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Vayikra

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Reflective
Question:

Where does real growth begin—when you focus less on what you gain and more on what you give?

Gematria on the Parshah:
The Secret of the Small Aleph

By: Reb Moshe Herskovits

In Parshat Vayikra, Hashem calls Moshe to the Tent of Meeting to teach him the laws of korbanot. Chazal notice something unusual. The word Vayikra is written with a small aleph. Why is the letter aleph written smaller than usual? What secret does this small aleph hold about drawing closer to Hashem?

The Small Aleph

The Chozeh MiLublin explains that the small aleph alludes to why Hashem called Moshe. Moshe minimized his own aleph, his own ani. At the burning bush, when Hashem commands Moshe to go to Pharaoh, Moshe responds **מי אני** Who am I to go to Pharaoh? He truly felt unworthy of being chosen. The Chozeh teaches this is precisely what made Moshe worthy.

The gematria of **מי אני** (Who am I) is 131, the same as **ענוה** (humility). The modern spelling, **אני** equals 111, the same as **אלה**. Hashem called Moshe because he minimized his **אני**, his own I. The smaller Moshe made himself, the greater Hashem made him.

The Tzaddikim explain that prophecy comes to a person who nullifies their ego. The Alter Rebbe teaches that a person must transform their **אני** into **אין**. Amazingly, the word **אין** (in a state of nullification) shares the same letters as the word **נביא** (prophet).

Symbolism of Matzah

Why does Hashem choose the humble? The humble person earns Hashem's trust. Hashem loves every Jew and wants the greatest blessing for them. The humble person understands this perspective. Their life isn't about taking care of themselves, it is about taking care of the entire nation.

This is alluded to in the symbolism of matzah. Matzah symbolizes humility, and chametz represents ego. The gematria of **מצה** is 135, the same as **סמיכה** (Rabbinic ordination) and **קהל** (congregation). A true leader is like matzah. He always acts with the entire congregation of Am Yisrael in mind.

The Gaon of Vilna teaches the Shechinah rests only upon a congregation. But when a person constantly carries the needs of the congregation in their heart, they are no longer living as **אני**, they live as **אנחנו**. When a person lives this way, Hashem is always with them.

Hashem's Desire for Every Jew

How did Moshe reach this level? What motivated him? The Midrash says Moshe heard the voice of prophecy from the Ark of the Covenant. He would hear the voice from between the two Keruvim. Chazal teach the Keruvim represent Hashem and Yisrael. The Keruvim were face to face symbolizing Hashem's deep yearning for Am Yisrael.

Moshe understood this secret. He realized that no matter how high he rose spiritually, this was not Hashem's ultimate desire. Hashem's true desire is to have the deepest relationship with every Jew, not just Moshe Rabbeinu.

When Moshe interacted with each Jew, he knew how deeply Hashem desired them. We can apply the same lesson to our own lives by remembering the deep desire Hashem has to connect with us and every single Jew we interact with.

The Baal Shem Tov: Holy Thieves

There is a story of the Baal Shem Tov connected to this idea.

A couple once came to the Baal Shem Tov. Their only child was gravely ill, and the doctors had given up hope.

The Baal Shem Tov gathered ten hidden Tzaddikim to pray, but even their prayers could not cancel the decree.

Refusing to give up, the Baal Shem Tov went into a forest known for thieves. The thieves respected him because he always saw the good in every Jew.

He told them about the sick child and asked them to pray. They agreed. They prayed, and the child was miraculously healed. Later the parents made a celebration to thank Hashem.

The parents asked, "Baal Shem Tov, you are so holy. Why did your prayer only work when you prayed with a minyan of thieves?"

The Baal Shem Tov smiled and said, "The gates of Heaven were locked, and I needed someone who could break the lock."

He explained: "Hashem loves every Jew more than we can imagine, more than a parent loves a child. Even these thieves are His beloved children. Like children who have been away from their Father, I knew that if I could bring them back to Him, even for a moment, the gates of Heaven would open."

Challenge

This week, take five minutes to reflect on how much Hashem yearns for every Jew, including yourself. When we begin to see every Jew the way Hashem sees them, we too become worthy to hear Hashem's call.

What a Korban Asks of Us

By: Reb Adam Klasner



The Torah tells us that when a meal offering was brought in the Mishkan, it could not contain chametz or honey. The flour had to remain simple. No leaven that makes the dough rise, and no sweetness mixed into it.

At first glance, this sounds like a technical rule. But the Torah often uses physical acts to teach something about the inner life.

Chametz causes dough to rise. Many explain that it represents ego. The part of us that inflates, that wants recognition, control, and importance.

Honey represents something else. Sweetness. Pleasure. The desire for what feels good.

When something is brought as a korban, neither of these belongs on the altar.

A korban does not just mean sacrifice. It comes from the word karov, closeness. A korban is about drawing closer to Hashem.

And real closeness cannot be built on ego or on chasing sweetness. It asks something more honest. It asks a person to show up without needing the moment to revolve around themselves.

But in the teachings of Chassidus there is an important insight. There are moments when chametz and honey do appear. Because at the beginning of a person's journey, sweetness and a sense of self can actually help someone grow. A person needs to feel that Torah speaks to them, that their life matters, that their choices have meaning.

But that is the beginning, not the destination.

The deeper stage of growth is when a person learns to move beyond the need for ego and beyond the need for sweetness. Not everything we do needs to feel good. Not everything needs to feed our identity.

Sometimes closeness begins when we simply show up with honesty.

That is what a korban asks of us.

Give it Back, It
Doesn't Belong to You!

By: Rabbi Avrohom Jacks

You may be committing the ultimate robbery without even realizing it! Granted, you never meant to take anything from anyone, but the heavy truth is you may have robbed the world of its most spectacular treasure. Let me break down exactly how this could have happened.

Towards the end of Parshas Vayikrah, the Torah discusses a type of animal sacrifice brought during Temple times, called a guilt-offering. These animal sacrifices could atone for a variety of sins. The Torah specifically mentions the case of a thief. A thief cannot achieve sacrificial atonement before he has physically returned the stolen object to its rightful owner.

We are not only capable of stealing physical objects. We can also steal divine potential. For you see, everything in this world was explicitly designed for pure goodness. When you allow a moment to slip into negativity, you are openly snatching resources intended for the realm of holiness. To be sure, Jewish



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law recognizes the large difference between a secret thief and a brazen robber. A robber takes property in broad daylight with absolute disregard for the owner. Since G-d is entirely present everywhere at all times, every ounce of wasted potential is a brazen robbery of His divine energy.

When we choose to play small or let laziness hijack our schedules, we commit a subtle form of spiritual theft. Every time we hit the snooze button, we are misappropriating a small piece of divine energy. When we surrender our mindsets to negativity, we compound this thievery. Every unconstructive pursuit robs the world of a little divine light.

But it is liberating to know that there is hope. The Torah provides mechanisms to repair and heal our past mistakes. We can wake up from our slumber. We can return the stolen energy and make restitution. Our dormant talents are simply waiting for us to flip the switch by stepping out of our comfort zones and reorienting our recovered power toward the higher purpose for which it was always intended.

In Hebrew, the word for sacrifice actually means to draw close. When you decide to use your gifts relentlessly, you elevate all of existence. When you return stolen energy to the side of holiness, you are now ready to draw everything closer to G-d.

Real Human Sacrifice

By: Rabbi Nachum Aaron Kutnowski



As we begin Sefer Vayikra, the Torah introduces the world of Korbanos: "If a person will bring a sacrifice from you to Hashem..." (Vayikra 1:2). The verse then clarifies that the offering must come from animals - "from the cattle and the flock" (Vayikra 1:2).

At first glance, this seems straightforward. Yet Rabbeinu Bachya notes that the opening phrase - "אדם כי יקריב מכם" - could almost be read as if a person himself might be sacrificed. The Torah therefore immediately clarifies that the sacrifice must come from animals, emphasizing that the offering comes from the person, but not the person themselves (Rabbeinu Bachya to Vayikra 1:2, אדם כי יקריב מכם).

But why would the Torah even allow such an ambiguity? Haven't we already learned, most powerfully through the Akeidah, that Hashem does not desire human sacrifice? Indeed, Rashi explains that Avraham Avinu was never even commanded to actually slaughter Yitzchak, but to simply bring him up (Rashi to Bereishis 22:2, והעלהו).

Why, then, does the Torah begin the laws of Korbanos with the word "אדם"?

The Sforno offers a fundamental insight into the nature of Korbanos. The essence is not the animal being offered, but the inner experience of the person bringing it. True sacrifice takes place within a human being - through self-reflection, confession, and a commitment to change. Without that internal process, the external act is empty (Sforno to Vayikra 1:2, אדם כי יקריב מכם).

With this, the Torah's wording becomes precise. Before anything is placed on the Mizbayach, the individual himself must be part of this sacrifice. The Korban merely expresses that inner process - it is a physical reflection of personal offering.

In this sense, while a human being is never literally the sacrifice, he is very much the sacrifice in a spiritual sense. The animal serves only as a symbol; the true offering is the person's own heart, humility, and growth.

This idea remains quite relevant for us today. In the absence of the Beis HaMikdash, we no longer bring Korbanos in their original form - but their message endures. Our "offerings" are found in our Tefillos, growth, and willingness to humble ourselves before Hashem and His commandments.

Ultimately, the Torah teaches that what matters most is not simply what we give, but who we become in the process.

May we merit to bring our whole selves into our 'עבודת ה', and through that, draw ever closer to Him.

The Offering of the Heart

By: Reb Yacov Aboudi



Two offerings can look identical on the outside but in the eyes of Heaven they may be worlds apart.

When the Torah introduces the offerings in Sefer Vayikra, something surprising appears almost immediately.

The most elaborate offerings involve bulls and sheep. Yet the Torah also describes a much simpler offering.... a handful of flour.

And when the Torah speaks about that offering, it uses a very unusual phrase:

"נפש כי תקריב קרבן מנחה."

"When a soul brings a flour offering."

(Vayikra 2:1)

Why would the Torah call this offering "a soul"?

After all, it is only flour.

Rashi, quoting the Gemara, explains that the flour offering was typically brought by someone poor.

"מי דרכו להתנדב מנחה? עני. אמר הקב"ה מעלה אני. עליו כאילו הקריב נפשו."

"Who usually brings a flour offering? The poor. Hashem says: I consider it as if he offered his soul." (Menachot 104b)

For someone who has very little, a handful of flour is not a small gift. It represents everything they have. In that moment, the offering reflects not only what they bring, but who they are.

This idea becomes even more striking when we remember that the first offering recorded in the Torah is also described as a mincha.

"וַיָּבֵא קַיִן מִפְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה מִנְחָה לַה'."

"Kayin brought from the fruit of the ground a mincha to Hashem." (Bereshit 4:3)

Yet Kayin's offering was not accepted. Rashi explains that Kayin brought something inferior rather than the best of his produce. Hevel, by contrast, brought the finest of his flock.

The difference between the two offerings was

not the category of the gift. It was the heart behind it.

Kayin brought something that cost him very little. The poor person who brings a mincha in Vayikra brings something that represents their very soul. Externally the offerings may look similar something simple from the ground.

But spiritually they are worlds apart.

The Ramban explains that a korban was meant to awaken a deep realization within a person. When someone brought an offering, they were meant to recognize that the korban represents themselves standing before Hashem (Ramban, Vayikra 1:9). The offering must reflect the person bringing it.

The Zohar adds another dimension. The very word korban comes from kiruv closeness.

"קָרְבָן אִיהוּ קִירְבָּא."

"A korban is an act of drawing close."

(Zohar III, 5a)

An offering that comes from humility and sincerity rises high, because it reflects a genuine turning of the heart.

There is another quiet message in the mincha offering as well. Sometimes a person may feel that they have very little to give... not enough resources, not enough strength, not enough to make a meaningful contribution. The mincha tells a different story. Even a simple handful of flour, brought with sincerity, can be called an offering of the nefesh. The Torah reminds us that a person is never emptyhanded before Hashem. Even when we feel small, what we bring from the heart can rise very high. As Chazal teach, "רחמנא ליבא בעי" the Merciful One desires the heart (Sanhedrin 106b).

Chazal summarize the entire idea in one famous line:

"אחד המרבה ואחד הממעיט ובלבד שיכוון לבו לשמים."

"Whether one gives much or little, what matters is directing the heart toward Heaven." (Menachot 110a)

Two offerings can look identical from the outside. A handful of flour.

But one may come from sacrifice, while the other comes from convenience.

We see this even today. Two people may give the same dollar to someone in need. For one person, that dollar is loose change... something barely noticed, something that costs nothing. For another person, that same dollar may be the last money they have in their pocket.

The amount is identical. But the offering is not.

One gift reflects almost nothing of the person giving it. The other reflects their nefesh. And that leaves us with the uncomfortable but honest question the parsha quietly asks each of us:

When we give to Hashem, to those in need, or to the people in our lives are we simply giving something? Or are we giving something of ourselves?

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