


CHABAD

RESEARCH UNIT

שבת..... *for Friday nights* קדש


Friday 7 March 2014 - 5 Adar II 5774
Sedra Vayikra

GOODNESS AND HOLINESS

DO MODERN MEN AND WOMEN HAVE ANY WAY TO RELATE TO THE HOLY? Or is holiness, being close to G-d, something which eludes us because the pace of life is too fast, or because we are too materialistic, or because we are living in a secular society, or because times have changed...?

According to Rabbi Shneur Zalman¹, we can learn something about this from a phrase at the beginning of the Sedra²: “if a person wishes to offer, of you, an offering to G-d”. The wording is a bit strange, don’t you think? You would expect it to say “if a person of you wishes to bring an offering to G-d”. Rabbi Shneur Zalman shows that this is telling us an important idea, relevant to each of us in our own time.

Ostensibly this verse is speaking about a person who wishes to bring an offering to G-d, in the sense of an offering in the Temple. However, it is well known that each word of the Torah has several levels of meaning. The Hebrew word for “offer” can also be translated “draw near”. So Rabbi Shneur Zalman explains that this text is saying “if a person wishes to draw near to G-d, [bring] of you, an offering to G-d”.

	<p>In Loving Memory of Mrs Jeanne Gewolb-Sostrin (Yenta bas Devora) ה'ע"ה - 15 Tevet 5772 Dedicated by her Son Dr Roger Gewolb שי'</p>
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What does this tell us about drawing near to G-d? How does a person achieve this? Rabbi Shneur Zalman says: you draw near by offering *yourself* to G-d.

Offering yourself? What does that mean, something mystical?

As explained by the Lubavitcher Rebbe³, in fact we can all understand what that means. Offering yourself means that the person does not think solely about their own benefit, but gives of his or her time, energy, money, comfort - in order to help someone else.

This is something which is comprehensible, even in our high speed materialistic age. A person needs you. You give of yourself, generously. You are helping someone, and also through this generosity, you are coming close to G-d.

Or take another scenario. There is a problem in a relationship. You and another person at work; or you and someone else in the family. What do you do? It is true that sometimes a person should stand firm. There are occasions when one should be assertive. But more often one wins by giving in. You surrender something of yourself. Through this you gain in the wider goal of peace and unity. In addition, you personally are coming closer to G-d.

This is because the larger framework of our relationship with the Divine is the central Mitzvah of the Torah: love of one's fellow. This is often expressed through giving: giving charity, giving time, giving in. Giving of oneself and through that, coming closer to the infinite Source of all being.

Through little steps of offering oneself, in a variety of ways, we are able to partake of sacred moments - despite our busy modern age. It might even be suggested that our complex world gives us more opportunities for this than people ever had before, when life was conducted at a slower pace. There is much good to be done. The teaching of the Sedra is that by doing good to others we gain in the deepest goals of life.

1. Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812), founder of Chabad, author of *Tanya* and an updated version of the *Code of Law*.
2. Leviticus chs.1-5. See 1:2.
3. See the Lubavitcher Rebbe's *Sichot Kodesh* 5752 p. 804.

Torah teachings are holy - please treat this page with care

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SEDRA VAYIKRA

PRAYER AND TEMPLE OFFERINGS

"Sammy, I'm taking you to the doctor soon - make sure you're ready." Sammy's mother put her head into her son's room, hoping that he wouldn't still be asleep, but she was pleasantly surprised to see him up and dressed. "I'm just praying, Mum - I'll be half an hour," he told her.

Sammy gazed at his open prayer book, trying to concentrate on the words he was saying, and not on the plaster cast on his left arm that the doctor would be removing today.

It was funny, praying by himself, instead of with the whole school, he thought. He recalled that just the day before they had been learning about the different offerings that the Jews had been commanded to bring to G-d in the Sanctuary or Temple. His teacher had told them that nowadays, the prayers were instead of the offerings.

"But praying and bringing offerings are two such different things," Sammy had objected. "How could they be compared?" "They might seem very different," his teacher had responded, with a smile, "but when you think into it, in both of them, we are giving something to G-d - our prayers, or an offering."

Sammy did not seem convinced. "In which way is our prayer like an offering in the Temple?", he had asked.

"Well," said his teacher, "there's actually an interesting teaching that when we pray, we should be getting excited to be serving G-d. We sing in the prayers, we are happy to be, close to G-d.

"The excitement, happiness and singing are qualities that we could easily use for very ordinary, non-holy activities. They come from a part of ourselves which likes having fun and enjoying oneself.

"When we offer this part of ourselves to G-d, and use it in our prayers, it is like an offering in the Temple. We are taking qualities which might be very ordinary and changing them into something holy."

"You mean," Sammy had said, "when we bring an offering, it starts off as something ordinary. But when it is brought to the Temple it becomes holy... So too we are using our ordinary energy in order to pray to G-d, which makes it holy..?"

"Exactly!" said his teacher, pleased that Sammy seemed to understand (which was not very often).

Sammy had taken all that to heart today - he could have slept in, since he was not going to school, but he had woken up extra early so he would have time to pray properly.

It had been hard - he hated waking up, but he felt good that he had done it. It had been a very happy offering in the Temple, he told himself with a grin.

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