

SHABBAT SHALOM FROM CYBERSPACE

VAYIKRA

Haftarah: Yeshayahu 43:21-44:23

APRIL 1, 2017 5 NISAN 5777

DEDICATION: In memory of Yaakov Ben Victoria – Jack David Gindi

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Can You Hear Me Now? Vayikra 5777

The book of Leviticus begins with the words, Vayikra El Moshe - He called to Moses.

The commentaries wonder why the Torah does not specify who called to Moses, but instead use the ambiguous terminology of "He called to Moses". The Netivot Shalom offered a novel explanation for this.

The Torah, he states, is informing us that Hashem calls out to every person through the events that happen to him or her during his or her lifetime. In every situation in which a person finds himself, he can "hear" Hashem speak to him if he wishes. Even though God's calling is not blatantly obvious the voice is there for us to tune into.

Rabbi Abittan z'sl often taught us that through technology we can better understand the sodot, the secrets of the Torah. He would explain that we live in a world of constant radio, television and cellular transmissions. They are whizzing by us, near us and around us. Thousands of conversations are taking place, millions of words and images are floating by yet we neither hear nor see anything unless we have a device which can pick up those electronic waves.

In the same vein how difficult must it have been for our ancestors to conceptualize what the rabbis meant when they taught a similar concept. The Torah relates that the revelation at Matan Torah was with a

"Kol gadol ve'lo yassaf" - a great voice - "ve'lo yassaf". Rashi quotes Unkelos' interpretation of ve'lo yassaf - "which did not stop". The Shelah HaKadosh explains that there is a continuous Kol or voice emanating from Har Sinai.

But one would certainly wonder then, "If there is a continuous voice, why do we not hear it?" Imagine trying to explain the concept of cell phones and voices traveling through the air unseen, a hundred years ago.

Today, we can readily understand. The voice is constant, never ending. Maybe more than voice, maybe images too or perhaps holograms or virtual reality. But if we don't tune in, we remain oblivious to the voice and to the message; a communal message and even more mystifying an individual message for our ears only.

The Torah begins the chapter on the Ten Commandments by telling us that, "In the third month from the Exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt, on this day, they arrived at the Sinai Desert". The obvious question is that we would expect the verse to read bayom hahu, "on that" day. Why then is it written "bayom hazeh", "this" day? Rashi answers that this is another reminder that we should look at the Torah as if it is being given today, every day or always.

If we truly contemplate, we can relate to the meaning of the Mishna in Pirkei Avot which teaches us just this. Everyday a Bat Kol – a Heavenly Voice - emanating from Mount Sinai cries out - "Woe to man because of the shame of the Torah".

Every day the Torah is given at Mount Sinai. The rabbis wanted to remind us that we can adjust the dial and listen to the Voice or we can ignore the Voice and live under the illusion that the world is silent. It is this wasted opportunity that the Heavenly Voice bemoans. That is indeed a shame to the Torah. Imagine the Torah crying out, "Can you hear me now?"

A few weeks ago, my brother Victor wrote that the Torah mentions five levels or grades of communication that take place from the celestial regions above to the physical world down below. According to some commentators they are in

descending order Nevuah - Prophecy, Ruah HaKodesh - Divine Spirit, Urim Vetumim - the Heavenly texting system worn by the high priest, Bat Kol - a Heavenly echo or voice and gorlot - casting of lots. The rabbis tell us that with the destruction of the Temple, three were taken from the world. We know prophecy was removed and with no Kohen Gadol, we had no Urim VeTumim. I might imagine that we were left with Ruah HaKodesh – A Divine Spirit, but in fact we were not. What we have is Bat Kol – this heavenly echo or voice (and Gorlot) and that is the voice the rabbis keep reminding us to take heed of.

Finally let us return to the opening verse of this week's portion. We read Vayikra El Moshe - He called to Moses. If you look at a Torah Scroll you will see that the first word, Vayikra is written in an unusual fashion. The last letter of Vayikra — the aleph — is written much smaller than the rest of the word.

Why is the aleph small? We are taught that when Hashem told Moses to write the word Vayikra “And He called”, Moses didn't want to write that last aleph. It seemed to Moses that it gave him too much importance. How could he write that Hashem called to him? Who was he, after all?

Moses would have preferred to write Vayikar — “And He happened (upon him – almost accidentally).” In other words Hashem just “came across” Moses, He didn't “go out of His way” to appear to him.

In spite of Moses' protestations, Hashem told him to write Vayikra — “And He called”. Moses followed Hashem's command and added the aleph to the end of the word, but with Hashem's permission, he wrote it small.

Based on the premise of the Shelah HaKadosh, can we then assume that not only is that voice playing, in fact that voice is talking to everyone and that voice is playing directly to me. Hashem is in fact calling to each of you individually each day. And here is the proof I believe.

We are commanded each day to say the Shema in the morning and in the evening and we have taken on the custom to say it a third time when we go to bed. In the chapter of VeAhavta we read - Asher Anochi Mesavecha HaYom - that which I command you - in the singular form - today.

In the next chapter of VeHaya we read - Asher Anochi Mesaveh Etchem HaYom - that which I command you - in the plural form - today.

In both cases we use the strange term HaYom - this day. And in many sidurim there is a small Hebrew note inserted after each which reminds us to pause for a second.

Why pause at the word HaYom - today? There is no explanation, only an admonition to pause a bit!

And then it occurred to me, and I understood that we must pause because when we utter the word HaYom – this day –it is the reminder that the voice is speaking right here and right now. And since the voice is speaking, we must stop and set our ear to hear that voice; both our communal ear and our individual ear.

Perhaps the Shema each day is that added opportunity for us to ignore the other voices, to ignore the static, to fine tune our internal antenna and to hear. Because Hashem is talking to you and He is wondering, “Can you hear me now?”

Shabbat Shalom,

David Bibi

Remembering Steven Zilberman, Z"L

On March 30, 2010, Chaplain Lt. Neal Kreisler was onboard the aircraft carrier USS DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER somewhere in the North Arabian Sea. The Chaplain had arrived earlier in the week via COD (Carrier Onboard Delivery), and noticed as he disembarked the aircraft that the ordnance personnel were carrying and loading live missiles and bombs onboard the jet fighters. He was in a combat zone, and F-18s were flying combat sorties every day to provide CAS (Close Air Support) to United States Marines fighting in Afghanistan. Although he had been onboard an aircraft carrier before during his career as a Jewish Navy chaplain, yet he had never seen the loading of live ordnance. This was the real thing.

Fortunately, all Passover supplies had arrived long before my arrival, and he had spent the afternoon on Erev Pesach preparing the dining room for First Night Seder. Tabletops were impeccably cleaned, a white tablecloth spread, and the ritual items set in their proper places on the Seder plate. Special Kosher for Passover MREs (Meals Ready to Eat) were provided in a separate space, ready for consumption during the Seder meal. Eight Sailors, in addition to Chaplain Kreisler attended the Pesach Seder that night onboard the "Mighty Ike."

Three of the Sailors were aviators. One lieutenant was an F-18 pilot, and the other two were E-2C Hawkeye pilots. Lieutenant Steven (Miroslav) Zilberman was the second of the Hawkeye pilots attending the Pesach Seder that night.

LT Zilberman was born in Ukraine, and the Chaplain could detect his accent. The Seder lasted long into the night; the Sailors were off duty, and we had nowhere else to go. Everyone drank the *arba kosot* (four glasses) of *Kedem* grape juice, and jokingly lamented the fact that we didn't have any *Manischewitz* onboard. The Chaplain explained to the Sailors how correctly to perform the *mitzvah* of *'akhilat matza* (eating the *matza*), and that each person is required by Jewish law to consume a *k'zayit bikh'dei 'akhilat pras* while reclining to the left. We recited the *b'rakhot*, read the *Haggadah*, ate *matza* and *maror*, sang songs, and told stories. The Chaplain learned that LT Zilberman had two children attending Hebrew school back home in Virginia.

After the Seder had concluded *k'hilkhato* (in accordance with Jewish law) LT Zilberman explained to Chaplain Kreisler how his son knew all the words to the Pesach songs. Had his son been onboard, said Steven, he would have been able to sing all the songs with us perfectly. Chaplain Kreisler distributed boxes of Passover candies to the Sailors, and cans of macaroons. LT Zilberman commented on the Pesach fruit jellies, joking that it was important to eat the lemon slices, as these prevented scurvy.

Eventually all the Sailors departed for the night and Chaplain Kreisler was left alone with that unique feeling of joyful accomplishment and camaraderie that attends the fulfillment of Jewish religious holidays out in the middle of nowhere in the midst of a war zone.

The next day, 31 March, 16 Nissan, LT Steven Zilberman was killed returning from a reconnaissance mission to Afghanistan. He was the flight crew commander onboard his E-2C Hawkeye when hydraulic pressure in the port engine failed. Flying on one engine alone, and unable to adjust the pitch of the second engine's propeller, the aircraft began to plummet to the sea. Only a few miles from USS EISENHOWER, Steve handed the flight controls to his co-pilot, and went aft to jettison the escape hatch. The co-pilot could barely grasp the controls; the aircraft was on the verge of spinning out of control, tumbling over and crashing into the waves. Steve resumed his seat behind the controls, took the wheel from his co-pilot's hands, and ordered his crew to bail out.

The three crew members safely floated to the sea in their open parachutes, but Steve did not make it out. His aircraft smashed into the North Arabian Sea with him onboard, and disappeared in 18,000 fathoms of water.

The next day Chaplain Kreisler flew back from the aircraft carrier to Bahrain, where the US Navy's Fifth Fleet is headquartered. The Chaplain asked permission from the Force Chaplain to extend his orders to the AO (Area of Operations) and to return to USS EISENHOWER, in order to participate in LT Zilberman's memorial service and say prayers for him.

The entire squadron loved LT Steven Zilberman, and everyone knew he was Jewish. While discussing plans for the memorial, the wing chaplain informed Chaplain Kreisler that the squadron commander had scheduled the memorial for Saturday. The Chaplain explained that this should not be done, as LT Zilberman was Jewish, and such events are prohibited on the Sabbath. But everyone loved Steve Zilberman, and everyone knew he was Jewish. So the wing chaplain conveyed Chaplain Kreisler's recommendation to his commanding officer. He returned and told him, "Rabbi, the CO says that anything you say goes." I know that this is because they wished to honor Steven Zilberman's Jewish heritage. So the memorial service was scheduled for a different day.

Returning from Bahrain to EISENHOWER to conduct the memorial service, Chaplain Kreisler could not get LT Zilberman out of his mind. He thought of how fragile and tentative life is; one moment a person is in this world, but in the next he may be gone. And yet LT Zilberman was a hero; he saved his crew. Steve could have made any number of decisions that day as he held the cyclic, struggling to control his plane. He could have panicked and released it, and the aircraft would have tumbled out of control, killing all onboard. But he was the flight commander. He stayed the course as he had been trained, performed his duty, and saved his crew.

Chaplain Kreisler wondered what his last thoughts were as the Hawkeye plummeted to the sea. The Chaplain shared this with his co-pilot, who was also Steve's roommate and best friend. The Chaplain suggested that Steve was thinking about his children. But his co-pilot tried to assure me that Steve, as a trained Navy aviator, no doubt was thinking only of what actions he must take next to try to save his plane. But the Chaplain was not convinced.

Chaplain Kreisler was uncertain as to why he was so affected by the loss of Steven Zilberman, but he suggested that the reason was because he was so affected by his life. In the one evening that the Chaplain had the pleasure of Steven Zilberman's company at the Passover Seder, he was captivated by his wonderful humanity, his affability, his humor, and his joy. He was a joyful man. *Barukh Hashem* that the Chaplain was able to share this time with him, to say Hebrew prayers at his memorial service, and to hear his commanding officer's final farewell, "LT Zilberman, Shalom!" May his memory be for a blessing.

LT

Neal R. Kreisler, CHC, USN

Pirchei Shoshanim opened a facebook page run by one of our Talmedim and in less than a week nearly 2000 have joined. <https://www.facebook.com/pirchei>

Summary of the Perasha

Sefer Vayikra generally deals with the Kohanim and their service in the mishkan. Within the first half of Sefer Vayikra the first 2 parshiot deal with korbanot. The end of the 2nd parasha and the 3rd parasha deal with the inauguration of the mishkan and the 4th and 5th parasha deal with tsaraat. The theme in the 2nd half of Sefer Vayikra is Holiness. Parashat Kedoshim discusses holiness regarding the Jewish people as a whole (i.e., kedoshim tihui). Emor discusses Holiness regarding the Kohanim and Holidays. And Behar discusses Holiness regarding the land of Israel (i.e., Shemita and Yovel).

Vayikra - Laws of various korbanot and how they are brought

- 1- Details regarding Korban Olah (when brought with cattle and with a sheep). Details include samach, slaughtering, throwing blood, skinning, cutting, washing, cooking.
- 2- Korban Olah (when brought with a bird), Korban Mincha (the solet, oven baked, and pan baked meal offerings)
- 3- Korban Mincha (the deep pan offering). Korban minchat ha'omer.
- 4- Korban Shelamim (when brought with cattle, sheep, or a goat)
- 5- Korban Hatat (details depending on if the sinner is the Kohen gadol, a congregation, or ruler)
- 6- Korban Hatat (for a regular person who sinned), Korban Oleh Ve'yored
- 7- Korban Asham

Getting ready for the Seder by Nathan

Pesach is just a week and a half away. I often find myself thinking of ways to get better prepared for the holiday so just wanted to share some things that came to mind.

- When cleaning our homes we can regularly remind ourselves that we are fulfilling a mitsva de'orayta of ridding our house of hametz on Pesach. This can make our cleaning more meaningful.
- Think of ways to get the kids pumped up for the seder.
 - o Tell the kids in advance that you are excited to hear their ideas on the seder table. Maybe this will give them an extra push to listen in class because they know their parents are waiting to hear what they have to say. It also shows the kids that we are giving importance to the seder night (and not just going through the motions).
 - o Candy- Most importantly, CANDY! Go to the store, buy a big bag of taffies, a box of bazookas, and a bag of lolly pops. Every time a kid says an idea on the seder table give them a candy. If you really want to get in to it you can get small prizes from amazing savings to raffle off and give out tickets every time a child says an idea (much easier than sitting there begging your shy son to read ma nishtana while you are holding everyone up and grandpa wants to push things along)!
 - o Buy Props – Go to Eichlers. Get a bunch of frogs and little matza ball men or a bag of little toy animals to leave out on the seder table. Bring a pillow to the seder table so you can lean. Make it fun!
 - o Nap - I've heard many people recommend trying to get your kids to take a nap the day of the seder so they can stay up late. I thought it was impossible but I tried it one year and it worked. Worth a shot.
 - Learn about the holiday. Especially about the makot. Focus on trying to build Emunah.
 - o Read the Me'am Lo'ez on parashat Va'era and Bo (discusses all interesting midrashim about the makot)
 - o Read through parashat Va'era and Bo in the Humash
 - o Listen to classes. Rabbi Mansour has a great series called Haggadah with the Malbim where he goes through and explains each line of the haggadah. Below is a link <http://www.learntorah.com/lt-shiur-details.aspx?id=1951>. Search on learntorah.com for other Pesach classes as well.
 - o Buy a Haggadah with persoohim to read in advance for ideas to say over on the table or at least to put us in the right head (Note, focus your hidooshim on the miracles that Hashem did for us as

the Rambam says this is the main part of the mitzvah).

- Rabbi Mansour has a Sephardic Heritage Haggadah from artscroll
- Rabbi Mersky has a Haggadah with Perooshim called Hegyoney Halacha (comes in Hebrew or English)
- Also, the Sephardic Children's Haggadah is really great (and not just for children). It lays everything out in a very simple format explaining why we do each thing that we do. I highly recommend it. The more we put in to the holiday the more we will get out of it!

FROM THE RABBIS OF THE JERSEY SHORE

“The Kohen shall take from the blood...and he shall cause all of its fats to go up in smoke on the Mizbeah.” (Vayikra 4:25-26)

The Torah requires that when bringing a korban, some of its blood and fats must be put on the altar. Rabbi Obadiah Yosef zt"l says that the Torah is hinting to us a very important concept. The fats represent the nature of man that is slow and lazy. The blood, which rushes through the body, represents man's energy and alacrity. The Torah says to place both of these on the altar to teach us that both of these qualities must be used to serve Hashem. Sometimes a person has to be quick and sometimes he has to be slow and lazy.

Rabbi Obadiah zt"l gives a parable. Once there was a businessman that loved to go learn in the Midrash. One day he spent a few hours there. That day a big customer came to his house seeking to make a big deal. The wife told the customer he was studying in the Midrash and she was lazy to go and call him. The customer got tired and left. When the husband came home, he got angry. He told her that whenever someone comes to see him, she should immediately run and let him know.

A few days later a man came to the house to collect a long overdue debt. The loyal wife learned her lesson and ran to notify him that someone came to see him. When the husband came, he was devastated. He was looking forward to a huge customer. Instead he finds his creditor waiting for him, threatening to get paid or else.

The husband nervously told his wife, when she was supposed to be quick she was slow, and when she was supposed to be slow she was quick. She caused him a great loss by switching the proper way.

Therefore, the Torah commands us to offer the blood and the fats on the altar of Hashem, to teach us that sometimes we should use the trait of alacrity and sometimes we must use the trait of laziness. Rabbi Reuven Semah

“When a man among you brings an offering” (Vayikra 1:2)

When the Jews were instructed on the laws of sacrifices, they were told that even a non-Jew could bring a korban, sacrifice. The only difference between his korban and ours is that we are allowed to bring burnt offerings and peace offerings, shelamim and olah, whereas the gentile may only bring a burnt offering, olah. Indeed, even if he says he's sacrificing a peace offering, it can only be brought as an olah, burnt offering.

The lesson in this is that the non-Jewish view of religion differs from ours drastically. They understand religion to be only to G-d, only in a holy endeavor, not in the normal course of everyday life. They feel if one wants to be close to G-d, he cannot engage in the everyday pursuits such as eating or having children. Therefore, their sacrifice is a burnt offering, only for the altar. We, however, believe that one must sanctify his everyday living in line with Hashem. We eat and we make a berachah. We get reward because it's a misvah. In business we perform many commandments. Our duty is to take the mundane and make it spiritual. Therefore we can bring a shelamim, peace offering, where part goes on the altar and part is eaten by man. Our mission is to live life the fullest in the ways of Hashem. Rabbi Shmuel Choueka

RABBI ELI MANSOUR

**Visit DailyHalacha.com, DailyGemara.com,
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The Small Alef**

The Book of Vayikra receives its name from the first word in the Sefer – “Vayikra” (“He called”). The Sefer begins with G-d calling Moshe and summoning him into the newly-constructed Mishkan, to issue the commands relevant to the Korbanot (sacrifices).

Anyone who looks at the way this word – “Vayikra” – is written in the Torah will immediately notice something peculiar: the final letter, “Alef,” is written considerably smaller than the other letters of the Torah. This in itself requires explanation, but the significance of this small letter might be even more far-reaching than it at first appears. Although the numerical value of the letter “Alef” is 1, if we spell the word “Alef” (“Alef,” “Lamed,” “Peh”), and combine the values of its letters, we arrive at 111 – the number of verses in Parashat Vayikra. This might allude to the fact that the message of this small “Alef” is the essential message of this Parasha. If we understand the small “Alef,” then we can understand the fundamental concept underlying all of Parashat Vayikra.

The construction of the Mishkan served to rectify the sin of the golden calf. Anytime a Jew commits a sin, he drives the divine Presence from his soul; he banishes the spark of Kedusha, the piece of G-d within him, and sends it away to exile. Teshuba (repentance) means making ourselves worthy of once again receiving that spark, and being a repository for the Shechina. And thus after the sin of the golden calf, God's presence left Beneh Yisrael, and they needed to build the Mishkan in order to bring Him back. But this process needed to unfold gradually, step by step. Beneh Yisrael could not receive the divine presence all at once. After falling so low after the sin of the golden calf, the process of the Shechina's return had to proceed slowly. A person leaving a dark room needs time to adjust to light. He cannot have the lights turned on all at once instantaneously. His eyes are simply unable to handle the drastic transition.

The Tasher Rebbe of Montreal, in his Abodat Aboda, explained that this is the symbolism underlying the small "Alef" at the beginning of Sefer Vayikra. Moshe Rabbenu was at the 50th level of Kedusha, the highest stature attainable by a human being. God instructed Moshe that in order to bring Beneh Yisrael back to where they needed to be, he would have to lower himself so the spiritual light he radiated would be smaller. After the darkness of the golden calf, Beneh Yisrael could not immediately receive the brightest spiritual light. And thus God appeared to Moshe on a lower level of prophecy, symbolized by the small letter "Alef."

This explains the comments of Rashi to the first verse of Sefer Vayikra, where he writes that the word "Vayikra" is a "Lashon Hiba" – a term that connotes love and affection. The Tasher Rebbe explained that the entire concept of Parashat Vayikra, G-d's willingness to restore His Shechina among Beneh Yisrael in the Mishkan, is a great act of love. Beneh Yisrael betrayed Him in the worst way, worshipping a foreign deity just weeks after receiving the Torah, and yet He was still prepared to return to them. He always gives us the opportunity to return and repair our relationship with Him. And He even ensures that the process will unfold at the right pace, step by step, so that it will be effective.

This is why the small "Alef" embodies the essence of the Parashat Vayikra. The concept underlying Korbanot is that we have the ability to restore our relationship with Hashem after falling. This entire book is a "Lashon Hiba," an expression of great love by G-d, who is always prepared to welcome us back in Teshuba, and is always prepared to help us along this process.

VICTOR BIBI/ SOD HAPARASHA
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Rabbi Wein
NO SERVICE

On my recent trip to America I encountered great difficulty with my mobile phone. It kept on telling me that it could not complete the calls I was attempting to make because there was "no service." This happened at numerous locations throughout my American stay, frustrating me greatly. I was hooked up to a major American telecom provider and could not understand why I was encountering this difficulty.

Visiting the company's retail outlet only frustrated me even more since it became obvious to me, quite early on, that they were mainly interested in selling me a new wonder phone that does everything necessary for an old rabbi, short of delivering sermons. After a while, seeing that I had no intention of abandoning my trusty nine- year-old phone, to which I had become emotionally attached, the clerk put me in touch with the experts in the tech department. They readily admitted to me that they were having a problem with their service providing abilities but I was not to worry since they were working on it.

By the time my visit to America was already in an advanced state, they apparently were still working on it. I could only make intermittent use of my phone, which in the broader perspective of life and its vagaries, was not such a great obstacle to my happiness. Nevertheless, I was able to draw a lesson for life from this prosaic technological frustration.

That lesson is that no matter how great the ability to dial up the intended number may be, if the there is no connecting service operational at the time, nothing will really happen. And that is true not only in terms of telecommunication but in other more important phases of life as well.

The basis for functional family life is strong and constant communication between the various members of the family group. This requires an efficient and constantly reliable communication service. No matter how great the desire may be of one individual to connect with someone else in the family group, the ability to do so is dependent upon the service – the connection – to be able to deliver the intended message. This connecting service entails honesty, tolerance, forbearing and the intangible quality of love and affection. When the service is properly grounded, it is a life line. When it

is not strongly present there will be, at best, an intermittent connection, wavering and impermanent.

One of the great challenges of life is the ability to build such a connection. It requires constant effort. The starting point is the realization that the effort and resulting connection are necessities. Many people make the erroneous assumption that such a connection is automatically operative.

Would that this assumption were true...but the clear lesson of life is that it is not and great energy and talent is required to build it and keep it in good operating condition. When there is "no service" present in a family, then dysfunction and frustration will always prevail.

This lesson is also true regarding our spiritual lives. Our inner souls should long for a connection to eternity and to the Infinite. But again our connection is oftentimes thwarted by the fact that there is "no service." In times of crisis and trouble we all want that connection to somehow be operative. But if we never built up such a 'server,' the chances for a strong and deep connection in one's time of need are at best sketchy.

Jews traditionally recited Psalms, prayed thrice daily, engaged regularly in Torah study and attempted to do good deeds on a regular basis, all in a constant effort to build a 'server' that would allow them to connect to the Creator. All of our efforts in Judaism are only to create such a 'server.' It is what the rabbis meant when they demanded of us "awe and fear of Heaven" and the idea of "love of Heaven."

These are the tools and materials necessary to build and maintain that 'server.' This is the correct way to view the Torah way of life. Constancy, regularity, focus, attention to detail, and the joy of pursuing noble goals, are the raw materials of our spiritual 'server.' We should never allow ourselves to be found in that dreaded no-man's land with 'no service' available. Meanwhile, I am going back to a land line.

Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks The Sin Offering

Vayikra is about sacrifices, and though these laws have been inoperative for almost 2000 years since the destruction of the Temple, the moral principles they embody are still challenging.

One set of sacrifices, set out in detail in this week's sedra, warrants particular attention: chattat, the 'sin offering'. Four different cases are considered: the anointed priest (the High Priest), the assembly (the

Sanhedrin or supreme court), the Prince (the King), and an ordinary individual. Because their roles in the community were different, so too was the form of their atonement.

The sin offering was to be brought only for major sins, those that carried the penalty of karet, 'being cut off'; and only if they were committed unintentionally or inadvertently (be-shogeg). This could happen in one of two ways, either [a] because the person concerned did not know the law (for example, that cooking is forbidden on the Sabbath) or [b] he or she did not know the facts (for instance, that today is the Sabbath).

Unintentional sins stand midway between intentional sins (where you knew what you were doing was wrong) and involuntary action (ones, where you were not acting freely at all: it was a reflex action, or someone was pointing a gun at your head). Intentional sins cannot be atoned for by sacrifice. Involuntary actions do not need atonement. Thus, the sin offering is confined to a middle range of cases, where you did wrong, but you didn't know you were doing wrong.

The question is obvious: Why should unintentional sins require atonement at all? What guilt is involved? The sinner did not mean to sin. The requisite intent (mens rea) was lacking. Had the offender known the facts and the law at the time, he would not have done what he did. Why then does he have to undergo a process of atonement? To this, the commentators gave a variety of answers.

R. Samson Raphael Hirsch and R. David Zvi Hoffman give the most straightforward explanation. Ignorance – whether of the facts or the law – is a form of negligence. We should know the law, especially in the most serious cases. We should also exercise vigilance: we should know what we are doing. That is a fundamental obligation, especially in relation to the most serious areas of conduct.

The Abarbanel argues that the sin offering was less a punishment for what had been done, than a solemn warning against sin in the future. The bringing of a sacrifice, involving considerable effort and expense, was a vivid reminder to the individual to be more careful in the future.

Nahmanides suggests that the sin offering was brought not because of what led to the act, but rather because of what followed from it. Sin, even without intention, defiles. 'The reason for the offerings for the erring soul is that all sins [even if committed unwittingly] produce a "stain" on the soul and

constitute a blemish in it, and the soul is only worthy to be received by its Creator when it is pure of all sin.'

The late Lubavitcher Rebbe, following midrashic tradition, offered a fourth interpretation. Even inadvertent sins testify to something wrong on the part of the person concerned. Bad things do not come about through good people. The Sages said that God does not allow even the animals of the righteous to do wrong; how much more so does He protect the righteous themselves from error and mishap (see Yevamot 99b; Ketubot 28b). There must therefore have been something wrong with the individual for the mishap to have taken place.

This view – characteristic of the Chabad approach, with its emphasis on the psychology of the religious life – shares more than a passing similarity with Sigmund Freud's analysis of the unconscious, which gave rise to the phrase, 'a Freudian slip'. Remarks or acts that seem unintentional often betray unconscious desires or motives. Indeed, we can often glimpse the unconscious more readily at such moments than when the person is acting in full knowledge and deliberation. Inadvertent sins suggest something amiss in the soul of the sinner. It is this fault which may lie beneath the threshold of consciousness, which is atoned for by the chattat.

Whichever explanation we follow, the chattat represents an idea familiar in law but strangely unfamiliar in Western ethics. Our acts make a difference to the world.

Under the influence of Immanuel Kant, we have come to think that all that matters as far as morality is concerned is the will. If our will is good, then we are good, regardless of what we actually do. We are judged by our intentions, not our deeds. Judaism does recognise the difference between good will and bad. That is why deliberate sins cannot be atoned for by a sacrifice, whereas unintentional ones can.

Yet the very fact that unintentional sins require atonement tells us that we cannot dissociate ourselves from our actions by saying: 'I didn't mean to do it.' Wrong was done – and it was done by us. Therefore we must perform an act that signals our contrition. We cannot just walk away as if the act had nothing to do with us.

Many years ago a secular Jewish novelist said to me: 'Isn't Judaism full of guilt?' To which I replied, 'Yes, but it is also full of forgiveness.' The entire institution of the sin offering is about forgiveness. However, Judaism makes a serious moral statement when it refuses to split the human person into two entities –

body and soul, act and intention, objective and subjective, the world 'out there' and the world 'in here'. Kant did just that. All that matters morally, he argued, is what happens 'in here', in the soul.

Is it entirely accidental that the culture most influenced by Kant was also the one that gave rise to the Holocaust? I do not mean – Heaven forbid – that the sage of Königsberg was in any way responsible for that tragedy. Yet it remains the case that many good and decent people did nothing to protest the single greatest crime of man against man while it was taking place. Many of them surely thought that it had nothing to do with them. If they bore the Jews no particular ill will, why should they feel guilty? Yet the result of their action or inaction had real consequences in the physical world. A culture that confines morality to the mind is one that lacks an adequate defence against harmful behaviour.

The sin offering reminds us that the wrong we do, or let happen, even if we did not intend it, still requires atonement. Unfashionable though this is, a morality that speaks about action, not just intention – about what happens through us even if we didn't mean to do it – is more compelling, more true to the human situation, than one that speaks of intention alone.

AS HEARD FROM RABBI AVIGDOR MILLER Z'TL "A man when he offers" (1:2)

Adam denotes "one made of the soil" ('adamah'). Not only the first man, but also every Adam comes from the soil which produced the food of which the body is composed. The first duty of an Adam is Gratitude to his Creator, and this Gratitude he must express most heartfully for the food of which he is composed and which maintains his existence.

The Korban that he offers to his Creator, whether of meat and blood or of flour or of wine, is fundamentally a demonstration of Thanksgiving to Hashem that created the miracle of food, and Who performed the miracle of creating the body from food, and the miracle of maintaining the body by means of food. This is the most obvious of the intentions of the offerings. But there are indeed more intentions which can be discerned, some of which we shall study.

Whatever intentions we may discover yet the basic attitude was that not "a man offers to Hashem" but a man declares that the offering belongs to Hashem the Creator. The bringing of the offering is a declaration that He is the Giver. This intention is the principle that underlies not only Korbanot and tithes, but also all the Mitzvot of the Torah: To declare Gratitude to the Giver – Hakarat Hatob.