

INSPIRE

**VAYIKRA****6TH NISSAN -20 MARCH 2021**

IDENTITY CRISIS

Service times

Friday 7 PM

Shabbos 9:30-11:30 am

Sunday 8:30 am

Amnesia is a frightening illness. Imagine forgetting who you are — suddenly you have no family, no history, and no identity. It can happen to an individual and it can happen to a people. There have been times in our history when we seemed to forget who we were and where we came from. And all too often, we seem uncertain about where we are going.

In the opening chapters of Leviticus, we read the expression *Nefesh ki techeta* — "when a person will sin."

The Torah goes on to describe the various atonement offerings necessary to absolve one from their trespasses. The Kabbalistic classic, *Zohar*, renders this phrase both literally and spiritually. *Nefesh* is interpreted as not merely a person but a soul, and the verse is punctuated by a question mark. In other words, the Torah is asking *Nefesh ki techeta?* Shall a soul sin? Can a Jewish soul, a *yiddishe neshamah*, a spark of divinity, really and truly stoop to commit a lowly sin? How is that possible?

Indeed, the only way it can happen is when we forget who we are, when we are no longer in touch with our true spiritual identity when we start to suffer from spiritual amnesia.

Sadly, it does happen. In fact, it's not really that difficult. After all, we live in a secular society. The old ghetto walls are no longer there to insulate us. We are exposed to the big wide world with all its seemingly tantalizing diversions. Even if we do marry within the faith, we become culturally assimilated. Slowly but surely, then, even a *nefesh*, a Jewish soul, starts forgetting who she is and can fall into the web of sin.

Remember the "wise man" from Chelm and his problem? He worried that when he went to the public bathhouse where everyone is unclothed he wouldn't know who he was. Without his own personal set of clothing to distinguish him from others, he might suffer an identity crisis. So he devised a plan. He tied a red string around his big toe so that even in the bathhouse he would stand out from everyone else. Sadly, when he was in the shower, the water and soapsuds loosened the red string, and it slipped off his big toe. To make matters worse, the red string floated along to the next cubicle and twirled around the big toe of the fellow under the next shower.

Suddenly, our Chelmer genius discovered that his string was gone. He started panicking. This was a serious identity crisis. Then he saw that the fellow next door was sporting his red string. Whereupon, he ran over to him and shouted, "I know who you are, but who am I?"

Who are you? You are a Jew! You are a son of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, a daughter of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah. You are a member of the "kingdom of priests and a holy nation." You were freed from Egypt and stood at Sinai. You have survived countless attempts on your life and your faith. You emerged from the ashes of Auschwitz only to live again. And you ask "Who am I?" This is a serious case of national amnesia. So the holy *Zohar* reminds us that we are not only "a person who may sin." We are a soul, and shall a soul sin? A soul is by definition part and parcel of the Divine. And for the G-dly soul within us, distancing ourselves from our very source is absolutely unthinkable.

How else can we explain the phenomenon that after 70 years of Communist atheism, Jews in the Former Soviet Union are today fervently embracing the faith of their forefathers? Or that after decades of apathy, American Jews of all ages are desperately seeking spirituality? Or that the renaissance of Jewish life has become a reality around the globe? Yes, there are good people out there igniting sparks and fanning them into a fiery faith. But the sparks would not take if there was not a burning ember inside every Jewish soul, an ember that remains inextinguishable no matter what.

So if you ever have doubts about who you are, remember the *Zohar*. You are a soul. And a soul never dies.

WHAT DO WE SACRIFICE?

By Rabbi Jonathan Sacks

Shabbat Times
Candle Lighting 5:54pm
Shabbos ends 7:04pm

The laws of sacrifices that dominate the early chapters of the book of Leviticus, are among the hardest in the Torah to relate to in the present. It has been almost 2,000 years since the Temple was destroyed and the sacrificial system came to an end. But Jewish thinkers, especially the more mystical among them, strove to understand the inner significance of the sacrifices and the statement they made about the relationship between humanity and G-d. They were thus able to rescue their spirit even if their physical enactment was no longer possible.

The laws of sacrifices are among the hardest to relate to

Among the simplest yet most profound was the comment made by R. Schneur Zalman of Lyadi, the first Rebbe of Lubavitch. He noticed a grammatical oddity about the second line of today's parsha:

Speak to the children of Israel and say to them: when one of you offers a sacrifice to the L-rd, the sacrifice must be taken from the cattle, sheep or goats. (Leviticus 1:2)

Or so the verse would read if it were constructed according to the normal rules of grammar. However, in Hebrew the word order of the sentence is strange and unexpected. We would expect to read: adam mikem ki yakriv, "when one of you offers a sacrifice". Instead what it says is adam ki yakriv mikem, "when one offers a sacrifice of you". The essence of sacrifice, said R. Schneur Zalman, is that we offer ourselves. We bring to G-d our faculties, our energies, our thoughts and emotions. The physical form of sacrifice – an animal offered on the altar – is only an external manifestation of an inner act. The real sacrifice is mikem, "of you". We give G-d something of ourselves. What exactly is it that we give G-d when we offer a sacrifice? The Jewish mystics, among them R. Schneur Zalman, spoke about two souls each of us has – the animal soul (nefesh ha-behamit) and the G-dly soul. On the one hand we are physical beings. We are part of nature.

We have physical needs: food, drink, shelter. We are born, we live, we die. As Ecclesiastes puts it:

Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. Both have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is a mere fleeting breath. (Ecclesiastes 3:19)

Yet we are not simply animals. We have within us immortal longings. We can think, speak and communicate. We can, by acts of speaking and listening, reach out to others. We are the one life form known to us in the universe that can ask the question "Why?" We can formulate ideas and be moved by high ideals. We are not governed by biological drives alone. Psalm 8 is a hymn of wonder on this theme:

When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
what is man that you are mindful of him,
the son of man that you care for him?
Yet You made him a little lower than the angels
and crowned him with glory and honor.
You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
you put everything under his feet . . . (Psalm 8:4-7)

Physically, we are almost nothing; spiritually, we are brushed by the wings of eternity. We have a G-dly soul. The nature of sacrifice, understood psychologically, is thus clear. What we offer G-d is (not just an animal but) the nefesh ha-behamit, the animal soul within us. How does this work out in detail? A hint is given by the three types of animal mentioned in the verse: behemah (animal), bakar (cattle) and tzon (flock). Each represents a separate animal-like feature of the human personality.

Behemah represents the animal instinct itself. The word refers to domesticated animals. It does not imply the savage instincts of the predator. What it means is something more tame. Animals spend their time searching for food. Their lives are bounded by the struggle to survive. To sacrifice the animal within us is to be moved by something more than mere survival.

Wittgenstein, when asked what was the task of philosophy, answered "To show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle". The fly, trapped in the bottle, bangs its head against the glass, trying to find a way out. The one thing it fails to do is to look up. The G-dly soul within us is the force that makes us look up, beyond the physical world, beyond mere survival, in search of meaning, purpose, goal.

The word bakar, cattle, in Hebrew reminds us of the word boker, "dawn", literally to "break through", as the first rays of sunlight break through the darkness of night. Cattle, stampeding, break through barriers. Unless constrained by fences, cattle are no respecters of boundaries. To sacrifice the bakar is to learn to recognize and respect boundaries – between holy and profane, pure and impure, permitted and forbidden. Barriers of the mind can sometimes be stronger than walls.

Finally tzon, flocks, represents the herd instinct – the powerful drive to move in a given direction because others are doing likewise. The great figures of Judaism – Abraham, Moses, the prophets – were distinguished precisely by their ability to stand apart from the herd; to be different, to challenge the idols of the age, to refuse to capitulate to the intellectual fashions of the moment. That ultimately is the meaning of holiness in Judaism. Kadosh, the holy, is something set apart, different, separate, distinctive. Jews were the only minority in history consistently to refuse to assimilate to the dominant culture or convert to the dominant faith.

The noun korban, "sacrifice", and the verb le-hakriv, "to offer something as a sacrifice" actually mean "that which is brought close" and "the act of bringing close". The key element is not so much giving something up (the usual meaning of sacrifice) but rather bringing something close to G-d. Le-hakriv is to bring the animal element within us to be transformed through the Divine fire that once burned on the altar, and still burns at the heart of prayer if we truly seek closeness to G-d.

By one of the ironies of history, this ancient idea has become suddenly contemporary. Darwinism, the decoding of the human genome, and scientific materialism (the idea that the material is all there is) have led to the widespread conclusion that we are animals, nothing more, nothing less. We share 98 per cent of our genes with the primates. We are, as Desmond Morris used to put it, "the naked ape". On this view, Homo sapiens exists by mere accident. We are the result of a random series of genetic mutations and just happened to be more adapted to survival than other species. The nefesh ha-behamit, the animal soul, is all there is.

The refutation of this idea – and it is surely among the most reductive ever to be held by intelligent minds – lies in the very act of sacrifice itself as the mystics understood it. We can redirect our animal instincts. We can rise above mere survival. We are capable of honouring boundaries. We can step outside our environment. As Harvard neuroscientist Steven Pinker put it: "Nature does not dictate what we should accept or how we should live," adding, "and if my genes don't like it they can go jump in the lake." Or as Katharine Hepburn majestically said to Humphrey Bogart in *The African Queen*, "Nature, Mr. Allnut, is what we were put on earth to rise above."

We can transcend the behemah, the bakar and the tzon. No animal is capable of self-transformation, but we are. Poetry, music, love, wonder – the things that have no survival value but which speak to our deepest sense of being – all tell us that we are not mere animals, assemblages of selfish genes. By bringing that which is animal within us close to G-d, we allow the material to be suffused with the spiritual and we become something else: no longer slaves of nature but servants of the living G-d.

G-d calls to Moses from the Tent of Meeting, and communicates to him the laws of the korbanot, the animal and meal offerings brought in the Sanctuary. These include:

- The “ascending offering” (olah) that is wholly raised to G-d by the fire atop the altar;
- Five varieties of “meal offering” (minchah) prepared with fine flour, olive oil and frankincense;
- The “peace offering” (shelamim), whose meat was eaten by the one bringing the offering, after parts are burned on the altar and parts are given to the kohanim (priests);
- The different types of “sin offering” (chatat) brought to atone for transgressions committed erroneously by the high priest, the entire community, the king or the ordinary Jew;
- The “guilt offering” (asham) brought by one who has misappropriated property of the Sanctuary, who is in doubt as to whether he transgressed a divine prohibition, or who has committed a “betrayal against G-d” by swearing falsely to defraud a fellow man.

Isaiah 43:21-44:23.

This week's haftorah starts with a rebuke to the Israelites for abandoning the Temple's sacrificial service. Sacrifices are the dominant topic of the week's Torah reading, too. The prophet Isaiah rebukes the Israelites for turning away from G-d and refraining from offering sacrifices, turning to idolatry instead. G-d exhorts the people to return to Him, promising to forgive their transgressions, as is His won't. The prophet then mentions the futility of serving empty idols which may be crafted by artisans but "neither see nor hear nor do they know..." The haftorah concludes with G-d's enjoiner to always remember Him and to return to Him.

WISHING ALL THOSE WITH YARTZEIT THIS WEEK CHAIM ARUCHIM

Irwin, Sandra mother Shear, Edith Ittka bas Moshe Saturday 20/3/21 Nissan 7, 5781

Shulton, Deborah mother Turner, Shirley Helen Chaya Sarah bas Binyamin Saturday 20/3/21 Nissan 7, 5781

Levy, Mark mother Simmons, Freda Fraydal bas Yitschak Monday 22/3/21 Nissan 9, 5781

Bradman, Gwen mother Yates, Edith Yetta Monday 22/3/21 Nissan 9, 5781

Freedman, Bernard wife Freedman, Sylvia Sarah bas Avraham Ha'Cohen Wednesday 24/3/21 Nissan 11, 5781

Curtis, Natalie mother Nerden, Rose Rochel bas Avraham Wednesday 24/3/21 Nissan 11, 5781

Kovler, Ivan father Kovler, Yonah Yonah ben Chaim Friday 26/3/21 Nissan 13, 5781

Lieberman, Leonard mother Lieberman, Annie Sarah Hindle bas Yaakov HaCohen Friday 26/3/21 Nissan 13, 5781

Rains, Raymond mother Rains, Ita Ita bas Zalman Halevi Friday 26/3/21 Nissan 13, 5781

JEWISH HUMOUR

One day little Rivki Adler was watching her mother make a roast for Shabbat. She cut off the ends, wrapped it in string, seasoned it, and set it in the roasting pan.

Rivki asked her mother why she cut off the ends of the roast. Mom replied, after some thought, that it was the way that her mother – Bubbie – had done it.

Bubbie came over for Shabbat dinner and Rivki asked her why she had cut the end off of the roast before cooking. After some thought, Bubbie replied that it was the way her mother had done it.

Now the great-grandmother – Alter Bubbie as they called her – was quite old and in a nursing home. But Rivki went with her mother and grandmother to see her and again asked the question. Alter Bubbie looked at them a bit annoyed and said, "So it would fit in the pan, of course."

RIDDLE OF THE WEEK

I have a little house in which I live all alone. It has no doors or windows, and if I want to go out I must break through the wall. What am I?

**Answer for last week
2oclock its on a clock**

STORY TIME

Life was hard in the village of Chernestra (Chernyy Ostrov), Ukraine, in the early 20th century. So hard that Yisroel Dov Waxman, whom everyone called Berel, decided to leave his wife, Rochel, and growing family behind for America. He hoped to be able to bring in enough money to feed his family, and perhaps even have them join him one day on America's faraway shores.

Before Berel boarded the train that would take him to the port city, where a steamship would take him to New York, Berel's father, Meshulem Zushia, pulled him aside for a few moments.

"My son," said the elder man, "I want you to swear to me that no matter what happens, you will never, ever work on Shabbat, our holy day."¹

A devout chassid, Berel was taken aback. Would my father even suspect that I would break Shabbat? he wondered to himself. Yet he shook his father's hand, gravely promising never to work on the holy day. Upon his arrival in New York, he went to the address of a landsman, a fellow from the same village who had immigrated to New York. The landsman was an overseer in one of the many sweatshops on the Lower East Side. The fellow gave him a job pressing shirts. The work was hard, and Berel would work from early in the morning to late at night for six days a week. Every Friday he would take a few pennies from his meager earnings to buy some groceries for Shabbat and the coming week. The rest he saved for his family.

Spring turned to summer, and summer became fall. The sun began setting earlier, and soon Berel realized that he would need to take off Friday afternoon as well, since Shabbat begins before sundown. Knowing that he would probably lose his job, he decided not to tell his boss that he would need to leave early until Friday afternoon, hoping to at least walk out with one last week's earnings. Friday came, and with fear in his heart Berel told his boss that he would need to leave early because Shabbat would soon arrive. Disgusted, his boss threw Berel's ironing board down into the street and told him never to come back.

Berel hurried into the street and retrieved his board. Where would he go? Shabbat was coming, and he had no time to take his ironing board to his boarding house before Shabbat would begin and he would no longer be allowed to carry. "I stood there in middle of the street staring at my only possible means to support my family, and wondered what I would do with it," he would later tell.

In desperation he dashed into the nearest store, a Chinese laundry, and asked them to please keep his ironing board. Anxious yet relieved, he strolled over to the nearest synagogue to welcome the Shabbat Queen. It was a difficult Shabbat. Berel was all alone in a strange country with no source of income. But his faith in G d was strong.

Shabbat ended, and Berel traced his footsteps back to the laundry. He asked the attendant behind the counter if perhaps he would return the ironing board, knowing full well that this person could deny ever having taken it. To his relief, the attendant handed it to him without a question.

As he walked down the street to no place in particular, he heard a voice calling. "I see that you have an ironing board," a strange man said. "You know, I have a lot of extra pressing work to be done right now. Can you please work for me? I can use a good fellow to work overtime."

That week Berel worked as much as he could, knowing that come Friday afternoon he would probably lose this job as well.

At the end of the week, Berel's new boss handed out envelopes to all the workers. Berel took a look inside his envelope and was shocked. There was much more there than he had earned at his previous place of employment.

"Sir," he said, "it seems that you made a mistake and gave me the wrong envelope."

"Oh, don't worry," said the man, "I did not make a mistake. I'll take care of your overtime soon as well."

A short conversation ensued, and Berel realized that his "friend," his old employer, had been taking advantage of him and was paying him a fraction of what he deserved for his regular hours, and nothing at all for his extra hours.

"At that moment it struck me," he would later tell his children. "If I would have kept my old job and worked on Shabbat, I would have lost not only my share in the world to come, but my rightful portion of this world as well!" Berel kept that job until he was able to find something better, and several years later he brought over his wife and children to join him in New York.

Now, 100 years later, Berel's grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren keep Shabbat (and much more!), just like he did so many years before.

FOOD 4 THE SOUL

People are afraid of joy. They are afraid they'll get out of hand and lose control.

These people haven't experienced real joy—the joy that comes from doing a mitzvah with all your heart. Where there is that joy, the Divine Presence can enter. Where there is that joy, there are no pits to fall into, and all obstacles evaporate into thin air.

The great Kabbalist, Rabbi Yitzchak Luria, said that the gates of wisdom and divine inspiration were opened to him only as a reward for his joy in fulfilling a mitzvah.