

# Sedra Highlight

- Dr Jacob Solomon

Tzav

*Zot HaTorah: This is the law of the burnt offering, the grain offering, the sin offering, the guilt offering, the installation offerings and the peace offerings, which G-d commanded on Mount Sinai... (7:37-38).*

The words ZOT HATORAH, "This is the Torah" brings the details of the korbanot to the climax, to the finale. The Gemara explores the significance of that ZOT HATORAH: Resh Lakish claims that it teaches that learning Torah is on par with bringing korbanot. Rava goes further; those who study Torah accumulate such merits that they need neither burnt offering, nor grain-offering, nor sin-offering, nor guilt-offering (Menachot 110a).

Elsewhere, the Gemara takes this idea one stage higher. Being fully focused on Torah learning prevents sin from occurring in the first place. And when tempted to do the wrong thing, the Gemara counsels, take yourself to the Beit Midrash. Be part of its proceedings and the evil urge will crumble and disappear, even if it is "as strong as iron". For G-d created the evil urge, but He has also created the Torah as its antidote (Kiddushin 30b).

In addition, the words ZOT HATORAH may possibly be interpreted as a limitation. For all these korbanot lack value if they are mere ritual or, worse, are offered in the spirit of saying sorry with no intention of doing teshuva at the same time. That is not Torah. The Torah of korbanot is only Torah when the rest of the Torah is heeded. Indeed, this idea fits in with the opening words of the regular haftara for the parsha (which we don't read this year, because it is pre-empted by the haftara for Para), with which the Navi Yirmiyahu brings in the name of G-d, and conveys a very different message about the korbanot:

"For I did not speak to your ancestors or command them about burnt offerings and sacrifices when I took them out of... Egypt." Rather, I commanded them: "Obey me, and I will be your G-d and you will be My people. Carefully follow the path I commanded you, so that things will go well for you" (Yirmiyahu 7:22-23).

Indeed, the tone of Yirmiyahu's words seem to indicate that the korbanot were not only worthless, but actually counterproductive, a source of harm rather than good. His words, with which the haftara concludes, contain a very different message from G-d Himself:

**"The wise man should not glory in his wisdom, the warrior in his bravery, or the rich man in his riches. Rather, let those who wish to glory do so in knowing and understanding Me: for I am G-d who acts kindly, justly, and righteously on Earth. It is these things that please Me..." (9:22-23)**

**So bringing lavish offerings to the Temple is not necessarily an act of piety. It may be a pitiful attempt to make amends for one's neglect in keeping commandments (especially in human relations), in breach of failing to 'please' G-d in acting 'kindly, justly, and righteously' towards other people. And large lavish offerings can add insult to injury, no doubt giving the donor the opportunity of 'glorying in his riches' and subtly embarrassing those who cannot afford to bring offerings on such a lavish scale.**

**As explanation, the Dubno Maggid (1741-1804) brings the following parable. Reuven commissioned an architect to design his new family home. The architect returned with the diagrams for all the components; the walls, the plaster, the window frames, the balconies, the roofing materials and so on. Reuven was happy with the designs and told the architect to go ahead.**

**Some time later, he returned to**

**Reuven and told him that all was completed according to the designs ordered. Reuven went to inspect. Imagine his disappointment when instead of a new house, he saw neatly stacked assemblies of the house components, as ordered.**

**By themselves, the parts were worthless. But put together, there would have been a house of great value. Similarly with the korbanot. By themselves, as Yirmiyahu emphasized, they were worthless. Only if Am Yisrael would behave in keeping with Torah values and teachings would the korbannot would have real meaning, would G-d see them as adding value.**

**Similarly today. To a great degree, we live in a tick-box society. But tick boxes do not tell the whole story. In education for example, an experienced inspector might visit a school, tick all the boxes favorably and yet declare that this school has something fundamentally wrong with it that is beyond the tick box system to reach and to identify... Tick boxes are important, but they capture the substance only, not the intangible spirit that lies at the heart of whole venture. 🌱📋**