 (Etz Hayim p. 617-621; Hertz p. 432-435)

Haftarah | Malachi 3:4-24, 23 (Etz Hayim p. 1295-1298; Hertz p. 1005-1008)

D'var Torah: Language of Sacrifice

Rabbi Andy Shapiro Katz, Director of North American Engagement

In a Jewish movement that has removed prayers for the reinstatement of korbanot (sacrifices), these last two parshiot are challenging. But properly understood, korbanot can give us insight into the human experience.

This week's parasha, Tsav, describes the same korbanot as last week's parasha, VaYikra. But due to its focus on the kohanim, it lists the korbanot in order of their holiness, as expressed in how much of the korban is consumed, and by whom:

- **Olah / Burnt Offering** (ox, sheep, goat, dove, or pigeon - entirely burned on the altar)
- **Minchah / Gift Offering** (grain - part burned on the altar and part eaten by the kohen)
- **Chatat / Sin Offering** (ox, sheep, goat, dove, pigeon, or grain - part burned on the altar, part eaten by the kohen, and part destroyed)
- **Asham / Guilt Offering** (same as Chatat)
- **Shlamim / Well-Being Offering** (ox, sheep, goat - part burned on the altar, part eaten by the kohen, and most eaten by the owner)

One might think that this menu of sacrifices originates with the Book of Leviticus, but in fact there are references to Olah, Minchah and Shlamim (often called Zevach) throughout Genesis and Exodus. Although not referred to by the

(Dvar Torah continued on back page...)

D'var Haftarah: The Stranger

Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty

The haftarah for Shabbat HaGadol (The Great Shabbat) – the Shabbat which precedes Pesach comes from the end of the last of the Minor Prophets, Malachi. His message was preached sometime during the Second Temple period and is messianic in nature. By messianic, I mean that Malachi yearned for the perfected world, when society's ills would be cured. It also means that Malachi was well aware of his society's imperfections and sought to do his part to move his brethren in the right direction.

It should not be surprising to any of us that many of the issues facing his society were similar to problems that face us. Elements of the following verse could easily be found in an op-ed in today's newspaper: "But [first] I will step forward to contend against you and I will act as a relentless accuser against those who have no fear of Me. Who practice sorcery, who commit adultery, who swear falsely, who cheat laborers of their hire, and who subvert [the cause of] the widow, orphan and stranger (mate' ger), said the Lord of Hosts." (3:5)

Resh Lakish, an Talmudic sage (Eretz Yisrael 4th century) was struck by a particular detail in how this verse expresses its concern for the "ger", which meant "stranger" in Biblical Hebrew but could also mean "convert" in Rabbinic Hebrew. Resh Lakish said: "Whoever wrests the judgment of the proselyte is as if he wrests the judgment of the All-High, for it is said: 'And twist the judgment of the stranger (or convert)': the consonants (mem, tet, yod) [can also be read]: And twist the judgment against Me (God). (3:5)" (Hagigah 5a) Normally the word "mateh" is spelled with a "hey" and not a "yod". The unusual spelling inspired Resh Lakish to assert that the oppression of the stranger or convert is tantamount to subverting or, as it were, oppressing God.

Sometimes religion is all about overcoming our atavistic or animal instincts. We are intuitively suspicious of the outsider for obvious reasons. Our religious tradition instructs us, though, to show kindness and justice even to those whom we might not naturally view as insiders. We need God to remind us that they too are His creatures. There is a lot going on in the world these days but these disquieting happenings should not turn us away from this very basic message that turning away from the stranger is tantamount to turning away from God.

For Discussion: As a people whose foundational narrative is that of a family/tribe, why is there such concern for the stranger? And what does the ability of the stranger to "convert" and join our people say about what "really" binds us together?

Parashat Tsav Self-Study

Vered Hollander-Goldfarb, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty

Our Parasha belongs to the Kohanim (priests). We open with general instructions for sacrificing, and move on to the process of turning Aaron and his sons from ordinary Levites into Kohanim.

1) Ashes accumulated on the altar (*mizbe'ach*) and had to be cleared off. A Kohen would remove it and leave it near the *mizbe'ach*. What would happen when too much started accumulating (6:3-4)? Why do you think that the Kohen who took it away had to change his clothing as part of this responsibility?

2) A person bringing an offering of *Shlamim* (wholeness) should bring it with his own 2 hands (7:28-30). What do you think is the significance or symbolism of this action?

3) Chapter 8 describes the preparation period for Aaron and his sons as they are becoming Kohanim that will serve in the *Mishkan*. Moshe is told to wash them with water (8:5-6). What might be the symbolism of the use of water? Are there other occasions on which we use water for ritual, rather than hygienic, reasons?

4) Following the washing, Moshe dresses Aaron in most of his special garments. What do you think this is intended to symbolize? Are there other places (not necessarily in Torah) where clothing carry similar symbolism?

5) The preparations before the *Mishkan* goes into full use will last seven days. What might that remind us of? Can you find any connection between the building and preparing for the *Mishkan* and the period of 7 days that you thought of?

INTERESTED IN ISRAEL, LEARNING HEBREW, & STUDYING TORAH?

*Come join the Conservative Yeshiva's 2018 Summer Program in Jerusalem!
To find out more visit: www.conservativeyeshiva.org/summer2018*

At the Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem we offer students of all backgrounds an opportunity to engage with Jewish texts in a dynamic, inclusive, and collaborative environment. We help students gain the skills necessary for Jewish learning and spiritual growth as individuals and in their communities in North America, Israel, and around the world.

We welcome your comments: torahsparks@uscj.org

© 2018, The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism