

Parashat Vayikra

The Leader and the Community

We all sin! Sin is endemic to man's nature: "There is not even a righteous person in the world who fails to sin." said Kohelet¹. This week, we are going to focus our attention upon the "Korban Chattat" - the "Sin Offering."

Chavruta Study:

1. Look through the parsha of the Chatat – the sin-offering 4:1-5:15.
 - Chart out the parsha listing the manner in which the different sub-sections are organized.
 - Identify the organizing principle(s) here.
 - What is the difference between the different Korbanot Chattat?
2. The Kohein Hamashiach. (4:3) Who is this? What has he done?
 - See the interesting difference of opinion between Rashi on the one hand, and Ibn-Ezra and Rashbam on the other hand.
 - You might also want to see the Sephorno who suggests a 3rd surprising approach. Reference the Mishna quoted from Berachot 34b. Contrast with Rashi.
3. Who is "the whole community of Israel" in 4:13.
 - See Rashi and see Rasag. (R. Saadia Gaon preceded Rashi.)
 - Once again the Sephorno gives us some vital perspective.
4. The spiritual underpinnings of the Chatat.
 - See the Ramban on 4:1, and on 5:16.

A LITTLE STRUCTURE

When we open Chapter 4 of Vayikra, the first thing that confronts and surprises us is that the Chapter prescribes different sin offerings for different individuals, dependent upon their status in the national hierarchy. Let me explain:

- 4:1-2 Introduction: The sin offering
Sin offering of:
4:3-12 The Chief priest (Kohen haMashiach)

- 4:13-21 "All of Israel"
4:22-26 Nasi/King
4:27-35 The private individual

Why is this order surprising? - Because it is without parallel in all other Korbanot. In all other Korbanot, no difference is made between king, priest or commoner as regards a Shelamim or an Olah! Why might a differentiation be made here?

Moreover, we are used to gradations and categorisation within the chapters of the Korbanot. In Chapters 1-3, the parshiot are structured on the framework of a progression, the Korbanot organised according to the object offered to God. It is the **object**, or animal offered, not the person bringing the offering. This can be demonstrated very neatly with a concise outline of Vayikra thus far.

<u>Ch.1 Olah</u>	<u>Ch.2 Mincha</u>	<u>Ch.3 Shelamim</u>
3-9 Cow	1-3 Plain Mincha	1-5 Bull
10-13 Sheep	4 Baked	6-11 Sheep
14-17 Poultry	5-6 Pancakes	12-17 Goat
	7-8 Fried	
	14-17 Roasted	

As we can see quite readily, the Korbanot are organised not by WHOM is offering the Korban, but rather by WHAT it is that is being offered. The Korban Chatat suddenly disrupts this structure². We might wonder, why?

One might make the following suggestion. The Korban Chatat is a very different Korban to that of Chapter 1-3. Parshat Vayikra outlines five classic types of Korbanot. It sub-divides those Korbanot into two prime categories:

Chap 1-3: OPTIONAL (self-motivated)

- Olah, Mincha, Shelamim

Chap 4-5: MANDATORY (obligatory)

² We should note that this is not entirely true. Sin offerings are also given with a certain gradation or progression. This may be found in Chapter 5:1-15 and there we do find choices between – in descending order – bulls, sheep, fowl, flour offering. But there the issue is a financial one. The question is, how much can the repentant sinner afford? If the financial means are limited, then the sinner is allowed a more modest Korban Chatat, and can even, in the case of extreme poverty, resort to a flour sin offering rather than an animal offering. To stress the point, the choices offered here are based upon financial needs and not the choicest korban or some other consideration.

¹ Kohelet 7:20

- Chatat and Asham

The first group are self-motivated. The impetus for the Korban comes at the initiation of the person concerned. Clearly, this explains the internal organisation of the Perek. After all, the options are wide open. The individual can choose which category of offering that he/she wishes to bring to God (Olah/ Mincha/Shelamim.) But after the choice is made, seeing that this is self-motivated Service - a voluntary offering - the individual may select within each Korban category whether to offer a bull, a sheep etc. or whether to offer a baked, fried or roasted Mincha. Hence, chapters here are organised accordingly, providing something of a menu, a guide for the individual who was moved to bring an offering to the Temple.

Chapter 4-5 however, are a totally different world. These korbanot are imposed, obligatory. The act of sin imposes an obligation; the Korban is mandated as part of the atonement process for sins. Here the individual has no choice in what to bring. They are instructed to offer the sacrifice and they are informed what it is that they shall bring to the Temple. No choices here! And hence in dividing the internal structure of the Parshiot, a different organising principle is utilised.

And yet, the question still nags us; why here with the Korban Chatat are particular "dignitaries" singled out as having a different procedure for the korban? Why does the sin offering become the Korban that separates out the average man, the king and the priest?

Let us turn our attention to some details here. Who are these people who are singled out here? What sin have they perpetrated?

THE KOHEIN HAMASHICH: WHAT IS THE SIN?

The first personality listed is the *Kohein HaMashiach* – the anointed priest, who sins, "*Le'Oshmat Ha'am* – for/by the guilt of the People." Who is this *Kohein HaMashiach*? And what is the nature of "the guilt of the People/Nation" here? How is the sin of the Priest connected to the sin of the Nation?

Rashi explains that we are dealing with the High Priest and Rashi resorts to Midrash to explain why the Priest's sin and the nation's sin are intertwined:

"When the High Priest sins, it is to the guilt of the people, for they are dependent upon him to atone for them and to pray for them. Now he has become corrupted."

But Kohanim do not serve exclusively in a ritual role. They also have, at times, a judicial role:

"The Kohanim were given the task of teaching and judging as it states, 'They will teach your Judgements to Jacob and your Torah to Israel.' Certainly this is the role of the High Priest who is the expert. Hence we are talking about the anointed priest who errs in his evaluation of a point of law, ruling erroneously in a public matter, thus causing the 'guilt of the people'"

This is the Rashbam's reading. Ibn Ezra explains similarly:

"The guilt of the people: For he issued a ruling that was mistaken, and the entire nation acted in error, all inadvertently."

So what was the mistake? The first possibility – Rashi - is that the Kohein sinned in his personal or ritual life, thereby disrupting his personal integrity. Since he embodies the link between God and Nation, that very relationship is in jeopardy.

Alternatively, our Kohein is a Judge, a *posek*, who has issued a mistaken Halakhic ruling. Due to the Kohein's error, the people are following the wrong Halakha. He bears the guilt of many private individuals because of his judicial error.

THE KOHEIN AS THE PERSONIFICATION OF THE NATION

Interestingly, Seforno takes the relationship between the Kohein and the people in a reverse direction. According to the Seforno, the Kohein bears guilt **because** of the sins of the nation! The Seforno quotes a Mishna in Berachot (34b) that states:

"If a person makes a mistake in prayer, it is a bad sign for him. If he is Shaliach Tzibbur it is a negative sign for his community."

The implication of this is that our mistakes in prayer are a reflection of our inner spiritual state. If our spiritual situation is in disrepair, the symptoms will manifest themselves in our inability to pray smoothly. If we are out of favour with God, then our prayers cannot flow smoothly. We make mistakes. In this view, prayer is a two way street. If the prayer is rejected, we find it difficult even to utter the very words of prayer.

Likewise, on the communal plane, the Shaliach Tzibbur who stumbles in prayer is having difficulty because those that "sent him" have sinned. In the Mishna, this is expressed by means of a story:

"When (after) R. Channina ben Dosa would pray for the sick he would say, 'This one shall live, that one shall die.'

They asked him, 'How do you know?'

He said, ' If my prayer flows smoothly I know that my prayers are accepted. If they do not flow smoothly I know that they are torn.'"

Rabbi Chanina instinctively felt that the very manner in which he prayed reflected whether God was receptive to his prayer or, turning His back on his prayers. Likewise the Shaliach Tzibbur who errs is not a personal reflection. It is a sign that his prayers – he being the people's representative, the embodiment of the community – are being rejected. Somehow the words are getting stuck, because the prayer is facing closed doors.

And here the Seforno explains something about the Kohein Gadol.

"Since sinners are of varying tendencies, some who are prone to sin inevitably becoming caught in it, and then there are others who at the other extreme, transgressing only occasionally; the Parsha talks about varying circumstances and the appropriate korbanot for each. Therefore with the Kohen HaMashiach, for he is least likely to sin, it writes, "IF the Kohein Hamashiach sin TO THE GUILT OF THE NATION" **for this will not happen unless he is ensnared by the nation.** Just as they say: "If a person makes a mistake in prayer, it is a bad sign for him. If he is Shaliach Tzibbur it is a negative sign for his community." His Korban is entirely burnt and the Kohein has no share in it. That is why it does not say the words (as with other Korbanot Chatat), "VeASHEM" a – and he bears guilt... He did not sin at all! rather it is the guilt of the people.

In other words, the Chatat of the Kohein is not for his personal sins. He brings a personal Chatat because of the degenerate spiritual state of the nation at large. **The Kohein is merely a reflection of the people.**

Note the contrast with Rashi:
For Rashi, the people reflect the sin of the leader. **For Seforno**, the Kohein reflects the sin of the nation!

THE ENTIRE COMMUNITY?

We can already see a very fascinating interplay developing here. The Korban Chatat begins with the story of a national leader who sins. But is it his sin at all? According to all three commentators that we have discussed thus far, the sin of the "Kohein Hamashiach" is reflected in, or an echo of, the sin of the nation.

Leader and nation are intertwined in an interconnected web of responsibility and national fate. After all, the leader is leader for the people, and by virtue of the people. The moral lead or ethical depravity of the national figurehead will affect national priorities. And the norms, moral or corrupt, of the nation will dictate and influence the leaders.

This interplay between leader and nation continues in the next two parshiot. In these lines we see the sin of:

1. All the community of Israel (4:13-21)
2. The Nasi (4:22-26)

What is the sin of "all the community of Israel" And how can the entire community sin? As the Torah continues, it is a situation in which the correct performance of a mitzvah is "hidden from the eyes of the collective." And who is this collective? Rashi says : "This is the Sanhedrin" who have made an "error in judgement," leading to public mass violation of Halakha. So the judicial authorities have made an error, and the people follow their ruling. The nation sin by virtue of their Judges.

The next case (4:22) is the sin of the Nasi – the prince of the community. Who is the Nasi? In both Biblical and Mishnaic times, the Nasi was a political and at times, religious leader of the Jewish community. Indeed all the commentators say that this Nasi here is some form of political leader: either a head of tribe (Ibn Ezra), or a king (Seforno.)

So we now realise that we have the entire national leadership:

- Religious (Kohein/Priest);
- Judiciary (Sanhedrin)
- National Administration/Government (King.)

It is quite incredible that at the start of the laws of atonement for sins, the leaders of the nation are specified. **We do not believe that our leaders are infallible. But we do expect them to confront their sins and to heal, repair and atone for their crimes.**

Rashi's comment is pessimistic but rather realistic when we think of the world of politics:

"Happy is the generation who's political leaders have the sensitivity to bring atonement for their mistakes; all the more so for those who regret deliberate acts of impropriety."

Most political leaders become hardened to the daily pressures, the fateful decisions that affect the lives of their constituents. They are unwilling to admit failure and decisions taken in error; they sin but fail to admit their actions. Happy is the nation whose leaders can admit their mistakes, even more if they have the readiness to seek atonement for those mistakes.

Shabbat Shalom

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