

Words of Kabbalah, Parshat Vayikra

Translated by Ariel Bar Tzadok

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These are the wise words of the Sages. Contemplate them and learn from them their overt and secret meanings.

Yaakov Abuhatzera, Pituhei Hotam

“All that the Holy One, blessed be He does and commands everything intentionally corresponds to the supernal upper worlds. The purpose of sacrifices was to “sweeten the judgments and to topple the accusers. . . Everything comes to hint to us for a man who is bringing a sacrifice to atone for his sins, to arouse his heart to sincere repentance in order to neutralize the forces of judgment.”

Yaakov Abuhatzera, Mahsof HaLavan

“The ascent of the sparks is from the three worlds of Asiyah, Yetzirah and Beriah. They ascend to the world of Atzilut, there they are repaired and complete their rectification. The world of Asiyah is the source of the Nefesh [level of soul]... when a man raises up the sparks of the world of Asiyah, he must concentrate on also elevating that [nefesh] portion of his soul along with them.”

Ben Ish Hai, Derashot, Vayikra

“It is well known the the sacrifice, in and of itself, has no importance. Its only purpose was to serve as a ransom for the soul to exempt the individual sinner from the punishment he incurs for having violated the Word of God. Yet God accepts [the sacrifice] because of the thoughts of the man who brings it. This man visualizes happening to himself all the things that will happen to the sacrificed animal, from the actual slitting of its through to the throwing of its blood upon the altar. The man contemplates that this was him who was now sacrificed, that it is his blood being splashed upon the altar. These are his thoughts, he thinks that he himself is the sacrifice. God joins his thoughts to the sacrifice and considers it as if the man himself was indeed sacrificed upon the altar.”

“The sacrifice of an animal can be compared to a pocket. What value is an empty pocket, it needs to be filled with money. The intent and the unification contemplated by the Kohen priest performing the sacrificial service and the Israelite who brings it, is the example of money in the pocket.”

Zohar HaNiglah Vayikra

“Rebbe Eliezer said: “In accordance to the sin, so is the sacrifice. A wealthy man sometimes has an boastful heart, he sacrifices a bull because his heart is more likely to sin before his Maker. A moderate man sacrifices a sheep because his desires do not provoke him to sin as much. A poor man, who has nothing of which to boast, has the least abilities of them all. His sacrifice is the easiest of them all. Each man is thus recognized by the type of sacrifice he would bring [to the Temple, when it stood]. Each one the Holy One, blessed be He would judge individually with the proper measure.”

Rebbe Shimon said: "Come and see, the sacrifice of the poor is the easiest of them all because his heart is broken. Even if he were to think of sinning, the thought of sin passes from him. He and his family are already suffering enough. Thus each and every sacrifice was individually known to the Temple Priest."

Once there was a wealthy man who brought before the Priest a sacrifice of two doves. Seeing this, the Priest tells him that such a sacrifice is unacceptable for him. The man returned to his house depressed. His family said to him, "Why are you so depressed"? He responded, "Because the Priest did not accept my offering." They asked, "What did you bring to offer?" He said, "Two doves." They said to him, "Two doves are appropriate only for a poor man, not for someone like you. It is written, If one is poor, and does not have the means. Rather, you must offer a sacrifice that is fitting for you." "What is that," he asked. They respond, "a bull." He said, "so severe is the mere thought of sin?" (for the Olah offering is for sinful thinking). I hereby commit myself never to allow into my head any further sinful thoughts.

From then on, what did he do? All day he would conduct his business, and at night he would sleep. He would awaken very early and call to his friends to teach him words of Torah. They would toil in these until the rising of the sun. This is what he did until he became learned in Torah. He was thus called, Judah the Changed One.

One day he happened upon Rebbe Yisa Saba dividing up his merchandise, giving half to the poor, and sending half away on ships for foreign trade. They sat down together to learn Torah. Judah the Changed began and said, "Come and see, The sacrifice of the poor is very important before the Holy One, blessed be He. Such a man actually is offering two sacrifices before before Him. The first is his own blood, sweat and tears, the second is the offering he brings. He has nothing to eat at home, and [still], he still brings a sacrifice. Thus the sacrifice of the poor is the least expensive of all, two doves. If he cannot afford even these, he can bring a small portion of flour, and he will be atoned.

At that hour a Heavenly voice proclaims, "God never denies or rejects the poor because of their poverty." Why is this so? Because the sacrifice of the poor is the choicest of them all. For it led me to my portion in the Holy One, blessed be He, and it led me to my portion in Torah. Therefore, I distribute all my merchandise to the poor, because they are the ones who led me to all this [true spiritual wealth]."

Tikunei Zohar 37

"There arose an old man from behind Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai's shadow. He said, "Rebbe, Rebbe, behold, I see that it is written, "From the heavens, He let you hear His voice to instruct you, and upon the earth He showed you His great fire, and you heard His words out of the midst of the fire" (Dev 4:36). And in another place we heard that God spoke to Israel from the side of the angels, for thus we hold that each and every speech that came forth from the Divine Mouth creates an angel. This is the meaning of "And all the people saw the voices and the torches, the sound of the shofar, and the smoking mountain, and the people saw and trembled; so they stood from afar" (Ex. 20:15). And yet, in another place the verse says, "God spoke one thing, I thus (Zo) heard two, for God has strength" (Ps. 62:12). What is this?"

Rabbi Shimon responded, Old Man, Old Man, I have heard that the Holy One, blessed be He gave to man three connections, these are his neshama, ruah and nefesh [souls]. The neshama is from the Throne of Glory, from there the Supernal Shekhina descends together with the three upper sefirot. Regarding them is it written, "God spoke one thing, I thus heard two." One and two, these are three, the upper sefirot. Regarding them it is said, one, then one and one, three singles. This is, "God spoke one thing, I thus heard two." [The Hebrew word] Zo (thus) makes them one. (Zo has the same numerical value as the Hebrew word for "one," ehad).

Afterwards, he spoke to him from the ruah (spirit). This is Metatron, who incorporates all the hosts of Heaven below (Beriah). Because they are cloaked within him and ride him, he is the center column of six sefirot. Because of this with each and every speech that came forth from him emanated from him an angel. This is the meaning of, "And all the people saw the voices."

Afterwards the lower Shekhina [the tenth sefirah] descended into an Ophan, which is the nefesh soul of man from there. Regarding this, it is said, "and upon the earth He showed you His great fire" (Dev. 4:36). Regarding this, it is said, "behold, one Ophan [was] on the ground" (Ez. 1:15). This was so that His Voice and His Speech could be heard from the Throne, and that the angels, Heavens and the Earth would know Him in all things, above and below, as the neshama soul that rules over all the body, even in every small organ. No organ is empty of this."

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