

PARSHAH SUMMARY & COMMENTARY

Vayikra/Zachor

Leviticus 1:1-5:26, Deuteronomy 25:17-19
Torah Reading for Week of March 9-15, 2003

The second half of the Book of Exodus—whose reading we concluded last week—was taken up primarily with the details of the Sanctuary's construction; in Exodus' concluding verses, we read how the Sanctuary was erected and the Divine Presence came to dwell in it. Thus the Sanctuary commenced its function as the "Tent of Meeting" between **G-d and man**: the place that is the focus of man's endeavor to serve his Creator, and where G-d communicated to man and made His presence felt within a humanly-constructed abode.

In the Parshah of Vayikra, which opens the book of Leviticus, **G-d speaks to Moses** from the Tent of Meeting and begins His communication of the laws governing the bringing of the *korbanot*, the animal and meal **offerings** that are the central feature of the service performed in the Sanctuary.

And He called to Moses; and G-d spoke to him out of the Tent of Meeting, saying:

Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: A man who shall bring near of you an offering to G-d; of the cat-

tle, of the herd and of the flock, shall you bring near your offering...

The first *korban* to be described is the *olah*, the "ascending" offering (commonly referred to as the "burnt offering"), whose distinguishing feature is that it is raised to G-d, in its entirety, by the fire atop the Altar.

If his offering be an Ascending Offering of the herd, let him offer a male without blemish; to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting shall he bring it near, that he may be accepted in goodwill before G-d.

And he shall lean his hand upon the head of the offering; and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him.

And he shall slaughter the bullock before G-d; and the priests, Aaron's sons, shall bring near the blood, and sprinkle the blood round about upon the Altar that is by the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.

And he shall skin the offering, and cut it into its pieces

And the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire upon the Altar, and arrange the wood upon the fire. And the priests, Aaron's sons, shall arrange the parts, the head, and the fat upon the wood that is on the fire which is upon the Altar. Its inwards and its legs shall he wash in water.

Commentary

VAYIKRA (LEVITICUS 1:1)

Said Rav Assi: Why do young children begin [the study of Torah] with the book of Leviticus, and not with Genesis? Surely it is because young children are pure, and the *korbanot* are pure; so let the pure come and engage in the study of the pure.

(Midrash Rabbah)

Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch (who later became the third Rebbe of Chabad) entered *cheder* on the day after Yom Kippur of the year 1792, eleven days after his third birthday. The child's grandfather, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, instructed Reb Avraham the *melamed* to begin the first lesson with the opening verses of *Vayikra*.

Following the lesson, the child asked: "Why is the word *vayikra* written with a little *aleph*?"

For a long while Rabbi Schneur Zalman sat in a deep meditative trance. Then he explained:

"The first man, Adam, was 'the handiwork of G-d,' and G-d attested that his wisdom was greater than that of the angels. Adam was aware of his own greatness, and this awareness caused him to overestimate himself and led to his downfall in the sin of the Tree of Knowledge.

"Moses, who possessed a soul deriving from *chachmah* of *atzilut* (the highest manifestation of the divine wisdom), was also aware of his own greatness. But this did not lead him toward self-aggrandizement. On the contrary, it evoked in him a broken and anguished heart, and made him

extremely humble in his own eyes, thinking to himself that if someone else had been blessed with the gifts with which he, Moses, had been blessed, that other person would surely have achieved far more than himself. Thus G-d testifies in the Torah that 'Moses was the most humble man upon the face of the earth.'

"In the letters of the Torah, which G-d gave at Sinai, there are three sizes: intermediate letters, oversized letters, and miniature letters. As a rule, the Torah is written with intermediate letters, signifying that a person should strive for the level of "the intermediate man" (a concept that Rabbi Schneur Zalman puts forth in his *Tanya*). Adam's name is spelled with an oversize *aleph* (in Chronicles 1:1), because his self-awareness led to his downfall. On the other hand, Moses, through his sense of insufficiency, attained the highest level of humility, expressed by the miniature *aleph* of *Vayikra*.

(From the talks of the sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson)

AND HE CALLED TO MOSES (1:1)

Said Rabbi Tanchum ben Chanilai: Normally, a burden which is heavy for one is light for two, or one heavy for two is light for four; but can a burden too heavy for 600,000 be bearable for one? Now all Israel were standing before Mount Sinai, and saying: "If we hear the voice of G-d... any more, we shall die" (Deuteronomy 5:22), whilst Moses heard the voice by himself and remained alive.

(Midrash Rabbah)

A MAN WHO SHALL BRING NEAR OF YOU AN OFFERING TO G-D (1:2)

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And the priest shall burn all on the Altar, an ascending offering, a fire-offering of a sweet savor to G-d.

The *olah* can also be a male sheep or goat, in which case the same procedure is followed.

A turtledove or young pigeon can also be brought as an "ascending offering." Instead of being slaughtered through *shechitah* (cutting of the throat), the bird is killed by *melikah*—nipping off the head from the back of the neck. The blood is applied to the wall of the Altar, and the bird's **crop** and its adjoining feathers are removed and discarded; then the bird's body is **burned** upon the Altar.

Meal Offerings

And a soul who shall offer a meal offering to G-d...

Meal offerings, called *menachot* ("gifts"), are prepared of fine flour, with olive oil and frankincense. The priest removes a *kometz* ("handful"—actually the amount grasped by his three middle fingers), to be burned on the Altar; the remainder is eaten by the priests.

There are **five types** of donated meal offerings: 1) the standard "meal offering" whose *kometz* is removed before it is baked; 2) the "baked meal offering," which came in two forms: loaves or 3) flat matzot; 4) the "pan-fried" meal offering; 5) the *minchat marcheset*, deep-fried in a pot.

The following rule applies to all the meal offerings (including the "loaves"):

No meal offering, which you shall bring to G-d, shall be made leavened; for you shall burn no leaven, nor any honey, in any offering of G-d made by fire...

Another rule is that,

Your every meal offering shall you season with salt; never shall you suspend the salt covenant of your G-d.

This latter rule applies to all *korbanot*: "With all your offerings you shall offer salt."

Another meal offering mentioned here is the *minchat bikkurim*

Commentary

The verse does not say, "a man of you who shall bring near an offering," but, "a man who shall bring near of you an offering"—the offering must come from within the person. It is the animal within man that must be "brought near" and elevated by the divine fire upon the Altar.

(The Chassidic Masters)

A MAN (ADAM) WHO SHALL BRING NEAR OF YOU AN OFFERING TO G-D (1:2)

Why does G-d use the word *adam* for "man" (instead of the more common synonym *ish*)? To teach us that a person cannot offer to G-d what has not been honestly obtained by him. G-d is saying: "When you bring an offering to Me, be like Adam the first man, who could not have stolen from anyone, since he was alone in the world."

(Midrash Tanchuma; Rashi)

When we speak of Adam as one who "was alone in the world," we are speaking of the very first hours of his life. Thus we are speaking of Adam before he partook of the Tree of Knowledge—of man still unsullied by sin.

This is the deeper significance of the Torah's reference to the bearer of a *korban*—which has the power to obtain atonement for a transgression—as an "Adam." Every man, the Torah is saying, harbors in the pith of his soul a pristine "Adam," a primordial man untouched by sin. Even at the very moment his external self was transgressing the divine will, his inner essence remained loyal to G-d; it was only silenced and suppressed by his baser instincts. It is by accessing this core of purity, by unearthing that part of himself that did not sin in the first place and restoring it to its rightful place as the sovereign of his life, that man attains the state of *teshu-*

vah—return to his original state of perfection.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

AN ASCENDING OFFERING, A FIRE-OFFERING OF A SWEET SAVOR TO G-D (1:9)

It is pleasurable to Me that I have spoken and My will was done.

(Sifri; Rashi)

[Regarding the offerings,] it is said: "This is an ordinance for ever to Israel" (II Chronicles 2:3). Rabbi Giddal said in the name of Rav: This refers to the Altar built in heaven where Michael, the great Prince, stands and offers up thereon an offering.

Rabbi Yochanan said: It refers to the scholars who are occupied with the laws of Temple service—The Torah regards it as though the Temple were built in their days.

(Talmud, Menachot 110a)

AND HE SHALL REMOVE ITS CROP WITH ITS FEATHERS, AND CAST IT BESIDE THE ALTAR (1:16)

The bird flies about and swoops throughout the world, and eats indiscriminately; it eats food obtained by robbery and by violence. Said G-d: Since this crop is filled with the proceeds of robbery and violence, let it not be offered on the altar... On the other hand, the domestic animal is reared on the crib of its master and eats neither indiscriminately nor of that obtained by robbery or by violence; for this reason the whole of it is offered up.

(Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)

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(also called the "omer") brought on the second day of Passover from the year's very first barley harvest. In this *minchah*, the kernels are roasted by fire before they are ground into flour.

(In addition, a meal offering **accompanied** all animal offerings.)

The Peace Offering

The *shelamim*, or "**peace** offering," could be either male or female, and either from "the herd" (i.e., an ox or a cow), a sheep or a goat.

Like the *olah*, its blood was sprinkled upon the Altar; but unlike the *olah*, which "ascended" in its entirety upon the Altar, the meat of the *shelamim* was eaten by the "owner"—the one who brought the offering (two portions of the animal, the breast and the right thigh, were eaten by the priests). Only certain parts of the animal were burned on the fire atop the Altar:

The fat that covers the inwards, and all the fat that is upon the inwards, and the two kidneys and the fat that is on

them, which is by the flanks, and the appendage of the liver which he shall remove with the kidneys.

If the peace offering is a sheep, "the whole fat tail, up to the backbone" was added to these.

And the priest shall burn it on the Altar; it is [divine] food, a fire-offering, a sweet savor to G-d.

Because they are offered to G-d on the Altar, these specified veins of fat, which the Torah calls *cheilev*, are forbidden for consumption in all animals: "It shall be a perpetual statute for your generations throughout all your habitations: all *cheilev* and all blood, you shall not eat."

The Sin Offerings

The *korbanot* discussed up to this point are "donations"—offerings pledged out of a desire to give to G-d. Now the Torah moves on to discuss obligatory offerings, such as the *chatat*, the "sin-offering" brought to **atone** for an inadvertent transgression of the divine will.

And G-d spoke to Moses, saying:

... If a soul shall sin through ignorance against any of the commandments of G-d, and shall do one of the things that must not be done...

Different offerings are prescribed depending on the **stature** of

Commentary

AND HE SHALL REND IT BY ITS WINGS... AND THE PRIEST SHALL BURN IT ON THE ALTAR (1:17)

The wings, with the feathers, were burned with it. An ordinary being, should he smell the odor of burning feathers, is nauseated thereby... Why then all this? Just in order that the Altar may be sated and glorified by the sacrifice of a pauper.

(Midrash Rabbah; Rashi)

A SOUL WHO SHALL OFFER A MEAL OFFERING TO G-D (2:1)

Why is the meal-offering distinguished in that the expression "soul" is used? Because G-d says: "Who is it that usually brings a meal-offering? It is the poor man. I account it as though he had offered his own soul to Me."

Why is the meal-offering distinguished in that five kinds of oil dishes are stated in connection with it? This can be likened to the case of a human king for whom his friend had prepared a feast. The king knew that his friend was poor [and had only one food to offer him], so he said to him: "Prepare it for me in five kinds of dishes so that I will derive pleasure from you."

(Talmud, Menachot 104b)

It is said of a large ox, "A fire-offering, a sweet savor"; of a small bird, "A fire-offering, a sweet savor"; and of a meal-offering, "A fire-offering, a sweet savor." This is to teach you that it is the same whether a person

offers much or little, so long as he directs his heart to heaven.

(Talmud, Menachot 110a)

An ox was once being led to sacrifice, but would not budge. A poor man came along with a bundle of endive in his hand. He held it out towards the ox, which ate it... and then allowed itself to be led to sacrifice. In a dream it was revealed to the owner of the ox: "The poor man's sacrifice superceded yours."

Once a woman brought a handful of fine flour, and the priest despised her, saying: "See what she offers! What is there in this to eat? What is there in this to offer up?" It was shown to him in a dream: "**Do not despise her!** It is regarded as if she had sacrificed her own life."

(Midrash Rabbah)

NO LEAVEN... [SHALL BE PRESENT] IN ANY OFFERING OF G-D (2:11)

Leaven, which is dough that has fermented and risen, represents self-inflation and pride, and there is nothing more abhorrent to G-d. In the words of the Talmud, "G-d says of the prideful one, 'He and I cannot dwell together in the world.'"

(The Chassidic Masters)

NO LEAVEN, NOR ANY HONEY, IN ANY OFFERING OF G-D (2:11)

Ultra-sweet honey and ultra-sour leaven, are opposite extremes; G-d does not like extremes.

(The Rebbe of Kotzk)

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the transgressor.

If the anointed priest does sin to the guilt of the people, he shall bring... a young bullock without blemish to G-d.

A similar offering is also brought in the case that the entire community commits a transgression as a result of an erroneous ruling by the Sanhedrin (High Court).

If the entire congregation of Israel shall sin through ignorance, and the thing be hid from the eyes of the community, and they have done something against any of the commandments of G-d concerning things which should not be done...

Commentary

NEVER SHALL YOU SUSPEND THE SALT COVENANT OF YOUR G-D... WITH ALL YOUR OFFERINGS YOU SHALL OFFER SALT (2:13)

When G-d separated the supernal waters from the lower waters (see Genesis 1:6-8), He made a covenant with the lower waters that their salt will be offered on the Altar.

(Rashi)

The world is one part wilderness, one part settled land, and one part sea. Said the sea to G-d: "Master of the Universe! The Torah will be given in the wilderness; the Holy Temple will be built on settled land; and what about me?" Said G-d: "The people of Israel will offer your salt upon the Altar."

(Yalkut HaReuveni)

The *korban*, which was the vehicle of the elevation of the world to G-d, had to include "representatives" of all four sectors of the creation: the inanimate world, the vegetable world, the animal world, and the human world. Thus the *korban* was offered by a human being, and consisted of an animal, grain, and salt.

(Rabbi Isaac Luria)

AND IF HIS OFFERING BE A SACRIFICE OF PEACE OFFERING (3:1)

Why is it called a "peace offering"? Because everyone partakes of it. The blood and fat go to the Altar, the breast and thigh to the priest, and the hide and flesh, to the owner.

(Torat Kohanim)

AND THE PRIEST SHALL BURN IT ON THE ALTAR; IT IS FOOD... TO G-D (3:11)

Do you think that He needs to eat? Does not the verse (Psalms 50:12-13) proclaim, "Should I hunger, I would not tell you, for the world, and all it

When the sin which they have sinned is known, then the congregation shall offer a young bullock for the sin, and bring it before the Tent of Meeting. And the elders of the congregation shall lean their hands on the head of the bullock before G-d..

Both the High Priest's sin offering and that of the congregation was distinguished in that it had to be a male bullock (the ordinary sin-offering was a female sheep or goat); it had to be offered by the High Priest; its blood was sprinkled "indoors"—inside the Sanctuary on the Golden Altar and opposite the *Parochet*; after the *chalabim* were burned on the Altar, the rest of the animal was not eaten by the priests (as was the case with ordinary sin-offerings) but rather "the skin of the bullock, and all its flesh, with its head, its legs, its inwards and its dung, even the whole bullock shall he carry forth outside the camp to a clean place... and burn it on the wood with fire."

A **nassi** (king) who commits an inadvertent transgression brings an offering similar to the standard sin-offering, except that it must be a male goat.

contains, is Mine... Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" But it is not for My desire that you are offering, [says G-d,] but for your own, as it is written (Leviticus 19:5), "For your own desire, you should offer it."

(Talmud, Menachot 110a)

When the Torah refers to the *korbanot* as "G-d's bread," this is obviously a metaphor; but what is its significance? In what sense are we "feeding" G-d when we offer up to Him ourselves and our material resources in the quest to serve Him?

Our sages have said that "G-d fills the world as a soul fills a body." On the human level, food is what sustains "life," which is the assertion of the soul's powers via its physical vessel, the body. And so it is with the divine life-force that suffuses the created existence: "G-d's food" is what we would call whatever it is that asserts the divine reality as a manifest presence in our physical world.

With our every act of serving G-d, we fulfill the divine purpose of creation—that "there be for Him a dwelling in the physical realms." We thus breathe life into the world-body, asserting and manifesting its quintessence and soul.

(The Chassidic Masters)

AND THE PRIEST SHALL BURN THEM UPON THE ALTAR... ALL THE FAT IS TO G-D (3:16)

Everything that is for the sake of G-d should be of the best and most beautiful. When one builds a house of prayer, it should be more beautiful than his own dwelling. When one feeds the hungry, he should feed him of the best and sweetest of his table. When one clothes the naked, he should clothe him with the finest of his clothes. Whenever one designates something for a holy purpose, he should sanctify the finest of his possessions; as it is written, "All the fat is to G-d."

(Maimonides)

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Anyone else who sins inadvertently, brings

a kid of the goats... [or] a lamb... a female without blemish.

And he shall lean his hand upon the head of the sin offering, and slaughter it for a sin offering in the place where they slaughter the burnt offering.

And the priest shall take of the blood of the sin offering with his finger, and put it upon the horns of the Altar of Burnt Offering; and all the [remaining] blood he shall pour into the foundation of the Altar.

And he shall remove its fat, as the fat is removed from... the peace offering; and the priest shall burn these upon

the Altar, upon the pyres of G-d.

And the priest shall make atonement for his sin that he has committed, and it shall be forgiven him.

With certain transgressions (such as failure to fulfill an oath to bear **witness**, or entering the Sanctuary in a state of ritual impurity), the sin-offering brought depended on the **financial ability** of the transgressor. One who could not afford a female sheep or goat, brought two turtledoves or two young pigeons—one bird to be brought as an “ascending offering” and the second bird as a sin offering. A person of even lesser means, who could not even afford two birds, brought a meal offering, on which “he shall put no oil upon it, neither shall he put any frankincense upon it, for it is a sin offering.”

Guilt Offerings

For certain transgressions, the offering brought in atonement is not a “sin offering” but an *asham* (“guilt offering”). An *asham* is distinguished from the standard sin offering in that it was a male sheep, and that it had to be worth at least “two shekels of silver of the shekel of the Sanctuary.”

Commentary

IF THE ANOINTED PRIEST DOES SIN TO THE GUILT OF THE PEOPLE (4:3)

When a leader sins, this becomes the excuse for everyone else’s wrongdoings.

(The Gaon of Lissa)

THAT A PRINCE SHOULD SIN... (4:22)

The Torah employs the uncommon usage *asher* (“that a...”) to say: Fortunate (*ashrei*) is the generation whose leader applies himself to atone for his errors.

(Talmud; Rashi)

IF A PERSON SIN, AND HEAR THE VOICE OF ADJURATION, AND IS A WITNESS, WHETHER HE HAS SEEN OR KNOWN OF IT; IF HE DOES NOT TESTIFY, THEN HE SHALL HEAR HIS INIQUITY (5:1)

There was once a governor who used to put to death the purchasers of stolen goods and release the thieves, and all used to find fault with him, saying that he was not acting correctly. What did he do? He issued a proclamation throughout the province, saying: “Let all the people go out to the campus!” What did he do then? He brought some weasels and placed before them portions of food. The weasels took the portions, and carried them to their holes. The next day he again issued a proclamation, saying: “Let all the people go out to the campus!” Again he brought weasels and placed portions of food before them, but stopped up all holes. The weasels took the portions, and carried them to their holes, but finding these stopped up, they brought their portions back to their places. Thus he demonstrated that all the trouble is due to receivers.

This then we learn from the governor; how can we illustrate our texts by an example? Reuben stole from Simeon, and Levi knew of it. Said Reuben to Levi: “Do not testify against me, and I will give you half.” The following day people enter the synagogue, and hear the overseer announce: “Who has stolen from Simeon?” and Levi is present there.

Surely The Torah has decreed: “If he does not testify, then he shall hear his iniquity.”

(Midrash Rabbah)

IF A PERSON SIN... AND IS A WITNESS (5:1)

If a person witnesses a wrongdoing of his fellow, this is a message to him that he, too, is guilty of a similar failing.

(Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov)

HE SHALL RESTORE IT IN THE PRINCIPAL, AND SHALL ADD THE FIFTH PART MORE TO IT (5:16)

The addition should be a fifth of the addition and the principle together (i.e., he must add 25% of the principle); this is the opinion of Rabbi Yoshiah. Rabbi Jonathan says: a fifth of the principle.

(Talmud, Bava Metzia 54a)

AND IF A PERSON SIN... THOUGH HE KNOW IT NOT, HE IS GUILTY (5:17)

One who knows for certain that he transgressed, brings a sin offering; one who doubts if he transgressed, must atone with a guilt offering. Why does the one who has perhaps not transgressed require the more valuable offering? Because his regret is not as complete.

(Raavad)

IF A PERSON SIN, AND COMMIT A BETRAYAL AGAINST G-D, AND LIE TO HIS FELLOW (5:21)

Said Rabbi Akiva: Why does the Torah consider him to have committed “a betrayal against G-d”? ... Because in defrauding his fellow, he is also defrauding the Third Party to their dealings.

(Rashi)

How is the offender also defrauding G-d? On the most basic level, he is

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Three types of *asham* are described in our Parshah. The first is brought by one who unintentionally made unauthorized use of property belonging to the Sanctuary—a crime called *me'illah* ("betrayal"). He must pay back what he had expropriated and add to that an additional **one-fifth** of its value, and also bring an *asham* to obtain atonement for his unintentional trespass.

A second type of "guilt offering" is the *asham talu*, brought by one who thinks he may have unwittingly committed a transgression, but is not sure (for example, he had two pieces of meat before him and ate one of them; later, he discovers that one of them was *cheilev*—forbidden fat—a trespass which would obligate him to bring a sin offering if he would know with certainty that he committed it).

The third and last *asham* of our Parshah is the one brought in atonement by one who swears falsely in the process of defrauding his fellow man:

If a person sin, and commit a betrayal against G-d, and lie to his fellow regarding that which was delivered him to keep, or in a loan, or in a thing taken away by violence, or withholding payment; or he found a lost object and has lied concerning it; if he swears falsely in any of all these

that a man does, sinning in that...

He shall restore it in the principal, and shall add the fifth part more to it, and give it to him to whom it belongs, in the day of his [atonement of his] guilt.

And he shall bring his guilt offering to G-d, a ram without blemish out of the flock, according to the value of a guilt offering, to the priest.

And the priest shall make atonement for him before G-d: and it shall be forgiven him for anything of all that he has done wherein to incur guilt.

Parshat Zachor

This being the Shabbat before Purim, on which we celebrate the foiling of Haman the Amalekite's plot to destroy the people of Israel, the weekly reading is supplemented by Parshat Zachor ("Remember") in which we are commanded to remember the evil of Amalek and to eradicate it from the face of the earth. The reading is from Deuteronomy 25:17-19):

Remember what Amalek did to you on the road, on your way out of Egypt. That he encountered you on the way and cut off those lagging to your rear, when you were tired and exhausted; he did not fear G-d. And it shall come to pass, when the L-rd your G-d has given you rest from all your enemies round about, in the land which the L-rd your G-d is giving you for an inheritance to possess it, that you shall obliterate the memory of Amalek from under the heavens. Do not forget.

Commentary

defying the Supernal Author of the command, "You shall not steal." Another explanation is that although it may be that not a single earthly soul knows what really happened between the litigants, G-d is the omnipresent witness to their dealings; so in addition to lying to his fellow, he is lying in face of the all-knowing "Third Party to their dealings."

A deeper understanding of the defrauder's crime against G-d can be derived from another saying by Rabbi Akiva, in which he speaks of how G-d "acquired and bequeathed His world" to man (Talmud, Rosh Hashanah 31a). Chassidic teaching explains this to mean that the concept of human "property rights" over the resources of G-d's the world is divinely ordained, and is integral to the divine purpose in creation: in order for man to be able develop his environment into a "home for G-d," thereby making the world a true divine "acquisition," each individual's proprietorship over the portion of creation he is charged to develop must be defined and safeguarded. Hence G-d's "bequest of His world" to man is at the very heart of His own ownership—this is the manner in which the Creator Himself desired that His "acquisition" of creation be realized.

Thus the Torah says: "If a person... commit a betrayal against G-d, and lie to his fellow." You have not only lied to your fellow—you have betrayed the "Third Partner", depriving Him of His ownership of His world as He Himself defines it.

(The Lubavitcher Rebbe)

REMEMBER WHAT AMALEK DID TO YOU ON THE ROAD, ON YOUR WAY OUT OF

EGYPT. THAT HE ENCOUNTERED YOU ON THE WAY (DEUTERONOMY 25:17-18)

[The Hebrew word *karcha*, "encountered you," also translates "cooled you off". Thus the Midrash says:] What is the incident (of Amalek) comparable to? To a boiling tub of water which no creature was able to enter. Along came one evil-doer and jumped into it. Although he was burned, he cooled it for the others. So, too, when Israel came out of Egypt, and G-d rent the sea before them and drowned the Egyptians within it, the fear of them fell upon all the nations. But when Amalek came and challenged them, although he received his due from them, he cooled the awe of them for the nations of the world.

(Midrash Tanchuma)

Amalek is thus the essence of chutzpa, of completely irrational challenge to truth. There are challenges to the truth that are based on rational argument. There are evasions that arise from subjective motives and desires. But then there is "Amalek," who neutralizes the most compelling evidence and chills the most inspiring experience with nothing more than his cynicism and audacity. There is only one way to defeat Amalek: to remember. Because his challenge is not rational, it cannot be rationally refuted; because it is immune to feeling, it cannot be repelled by a rousing of emotion. To counteract Amalek's poison, one must call forth the souls reserves of supra-rational faith, instilled within it when it was first formed as a spark of the divine essence--a faith which, when remembered, can meet his every moral challenge.

(The Chassidic Masters)

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From the Chassidic Masters

THE OFFERED BEAST

Why, if a person sinned and wished to make atonement, or he was just in a generous mood and wished to offer something to G-d, does he sacrifice an innocent animal? Why doesn't he sacrifice himself, for example?

Answer the Chassidic masters: he does.

The Torah, they explain, makes this very point in the verse that introduces the laws of the *korbanot*:

A man who shall bring near of you an offering to G-d, from the beast, from the cattle and from the sheep, you shall bring close your offering...

As Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi points out, the verse does not say, "a man of you who shall bring near an offering," but, "a man who shall bring near of you an offering"—the offering brought is "of you". The sacrificed animal is a projection, in the extra-human sphere, of a process transpiring in the intra-human sphere..

Man, says the Talmud, is a world in miniature. Which means that the world is a man in macro. Our world contains oceans and continents, forests and deserts, men and beasts; so, too, does man. The human psyche includes a subconscious "sea" and a "terrestrial" persona; it has lush forests and barren deserts; and it has a "human soul" and an "animal soul."

The human soul—also called the "G-dly soul"—embodies all that is upward-reaching and transcendent in man. It gravitates to its source in G-d, driven by an all-consuming love for G-d and the desire to lose itself within His all-pervading essence. Its modes of expression are the thought, speech and deed of Torah—the means by which man achieves closeness and attachment to his Creator.or.

The "animal soul" is the self that man shares with all living creatures: a self driven and fulfilled by its physical needs and desires. Its vehicle of expression are the endeavors of material life.

"A man who shall offer of you an offering to G-d, from the beast, from the cattle and from the sheep, you shall bring close your offering." When a person brings an animal from his paddock as a gift to G-d, the

gesture is devoid of meaning unless he also offers the animal within himself.

The Ox and the Plow

What is to be done with this animal?

The beast within man has not been placed there just so that it should be suppressed or uprooted. "Much grain is produced with the might of the ox," remarked the wisest of men, and the Chassidic masters say that this is a reference to the animal inside our hearts. An ox run amok will trample and destroy, but when dominated by a responsible human vision and harnessed to its plow, the beast's vigor translates into "much grain"—a far richer crop than what human energy alone might produce.

The same is true of the beast in man. Nothing—not even the G-dly soul's keenest yearnings—can match the intensity and vigor with which the animal soul pursues its desires. Left to its own devices, the animal soul tends toward corrupt and destructive behavior; but the proper guidance and training can eliminate the negative expressions of these potent drives and exploit them towards good and G-dly end.

The first type of *korban* described in our Parshah is the *olah*—the "ascending" offering, commonly referred to as the "burnt offering." The *olah* is unique in that it is an absolute offering: after it is slaughtered in the Temple courtyard and its blood is poured upon the Altar, it is raised up upon the Altar and is burned, in its entirety, as a "a fiery pleasure unto G-d."

The burning of something is the physical counterpart of the sublimation process described above. When a substance is burned, its outer, material form is eliminated, releasing the energy locked within. This is the inner significance of the *korban*: the animal energy within man is divested of its material forms and offered upon the altar of service to G-d.

The Eaten Offerings

After detailing the various types of *korban olah*, the Torah goes on to discuss the other two primary categories of offerings—the *korban chattat* ("sin offering") and *korban shelamim* ("peace offering").

Like that of the *olah*, the blood of these offerings was poured on the Altar. But unlike the wholly burnt offering, only certain parts of *chattat* and *shelamim* "ascended" by fire. The Torah designates certain veins of fat (called the *chalabim*) which should be removed and burned. But the meat of the *korban* was eaten under special conditions of holiness. (The meat

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of the *chattat* was eaten by the priests, and that of the *shelamim* by the person who brought the offering, with certain portions given to the priests).

There are portions of our material lives which, like the burnt offering, are wholly converted to holiness: the money given to charity, the leather made into *tefillin*, the energy expended in Torah study, prayer and the performance of a mitzvah. But there is also the money we spend to feed our families, the leather we make into shoes, the energy we expend on the everyday business of physical life. But these, too, can be served as a *korban* to G-d, when they are “eaten in holiness”—when the money is honestly earned, the food is kosher, and our everyday activities are conducted in a way that is considerate of our fellows and faithful to the divine laws of life.

The “blood” of the animal soul—its fervor and passion for material things—must be poured upon the Altar; its “fat”—its excessive indulgence and pleasure-seeking—must be burned. But the gist of the animal self—its “meat”—can be sanctified even when it is not wholly converted into a holy act. As long as they are “eaten in holiness,” our material endeavors can be a means of “bringing close” (—the meaning of the word *korban*) of man to G-d.

AMALEK

The people of Israel journeyed... and they camped in Rephidim....

And [Moses] named the place “Challenge and Strife” because of the strife of the people of Israel and their challenging of G-d, saying, “Is G-d amongst us or not?”

Then came Amalek and attacked Israel in Rephidim.

Exodus 17:1-8

Remember what Amalek did to you on the road, on your way out of Egypt. That he encountered you on the way and cut off those lagging to your rear, when you were tired and exhausted; he did not fear G-d. Therefore... you must obliterate the memory of

Amalek from under the heavens. Do not forget.

Deuteronomy 25:17-19

The Jewish people had just experienced one of the greatest manifestations of divine power in history. Ten supernatural plagues had compelled the mightiest nation on earth to free them from their servitude. The sea had split before them, and manna had rained from the heavens to nourish them. How could they possibly question “Is G-d amongst us or not?”

Yet such is the nature of doubt. There is doubt that is based on rational query. There is doubt that rises from the doubters subjective motives and desires. But then there is doubt pure and simple: irrational doubt, doubt more powerful than reason. Doubt that neutralizes the most convincing arguments and the most inspiring experiences with nothing more than a cynical shrug.

Such was the doubt that left the Jewish people susceptible to attack from Amalek. “Amalek,” in the spiritual sphere, is the essence of baseless, irrational indifference; in the words of the Midrash:

What is the incident (of Amalek) comparable to? To a boiling tub of water which no creature was able to enter. Along came one evil-doer and jumped into it. Although he was burned, he cooled it for the others. So, too, when Israel came out of Egypt, and G-d rent the sea before them and drowned the Egyptians within it, the fear of them fell upon all the nations. But when Amalek came and challenged them, although he received his due from them, he cooled the awe of them for the nations of the world (Midrash Tanchuma, Ki Teitzei 9).*

This is why Amalek and what he represents constitutes the arch enemy of the Jewish people and their mission in life; as Moses proclaimed following the war with Amalek, “G-d has sworn by His throne; G-d is at war with Amalek for all generations” (Exodus 17:16). Truth can refute the logical arguments offered against it. Truth can even prevail over man’s selfish drives and desires; for intrinsic to the nature of man is the axiom that “—that it is within a person’s capacity to so thoroughly appreciate a truth that it is ingrained in his character and implemented in his behavior. But man’s rational faculties are powerless against the challenge of an Amalek who leaps into the boiling tub, who brazenly mocks the truth and cools man’s most inspired moments with nothing more than a dismissive “So what?”

The Bottleneck

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Amalek attacked Israel “on the road, on the way out of Egypt,” as they were headed toward Mount Sinai to receive G-d’s Torah and their mandate as His people. Here, too, history mirrors the inner workings of the soul: the timing of the historical Amaleks attack describes the internal circumstances under which the pestilence of baseless doubt rears its head.

In the Passover Haggadah we say: “In every generation one must see himself as if he himself came out of *Mitzrayim*.” *Mitzrayim*, the Hebrew word for Egypt, means “narrow straits”; on the personal level, this refers to what Chassidic teaching calls the “narrowness of the neck” which intersects between the mind and the heart. Just as, physically, the head and the heart are joined by a narrow passageway the neck—so it is in the spiritual-psychological sense. Although, as mentioned above, the mind possesses an innate superiority over the heart, it is a most difficult and challenging task for a person to exercise this superiority to direct and mold his feelings and desires to conform with what he knows to be right. This is the “Exodus from *mitzrayim*” that is incumbent on each and every generation: the individual challenge to negotiate the narrow straits of his internal “neck,” to overcome the material enticements, the emotional subjectivity, the ego and self-interest which undermine the mind’s authority over the heart and impede its influence on the person’s character and behavior.

As long as a person is still imprisoned in his personal *mitzrayim*, he faces many challenges to his integrity. As long as he has not succeeded in establishing his mind as the axis on which all else revolves, his base instincts and traits such as greed, anger, the quest for power and instant gratification may get the better of him. But once he achieves his personal “Exodus” from the narrow straits of his psyche, once he establishes his knowledge and understanding of the truth as the determining force in his life, the battle is all but won. He may be confronted with negative ideas and rationalizations, but free of the distortions of self-interest, the truth will triumph. He may be tempted by negative drives and desires, but if in his life the mind rules the heart, it will curb and ultimate-

ly transform them.

But there remains one enemy which threatens also the post-Exodus individual: Amalek. Amalek “knows his Master and consciously rebels against Him.” Amalek does not challenge the truth with arguments, or even with selfish motivations — he just disregards it. To the axiom, “Do truth because it is true,” Amalek says “So what?” Armed with nothing but his *chutzpah*, Amalek jumps into the boiling tub, contests the incontestable. And in doing so he cools its impact.

Beyond Reason

How is one to respond to Amalek? How is one to deal with the apathy, the cynicism, the senseless doubt within? Amalek is irrational and totally unresponsive to reason; the answer to Amalek is likewise supra-rational.

In his Tanya, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi discusses the faith in G-d that is integral to the Jewish soul. Faith is not something that must be attained; it need only be revealed, for it is woven into the very fabric of the soul’s essence. Faith, continues Rabbi Schneur Zalman, transcends reason. Through faith one relates to the infinite truth of G-d in its totality, unlike the perception achieved by reason, which is defined and limited by the finite nature of the human mind. Thus Rabbi Schneur Zalman explains the amazing fact that, throughout Jewish history, many thousands of Jews have sacrificed their lives rather than renounce their faith and their bond with the Almighty, including many who had little conscious knowledge and appreciation of their Jewishness and did not practice it in their daily lives. At their moment of truth, when they perceived that their very identity as Jews was at stake, their intrinsic faith — a faith that knows no bounds or equivocations — came to light, and overpowered all else.

The Jew’s response to Amalek is to remember. To call forth his soul’s reserves of supra-rational faith, a faith which may lie buried and forgotten under a mass of mundane involvements and entanglements. A faith which, when remembered, can meet his every moral challenge, rational or not.

* The Hebrew word *karcha*, “he encountered you,” employed by the verse to describe Amalek’s attack on Israel, also translates as “he cooled you.”

*Based on the teachings of the Lubavitcher Rebbe,
www.therebbe.org ; adapted by Yanki Tauber,*