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 RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights*..... קדש

Friday 23 March 2012 - eve of New Moon Nisan 5772  
 Sedra Vayikra

**AROUSAL FROM ABOVE, RESPONSE FROM BELOW**

**WE ARE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE HEBREW MONTH OF NISAN, THE MONTH of our redemption from Egypt. Preparations for Pesach have begun; in fact, the whole month has a special atmosphere. It is a time of great spiritual opportunity.**

The theme of the month is expressed in phrase from the Song of Songs<sup>1</sup>: “My Beloved is to me, and I am to Him”. The Sages tell us that the Song of Songs, written by King Solomon, is about the deep bond of love between G-d and the Jewish people. “My Beloved” refers to G-d. King Solomon is describing one of the ways in which G-d and the Jewish people relate together.

In this mode of relationship, the first move of closeness is initiated by G-d. G-d approaches the Jewish people, who are unconscious of Him or even resistant to Him. G-d seeks to arouse them. This is expressed by the words “My Beloved is to me”, meaning that first of all, G-d approaches me, the Jewish people. Only then do we respond in kind, moving towards G-d, as expressed by the end of the verse: “..and I am to Him”.

This represents the mood of the month of Nissan, when G-d took us out of Egypt. We, as a slave nation, were spiritually indistinguishable from our Egyptian neighbours, undeserving of any

special treatment and certainly not redemption. And yet there was an approach from above: “My Beloved is to me”. G-d came to us, sent us His servant Moses, worked miracles for us and redeemed us from slavery. Eventually our response was “I am to Him” - we were willing to follow Him into the desert in total trust and faith, an act of dedication which G-d remembers always.

This response on our part was crowned with the ultimate Divine gift, the giving of the Torah at Sinai. This is termed a ‘wedding’, so to speak, between G-d and the Jewish people. It was the culmination of our bonding with G-d, concluding the process which had begun in Egypt, when we were sunk in the oblivion of slavery, and for no apparent reason, G-d had made an advance towards us.

This also describes a pattern in our lives as individuals. Often there is an initial overture from G-d, towards us. It might take the form of some personal good fortune that arrives unexpectedly. Or we may suddenly feel “uplifted” and realise in a new way, how important being Jewish is to us. Or, G-d forbid, it may even be in a time of trouble or sorrow. In our pain we suddenly feel a closeness to G-d we never experienced before. This sense of “arousal” constitutes a move from G-d to us. It is then up to us to complete our side of the relationship by a suitable response - an act of dedication, trust, and movement forward in concrete observance of G-d’s wishes.

A contrasting way of relating to G-d is expressed by another, similar verse<sup>2</sup>: “I am to my Beloved, and my Beloved is to me”. In this case the first move comes from the individual. The first “arousal” is from below. After that comes the response from G-d. This second mode relates to the atmosphere of the month of Elul (August-September), when we prepare for the New Year and Yom Kippur. At that serious time of year, we earnestly try to improve ourselves, and G-d responds by blessing us for the New Year and forgiving our transgressions. Then the initial arousal is from below.

But now in the month of Nissan, the mood is different. There is the feeling that G-d is making the first move, reaching down to us, arousing us to be His people, and to give us freedom. Filled with joy, we respond, and enthusiastically embark on the Pesach preparations...

1. Song 2:16. See the 4<sup>th</sup> Lubavitcher Rebbe, the Maharash, *Discourses of 5627*, p.196. 2. Song 6:3. The initial letters of this verse form the word Elul. See *Likkutei Sichot* vol.29, 162-3.



## SEDRA VAYIKRA

### **TEMPLE OFFERINGS IN DAILY LIFE**

Sammy was sitting at the dining room table, a large pile of books in front of him, and a frustrated look on his face.

“What's up, Sammy?” his father came in and inquired.  
 “You look worried about something”.

“I am!” his son sighed. “I told my teacher I would prepare a talk on the Sedra for our class this week, but I've been looking for ages and I can't find anything to say - Sedra Vayikra only talks about the offerings in the Sanctuary and the Temple, and its not really so interesting to people - I mean we don't actually bring those offerings nowadays.”

“Oh, but we can learn lots of things that apply to us nowadays from the offerings,” father said. “For example, nowadays, we pray to G-d instead of brining offerings to the Sanctuary. So just as there were set offerings in the morning and afternoon, we have the set prayers of the Morning and Afternoon Service. Then there is Musaf, the Additional Prayer that we say on Shabbat and special days. This corresponds to the extra offering which was brought on Shabbat. Musaf means ‘extra’.”

“What about the evening prayer?” asked Sammy. “At night the left-over offerings from the day would be brought to the Altar. But there wasn’t a fixed evening offering, and because of that, in the Synagogue we don’t repeat the Amidah in the evening prayer, but we do repeat it for the Morning, Afternoon and Musaf prayers.”

Sammy wrote down what his father said. This would make good material for his talk! “What about Mincha?” he asked. “That’s the afternoon prayer,” said his father. “Does Mincha mean ‘afternoon’?”

“Well,” said his father, “the word Mincha actually means 'present', like giving someone a present. In the Sedra it tells us about an offering called Minchah which was made of flour and olive oil. But in the story of Elijah having a contest with the Priests of Baal on Mount Carmel, it tells us it was around the time of offering the Minchah, meaning the time of the afternoon offering. So that’s what we call the afternoon prayer today.”

“Oh, I didn’t know all that,” said Sammy “I suppose I could say something about that - like that when we pray, it’s a present for G-d, because we love him so much.”

“That will make a beautiful talk!” said his father. “Also, the special thing about the afternoon prayer is that we have to tear ourselves away from whatever we are doing. So it really is like a present to G-d!”. “Thanks Dad,” said Sammy. “Then I’m thinking I could end off that one day, very soon Moshiach will come, and when that happens, the Third Temple will be built. Then we’ll start once again bringing all the different offerings, just like in the Sedra.”

“Well done!” said his father. “I’m sure your talk will help make it happen!”

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