

Two very sad situations. Obviously, there are more. No one should ever be confronted with such a challenge. It does, however, happen. What is an observant Jew to do? The Torah teaches that theft is treachery against Hashem. The answer is that, while to the secular mind this is an extreme situation that might allow one to break or, at least, bend the rules, we Jews answer to a Higher standard. We are deeply committed in faith to Hashem that He will provide. If we just open our eyes, we will see His salvation. It is a grave error to think that our actions will change Hashem's result. It is very easy to sit here and write, but we must take into consideration that once our moral/ethical compass is breached, regardless of how deep or wide is the crack, it is no longer the same. We have demonstrated that we trust Hashem only when it is convenient, when life is good. When the challenges arise, we take the law into our own hands. Is that not equivalent to idol worship?

**והמשחיתו יוסף עליו
And add its fifth to it. (5:24)**

One who unlawfully has his fellow Jew's money in his possession, but cannot be compelled to pay, because the plaintiff lacks sufficient proof – and who (compounds his guilt) swears falsely that the money is rightfully his – must (after it is discovered that he lied) pay the principal plus an added fifth, followed by a korban *asham*, guilt offering. No one has a right to someone else's money – even if he intends to replace it eventually. The added fifth applies even if the thief has decided to finally come clean and repent his erroneous ways.

The *Talmud (Berachos 6b)* states: "Whoever knows that his friend is accustomed to greeting him (he) should precede him in greeting." (In other words, do not wait for your friend to greet you. If he is in the habit of greeting you – greet him first.) "If one greets his friend and his friend does not return the greeting, he is considered a *gazlan*, thief." Obviously, receiving a return greeting from someone is very important. The *Melitzer Rebbe, Shlita*, explains that a *gazlan* is one who steals the *simchas ha'chaim*, joy of life, from someone. When I greet someone, I expect to be greeted in return; when I smile to someone, I expect a smile in return. To be ignored, to be shunned, is to be deflated, humiliated, to have my bubble of life punctured. That, says the *Rebbe*, is *gezeilah*, theft.

Horav Leizer Brody, Shlita, adds that ignoring someone's greeting is bad, but it can be worse. *Misaleim*, one who conceals himself in an attempt to avoid meeting the other fellow, sends a deplorable message: "I do not think very highly of you." "You mean very little to me." "You are not worth my time." Such messages destroy a person's self-esteem. The individual wonders, "What about me offends him so? Why does he refuse to greet me?" One who refuses to return a greeting offends not only the other person – he also offends Hashem! His display of arrogance is insidious.

Hashem despises any kind of arrogance in people.

Therefore, when this individual finally acknowledges his opprobrious behavior and seeks to repent, he must add a fifth. In addition to a greeting and talking to the other person like a *mentch*, decent person, he must reach out to him will all five fingers – give him his hand. A simple hello is insufficient. He now must give a handshake. As far as offending Hashem, let the offender devote himself to a higher degree – to Hashem's Five Chumashim. Let him learn Torah. That should do it.

Va'ani Tefillah

**S'lach לנו אבינו כי חטאנו מחל לנו מלכנו כי פשענו
lanu Avinu ki chatanu, m'chal lanu Malkeinu ki fashanu.**

Forgive us, our Father, we certainly did sin. Forgive us our King, for we have committed acts of rebellion.

The *teshuvah*, repentance, process begins with *viduy*, confession. Thus, following the blessing of *Hashiveinu*, Return us, which declares our commitment to repent, we begin by acknowledging our transgressions. The word, forgive, is related to *tz'lach*, which means to jump over something and continue on. *Horav Shimon Schwab, zl*, explains that *s'lach* is, therefore, used here in connection with *chet*, sin, which is committed *b'shogeig*, inadvertently. This is a sin committed without the sinner realizing that it is wrong, or, at least, he is unaware that the activity is bad enough to constitute sin. We now ask the Almighty to *s'lach*, overlook, disregard, pass over (so to speak) our *chataim*, inadvertent sins, much like a Father overlooks the misdeeds of his children, committed while unaware of their being wrong.

When we ask Hashem to forgive our *peshaim*, advertent acts of rebellion, we acknowledge that these acts deserve full measure of punishment. Nonetheless, we ask Him as our King to please issue a royal pardon for us, which only a king can do.

In memory of our beloved parents
Rabbi Dr. Avrohom Yitzchok Wolf
Rebbetzin Anna Moses
Sruly and Chaya Wolf and Family
Ari and Rivky Wolf and Family

Abba and Sarah Spero and Family
Pesach and Esther Ostroy and Family
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Parashas Vayikra

תשע"ז

פרשת ויקרא

**ויקרא אל משה
He called to Moshe. (1:1)**

Rashi comments: "Calling", *Vayikra*, preceded every statement, every saying and every command. It is a language of affection. In other words, prior to speaking to Moshe *Rabbeinu*, Hashem called his name (twice). This was followed by the actual message. Hashem speaks to each and every one of us – all of the time. He employs various media of "expression," but each communication is intoned with love. Perhaps this method of signaling a communication to Moshe applies equally to us. First, Hashem signals us by calling our name in order to get our attention. This is followed by the message. Now, if we do not listen to the original calling – i.e. calling our name – we will be hard-pressed to know to whom Hashem is speaking. We tend to disregard His messages, because we do not bother to listen to the initial communication.

Hashem has various means of communication. It could be a natural occurrence; it could happen to someone else in our proximity: Hashem expects us to listen. We may not assume that things just happen. Whatever takes place within our sphere of awareness is a subtle message. This is the calling, enjoining us to listen. When the message moves closer to us, it is a sign that the message is urgent, things are beginning to heat up; we had better react soon. The message may no longer be a message – but the actual punishment.

Some of us have developed a system of selective messaging: we listen to certain messages, while ignoring others. This is not a wise approach to Heavenly messaging, since everything is important. *Horav Nissim Yagen, zl*, was walking with his son when they came upon a vicious bull dog whose appearance showed anger and fear all combined. They immediately made a retreat, looking back to see that the dog was following them. After a series of smart moves they were able to evade the dog. As soon as they reached safety, *Rav Nissim* burst out in tears. "Father, the *tzarah*, trouble, is over. We have eluded the dog. Why are you crying now?" his son asked.

Rav Nissim's reply is one that we should all ask ourselves: "Why am I not in such fear of Hashem? Should a dog arouse greater fear in me than Hashem does? Should I have greater fear of the tax collector, an illness, a car accident – than I have of Hashem? This is why I am crying!" his father answered.

The other day I had occasion to meet someone in the hospital as he was about to take a major test. The man

was as cool as ice. He displayed no anxiety; he was completely relaxed. I, being an observer of human nature, asked him how he stayed so cool under such pressure. He said (casually), "I figure it can go either of two ways. So why worry myself? It either is or it is not." This is not the type of person whose religious beliefs would lead him to think about Divine messaging, and the idea that Hashem is "calling" to him, such that, yes, he should wake up, reach out, and heed the message. Do most of us not act similarly? We either survive the scare and return to business as usual, or we seek every avenue for salvation.

The following story – with which many of us can regrettably identify – might alter our perspective. A photographer was visiting the Grand Canyon, looking to take some unique photos of the natural wonder. He was impressed with the overwhelming awesomeness of the place, but he sought a special shot which would define the essence of the Grand Canyon in one single image. Searching for a spot where he could get that shot, he came upon an area that had been ringed off with yellow tape that read: "Danger! Do not go past this line." Peeking over the tape, he saw the place he had come to photograph. It was expansive and captivating, capturing the beauty and awesomeness of the Canyon- all in one spot. He decided to ignore the sign, and, with camera in hand, he crossed the line in search of a perfect position to make his photo shoot.

Signs are there for a reason, but a fool is one who thinks he is smarter than those who placed the sign. One quick jump over the yellow tape gave him access to a picture of unparalleled beauty. Sadly, there was nowhere for him to place his feet – as his body, camera and all, went soaring down the walls of the canyon. He screamed, calling for help as he attempted to grab onto whatever he could to break his fall – to no avail. Halfway down, he was able to grab hold of a weak, protruding branch. He knew he could not hold onto it for long. His hands were slipping. He would soon become part of the canyon's history. He did what all good Jews do when the future appears ominous. He cried. "Hashem, please help me! Please!" he screamed and cried over and over. Suddenly, he heard a powerful voice, "Do you really want Me to help you?" the voice asked. "Yes, yes, please help" was the man's immediate reply. "If you really want Me to save you, let go of the branch!"

Obviously, the story is allegoric, but it carries a powerful message. Each and every one of us has that branch onto which we hold for dear life. If we are to turn to Hashem with complete trust than we must believe that He – only He –

can provide the *yeshuah*, salvation, for which we yearn.

אדם כי יקריב מכם קרבן לך
When a man among you brings an offering to Hashem.
(1:2)

I recently came across an article penned by a secular Jew, decrying our yearning for the rebuilding of the *Bais HaMikdash*. In one of his gripes, he declared that he found the notion of *korbanos*, sacrifices, primitive, archaic, and a form of service no longer necessary. While to the ancients it was natural to offer a *korban*, offering, to Hashem, this modern man eschews such form of worship. Obviously, he is clueless with regard to the underlying concepts of *korbanos* and the spiritual elevation they engender in the person who offers them.

A *korban* is a way of coming closer to Hashem. The word *korban* is derived from *karov*, to come/be near. A *korban* is offered as a form: of atonement, thanksgiving, of celebration of a milestone event – an opportunity to rejuvenate our relationship with Hashem. It is a way of declaring that we are connected to Hashem Above. Nothing is primitive about a *korban*, unless one considers spirituality primitive. It is a mechanism through which we add a spiritual dimension to a physical activity. During a *korban* the animal takes the place of the human being who is offering it; or, alternatively, we perceive a *korban* to be a way of sanctifying and giving meaning to the mundane.

Truth be told, the individual who shuns *korbanos* in the sphere of modernity, probably has long ago eschewed religion in general as being archaic. Today's Sanctuary is the *shul*; our *korbanos* are the *tefillos*, prayers, which we offer up to Hashem. All of these bring us closer to Hashem. An individual who does not *daven*, or has no *shul*, consequently will not have a need for the return of the *Bais HaMikdash*. His idea of worship is self-worship; his form of communal Jewish activity is protesting and slandering his co-religionists who abide by *halachah*. Is it any wonder he has no need for the *Bais HaMikdash*?

Veritably, as noted by *Horav Eli Munk, zl*, upon careful examination of the underlying reasons behind each of the *korbanos*, we cannot fail to note that the sacrifices were designed for a people who had achieved a very high level of morality and who aspired to achieve even greater spiritual elevation. Absolutely no parallel exists between the *korbanos* offered by *Klal Yisrael* and the pagan rites which were motivated by desire to appease the anger of their gods or seek their favor.

Let us analyze the primary *korbanos* and their ultimate purpose. The *Korban Olah*, Elevation/Burnt offering, was brought by a person who had sinned in his thoughts or had failed to execute a required positive action, such as a *laav she'nitek l'asei* – a prohibition which can be rectified though the performance of a positive command; a prohibition which can be rectified by the fulfillment of an *asei*, positive commandment.

The *Korban Shelamim*, Peace offering, was brought: in fulfillment of a vow made in Hashem's honor (*neder* or *nedavah*); as an act of thanksgiving (*Korban Todah*); to celebrate a *YomTov*, Festival (*Shalmei Simchah Chagigah*; *Shalmei Tzibur*); or at the end of a period of abstinence from wine (*Shalmei Nazir*).

The *Korban Asham*, Guilt Offering, was brought to atone for a sin of sacrilege (*Asham meilos*), for a false oath concerning a theft (*Asham g'zeilos*) or for a borderline situation involving doubt whether the sin was actually committed (*Asham talui*). There are other cases of *Asham* in which a sin of sacrilege was committed such as *Asham shifcha charufa*, *Asham nazir*, *Asham metzora*. These were guilt offerings which must be atoned, but even here the sins define – and are relative to – the spiritual plane achieved by the sinner.

Last is the *Korban Chatas*, Sin Offering, which was reserved for a sin committed through error (*b'shogeig*). There are special cases of a *Korban Chatas*: when the involuntary sin was committed by the *nasi*, prince of a tribe; or the *melech*, king; when the *Sanhedrin* or *Kohen Gadol* (*par ha'elem davar*) (*Par Kohen Moshiah*) erred.

I have detailed the *korbanos* for the express purpose of showing the ethical and religious value that Jewish law places on *korbanos*. It has never been a question of offering an animal as a sacrifice in order to gain forgiveness for a sin that was committed in full awareness. A Jew who has descended to such a nadir as to sin knowingly cannot expect the “easy cure” of a *korban*. *Teshuvah*, repentance, prayer, performing good deeds, and a complete lifestyle change are prescribed for him.

Having demonstrated the spiritual level of the individual who offers a *korban*, we now cite *Horav Yitzchak Arama, zl* (*Akeidas Yitzchak*), who explains the role of *korbanos* in the Jewish religion. After analyzing the various sacrifices, he identifies two distinct defining characteristics: as expressions of gratitude or devotion; and expressions of penitence. In summation, the *korbanos* are either an expression of the gratitude felt by an individual or the nation in recognition of the Divine care they receive. On the other hand, the *Korban* offers one an avenue of atonement for sins he has committed, but at no time do they reflect the denial of his responsibility to Hashem and to others. These are sins committed by people who would never transgress out of indifference, rebellion, or unfaithfulness to Hashem. The *Korbanos* atone only for sins which fall into the “gray” area, on the borderline between good and evil, or the less obvious sins characterized by unawareness, doubt, or thought without action.

Let us return to the opening statement of those modern, secular thinkers who would audaciously reject the “primitive” nature of the *korbanos*, and, for that matter, the *Bais HaMikdash*. After all, if there is no service, why bother with an edifice? (These are the same people who slander Orthodoxy for maintaining the sanctity of the *Kosel*.) They have nothing to connect themselves to the *korbanos*, since it is evident from the above that the sacrificial service is intended for a society with a highly developed sense of self-discipline and moral values. Only such a society requires forms of atonement so subtle and so rare as those described. One whose moral compass is turned south, whose values are bankrupt, is beyond the scope of sacrificial atonement. *Korbanos* are spiritual “maintenance” for one who has an affinity for spiritual ascendance – not for eschewing the basic principles to which our people have adhered throughout the millennia.

ונפש כי תקריב קרבן מנחה לך
When a person (soul) offers a meal-offering to Hashem.
(2:1)

Of all those who offer voluntary sacrifices/offerings, only one who brings a *Korban Minchah*, Meal offering, is referred to by the Torah as a *nefesh*, soul. This inexpensive *korban* was brought primarily by the poor, since they were financially challenged to bring an animal or fowl. Hashem says: “I will regard the *korban* of a poor man as if he had offered his very *nefesh*, soul.”

The simple explanation of this statement is that a wealthy person who brings a *korban* takes from his “extra” money – not from the money he needs for his daily sustenance. A poor man, however, has no extra money. In fact, he does not have sufficient funds for his daily living. Yet, he finds a way to somehow put together a few pennies to purchase the required flour for his *korban*. Such a person truly offers his soul.

Horav Eliyahu Meir Bloch, zl, offers a pragmatic explanation, which also teaches us a perspective on charitable giving – and how it should be performed. When a wealthy man contributes to an organization or an institution, he receives accolades in the way of a dinner, a plaque, a public gesture of gratitude – and he should. Without the support of those who can, our ability to subsist would be greatly stunted. Obviously, all support is derived from Hashem, but these are His agents. Even one who normally shuns public acclaim feels good about his contributions. After all, who is not happy if he can help someone? And who does not feel elevated when he receives that “thank you”? This applies even to a *tzadik*, righteous person, who takes personal pride in his good deeds.

The exception is the *ani*, poor man, who has nothing to scrape together. He knows for certain that accolades will not be forthcoming. The poor man derives nothing personal from his contribution, because he knows that his tiny donation, his few pennies, will not amount to much and will not create any stir or change within the organization or institution to which he gives. Why does he give? He gives to fulfill the command of Hashem – pure, selfless giving, with no ulterior motives – prior to or after the fact. This is a unique form of giving, which is found only in the *korban* of the poor man. Thus, Hashem refers to his giving as one who offers his soul.

Meged Yosef relates a story which is endemic to the *Rosh Yeshivah's* exposition and offers us a powerful insight into *tzedakah*, charitable giving. A poor, wretched widow who, despite having a daily challenge to obtain enough to sustain herself daily, would scrounge all week, saving everything that she could until she had one penny – which she personally proceeded to deliver to *Horav Yechezkel Sarna, zl*, for the *Chevron Yeshivah*. This took time, because the *Rosh Yeshivah* would drop everything to greet and spend a few minutes with her. The members of his family were not very happy that she occupied the *Rosh Yeshivah's* precious time. “Does the *Chevron Yeshivah* subsist from her penny?” they asked. The *Rosh Yeshivah* replied, “Veritably, the *Yeshivah's* continued existence does not hinge on her donation – but the entire world does!”

What a compelling insight. We tend to disregard the small, insignificant donations that are received from

those who simply cannot give more. *Tzedakah* should not be measured by how much one gives, but by the proportion of his assets this donation represents. If one has very little and he gives a little, he is actually giving considerably more than his counterpart who has very much and does not give proportionately.

ונפש כי חטא ומעל מעל ב'ה וכחש בעמיתו
If a person will sin and commit a treachery against Hashem by lying to his comrade. (5:21)

Stealing from a fellow Jew is certainly an act of evil, but is it treachery against Hashem? Does the thief take into consideration that “borrowing” from his friend with no intention of repaying the “loan” is not only theft, but also a perfidious act of betrayal against Hashem? There is no question that the thief is not a “good” person, his moral and ethical compass leaves much to be desired, but did he sin against the Almighty? It certainly was not his intention. The early commentators explain that one who swears falsely using Hashem's Name in uttering the oath (claiming that he committed no wrong) is not only a liar and a thief, but he has also defamed Hashem's Name. That is an act of treachery. While this might be true with regard to the case in which swearing was involved, what if he “merely” stole or lied without supporting his claim of innocence with a false oath? Is this, too, considered treachery?

Horav Nachman Breslover, zl, (*Likutei MoHarn*) writes that a person who falls prey to his desire for money to the point that he must have it – even if it means stealing it – indicates by his very action that he has limited belief in the Almighty's “ability” to provide for his needs. Thus, if a Jew motivated by his desire – or need – for money transgresses any *mitzvah*, it is tantamount to idol worship. If he believes that Hashem will provide for him, then he would not resort to theft. His stealing is an act of faithlessness.

Let us put the *Breslover's* exposition into perspective. A father who has been doing everything within his ability to provide for his large family is simply not making it. No matter what he does, they do not have food or decent clothing. They barely have a roof over their heads. I must emphasize that this is a man who is willing to work any form of labor, unlike those who are selective concerning what form of labor suits them. He looks at his starving children who must go to bed hungry, and he begins to wonder. Down the block is his neighbor whose two cars in the driveway cost more than his house, whose children eat snacks that cost as much as a supper in his house. Perhaps he could “borrow” something from his neighbor until such time that he could pay him back. After all, why not spread the wealth? Why should one person be extremely wealthy, while his neighbor is extremely poor? Here is a good person who is at his wit's end, who can no longer take it, who can no longer watch his children suffering. So, he steals.

Another case is the man whose wife is very sick. There is a cure, but he has no insurance. He has received assistance from every organization available. Now, the physician claims that unless his wife receives a certain expensive medication, she will succumb to her illness. What does this poor man do? He has exhausted every legal avenue of relief. He is not going to stand idly by while his wife suffers. So, he steals.