

Good Shabbos Everyone. In this week's portion Tzav the Torah continues its discussion of the Korbanos, the animal and flour offerings which served as one of the main avenues of Jewish worship in the times of the Temple. These sacrifices served to bring Jews closer to Hashem. This is hinted to in the root of the word Korban which is "Karov," meaning "close." One of the most important of the Korbanos-sacrifices is the Korban Pesach. The Torah describes the Korban Pesach in Parshas Bo: "They shall eat the meat [of the sheep or goat] on that night – roasted over the fire – and matzos; with bitter herbs shall they eat it." (Shemos 12:8)

Until the rebuilding of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, we are unable to bring the Korban Pesach. What can we bring to Hashem in place of the Korban Pesach and all the other sacrifices that for so long served to connect us with Hashem? Hashem would not have taken away the Korbanos (sacrifices) without giving us an alternate route to grow closer to Him.

The Prophet Hoshea answers our dilemma: "Let our lips compensate for the bulls [which we used to bring as sacrifices.]"(14:3) Hashem is telling us through the Prophet's words that in place of the sacrifices, we can use our mouths to serve Hashem through prayer. As we say before prayer "My L-rd, open my lips, that my mouth may declare Your praise."(51:17)

As we approach Pesach, it is important to mention that the themes of Pesach and prayer are very much related to one another. Before we begin the Amidah, the main body of Jewish prayer, we praise Hashem for freeing us from slavery in Egypt. Why do we link our redemption from Egypt with our prayers to Hashem? The following parable illustrates our answer: There once was a man who fell into a fast moving river which flowed towards a 300 foot waterfall. The man began to yell for help. Nearby, the king was out strolling by the riverside when he heard the cries of the drowning man. The king was able to miraculously rescue the man from certain death.

The man was very grateful to the king for saving his life and he became one of the most outspoken supporters of the king and his policies. The man was appointed official spokesman of the royal court. Wherever the man went to speak the praises of the king, he prefaced his remarks with the story of how the king saved his life.

The Children of Israel were drowning in a river of impurity in Egypt. Hashem, the King, heard the cries of the Children of Israel and saved them from certain spiritual death. We are so thankful to Hashem that He released us from slavery that we became "Avdei Hashem"-- Hashem's spokespeople. Thus, when we sing Hashem's praises in prayer, we often begin by recounting how Hashem brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an out-stretched arm. (Shemoneh Esrei, Rav. Avrohom Chaim Feuer, p.37)

The Gerrer Rebbe commented that the Jews are Hashem's chosen people mainly because we have a power to pray to Hashem. The Egyptians, on the other hand, used their mouths to pursue prurient interests. The Egyptian leader was therefore called Pharaoh, which can be read "Peh Rah" the wicked mouth. (Likutei Yehudah, Parshas Vaeira, p.45)

The primary tragedy of the Jews in Egypt was not their physical bondage but the shackling of their souls. The Jews' spirits were silenced, and they almost lost the ability to pray and communicate with Hashem.(Ibid.) On Pesach we celebrate our spiritual freedom to call out to Hashem all of our hopes and needs, and our appreciation for being alive. The name of the Yom Tov itself hints to this concept; Pesach can be read "Pey Sach" the mouth that speaks and can therefore pray to Hashem. (Ibid)

We read about the importance of prayer in our Torah portion this week Tzav. By looking into the verses, we can improve the quality of our own prayers. The Torah tells us that improper thought while bringing a korban - sacrifice can invalidate the sacrifice. (Vayikra 7:18) As we have discussed, prayer substitutes for the sacrifices. When a Jew prays he should therefore be careful not to let any foreign thoughts into his head, such as the plans for the day, or what he is going to eat after davening. Just as an improper thought renders a sacrifice invalid, so too do foreign thoughts render prayer invalid. (Shulchan Aruch).

On their way through Rizhin, a group of misnagdim (opponents of the Chasidim) from Sanik decided to visit Reb Yisrael of Rizhin in order to enjoy a little argument with him on the ideology of Chassidism.

"We, at least, walk in the path of G-d," they began. "We set aside times for the study of Torah; we pray with a minyan at daybreak; and when prayers are over, while we are still wearing our tallis and tefillin, we settle down to learn Mishnayos. But the chassidim -not only do they pray after the statutory time, but when they have finished with their prayers they sit down and drink a 'l'chaim' and have cake. And then they call themselves chassidim, (which means 'pious ones,') and us they call misnagdim, their antagonists. Why, it should be the other way round!"

The Rizhiner rebbe's shammes who happened to be present, could not contain himself, and came out with his own reply: "You misnagdim serve the Creator frigidly - you are as lacking in warmth as a corpse, G-d forbid. And everyone knows that after a death the traditional custom is to study Mishnayos. But when chassidim serve their Maker, they do it with enthusiasm, and their heart is on fire, just as a living man is full of warmth - and doesn't a living man need a drop of vodka now and again?"

After hearing the words of his shammes (attendant), Reb Yisroel of Rizhin commented: "This answer, of course, was not to be taken seriously. But the fact is that from the day on which the Temple was destroyed, it is prayer that substitutes for the sacrifices which can no longer be offered, as it is written: "Let our lips compensate for the bulls [which we used to bring as sacrifices.]"(Hoshea 14:3)

Moreover, just as a sacrifice is rendered invalid by an improper thought, and becomes an abomination which is not acceptable On High, so too is a man's prayer invalidated by alien thought. The Evil Inclination therefore has all kind of tricks he uses to introduce foreign thoughts into the mind of the worshiper in order to distract him. And that is why the chassidim invented a counter-strategy of their own. After their prayers they sit down to have a shot of vodka together, and wish each other l'chaim; and as each man gives expression to what he most needs, his friend says: 'May G-d grant your request!'

Now according to the law of the Torah, prayer may be uttered in any language, so these informal words are of course reckoned in heaven as prayer. Here, however, the Evil Inclination has no say, for when he sees people eating and drinking and speaking in their everyday language, he thinks that this is a mere bodily activity and does not even realize that this is prayer!" (A Treasury of Chassidic Tales, p.322 R.S.Y. Zevin, U.Kaploun, trans.)

In the place of sacrifices, a Jew today can grow closer to Hashem through prayer, as it states in Psalms "Hashem is close to all who call upon Him – to all who call Him sincerely." (Tehillim 145:18) May it be Your will Hashem, our G-d and the G-d of our forefathers, that the prayers of our lips be worthy, acceptable and favorable before You as if we brought the offerings at their set times and at their proper locations. May the Holy Temple be rebuilt, speedily in our days, so that we may again bring offerings that are pleasing to you Hashem. **Good Shabbos Everyone.**