

Bringing the Prophets to Life

**Weekly insights into the Haftara
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The Importance (or Not) of Korbanot

VAYIKRa - 31 p'sukim

- Yeshayahu 43:21-44:21

With the opening of Sefer Vayikra, we are introduced to the world of korbanot. In it, the Torah depicts, details and delineates the proper procedures to be observed when involved in sacrificial ritual. This first parasha of Sefer Vayikra includes the proper practices to be followed for a range of offerings, including: the diverse types of Olot, the variety of Menachot, the assorted kinds of Sh'lamim, the different sorts of Chatot and various array of Ashamot. The following parasha of Tzav depicts more practices that must be carried out when sacrificing to Hashem, including the specific tasks of the Kohanim, the choice of the sanctified utensils and where and how the sacrifice is to be taking place.

Given the litany of laws and practices of the korbanot that fill these parshot, it is more than curious to find that the haftarot of each portion do not focus on sacrifices at all.

Instead, both readings speak of Israel's corruption of the ritual service [Yishayahu 44:9-17] and how inconsequential it really is! [Yirmiyahu 7:21-22]

I would submit, therefore, that the words of our nevi'im are, indeed, targeted at the importance of the korbanot - but they do so by revealing what the essence of divine worship must be.

The popular quotation "familiarity breeds contempt" dates back to the fabulist, Aesop, some 2600 years ago, but the truth of its message pre-dated the Greek storyteller by 1000 years at Har Sinai. There, Hashem charged the entire nation to be a MAMLECHET KOHANIM, a kingdom of ministers [of G-d] and a holy nation, and, therefore, may not even approach the holy mountain due to its sanctity. The very act of approaching a source of sanctity suggests an improper closeness and inappropriate familiarity with kedusha. Unfortunately, such behavior inevitably leads to the diminishing of one's reverence toward Hashem.

It is for this reason that sanctity demands reverence and, therefore, kedusha requires separation. And this was the challenge that the Israelite nation of the prophetic era failed to meet ... and the challenge that the Jewish community in our own time must face.

It was this failure that Yishayahu condemns in our haftara.

When we carefully read through the haftara, we find that the first eight p'sukim [43:21-28] are filled with the condemnation of Israel for their failure to show the proper respect to Hashem and His worship. G-d reminds Yishayahu of how He had to punish the earlier generations for their sins - having to defile, "profane" even those "officers" who were to serve G-d - VA'ACHALEL SAREI KODESH!

The bulk of the prophet's message, however, is found in the 23 verses of perek 44. There, the navi details the various ways that the people (even the Kohanim) had desecrated the ritual service to the point of deifying the pagan gods and worshiping them! Yishayahu implies that the nation's disregard of Hashem's overwhelming power and abilities, leading them to equate Him with other "gods", was due to their loss of the reverence, respect and awe of HaKadosh Baruch Hu.

Indeed, Kedusha DOES require separation and distance, whether it refers to the need of keeping a respectful relationship with a parent, a teacher or a scholar. Sadly, I believe it is this "challenge of the ages" that we fail to meet in today's world.

Furthermore, I do not see this failure

as being limited to our behavior toward individuals alone but it also demands us to consider how we regard our treatment of Yeshivot, of Batei Midrash, and, most commonly, of Batei Knesset. Should we not reflect on the propriety of entering a shul for tefilla with a cup of coffee in hand to drink? Do we find it acceptable to depart the sanctuary while our litter remains on the floor? And, can we not complete our (unnecessary) conversations after the conclusion of tefilla?

Yes, we can create and develop an atmosphere of sanctity in our lives, but only when we distance ourselves from the mundane during those precious moments of holiness. Simply, we will better cherish the consecrated in our lives when separating the holy from the profane. The ancient prophets demanded this to their generation.

And, I submit, they were speaking to us, as well. ✨