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Parashat VaYikra

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We open the Book of VaYikra, Leviticus, also known as Torat HaKohanim. It is the Book of Torah that concerns itself predominantly with sacrifices. The first parashah, VaYikra, begins with HaShem giving over the laws of korbanot (sacrifices) to Moses, who is tasked to pass them on to the people.

There is an interesting law concerning bird sacrifice. It concerns the feathers of the bird. The feathers are burnt as part of the sacrifice and the fragrance will be pleasing. Rashi addresses the fragrance of the feathers saying, “But surely you will not find even a common sort of man who can smell the odor of burnt feathers without being disgusted by it.”

The question then is why is this, and other, sacrifices get described as having a pleasing odor. The lesson for us is to have us understand that a cattle sacrifice and a bird sacrifice are equal in their importance. Rashi closes his earlier comment, “Why then does the Torah say that it shall be offered with the feathers? In order that the Altar should appear full up, as it were, and adorned with the sacrifice of the poor (since the bird with its feathers makes a finer show than without them).”

Simply put, as long as the person offering the korban (the sacrifice) has the proper intent and his/her heart is in the right place. G-d “wants” participation, and the award is the ability to participate, as accorded by The Torah.

The least elaborate of the korbanot is the “meal offering”. The description of the person who brings it is “soul”. With the other sacrifices the person who is offering it is referred to as “person”. Rashi again comments on this change of language to “soul”. “For who is it that usually brings a meal offering? The poor man! The Holy One, blessed be He, says as it were. I will regard for him as though he brought his very soul as an offering.”

If the definition of happiness is leading a fulfilling life in accordance with the laws of Torah, then we learn that convenience and money do not buy happiness. It is one’s good heart that will provide the happiness one deserves whether it be in this world or the world to come.

Good Shabbos!

Rabbi Nathan W. Langer

