The Korban Shaliach

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As we delve into VaYikra, the third Sefer of the Torah, we realize that this new Sefer is fairly different from all of the other four books. The concept of Korbanot, sacrifices, is the most dominant theme in Sefer VaYikra. It is very common for our modern society to look upon this subject as a perplexing and antiquated matter because Korbanot were offered thousands of years ago, a time when the Jewish nation enjoyed its most cherished possession, the Beit HaMikdash. Understanding what the Korbanot represented appears incomprehensible to a contemporary Jew. Although Sefer VaYikra is challenging and somewhat difficult to understand, by immersing ourselves in this difficult Sefer, we may be able to appreciate the true meaning of the Korbanot.

Rambam (Moreh Nevuchim 3:46) suggests a famous idea that may explain this intricate subject. When Bnei Yisrael, transferring from the life they once led into a new period of life, build the Mishkan, the nation had to transition from worshipping many idols to worshipping only Hashem. Rambam suggests that the only way to make the transfer successful was for Hashem to ease the transition by incorporating similar methods of worship that the nation was accustomed to in Egypt, which happened to be the use of animals.

Ramban (VaYikra 1:9 s.v. Olah) disagrees with Rambam on this controversial subject. Ramban believes that the main purpose of Korbanot is for a person to become closer to Hashem. Ramban derives this understanding from “Kareiv,” the Shoresh of ”Korbanot,” which means “to come close.”

Korbanot represent what the values and priorities of a Jew should be. The Korban Chatat shows the importance of repentance and the value of mistakes. It demonstrates that by learning from mistakes, we can better ourselves for the future. Additionally, the Korban Shelamim, according to Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch, illustrates the importance of being thankful for what we have and using that which we have in an appropriate manner.

However, perhaps the real meaning behind the Korbanot is exemplified by the first Korban introduced in Parashat VaYikra, the Korban Olah (VaYikra 1:3). The Korban Olah is one of the most disputed of the Korbanot due the debate of what the Korban Olah actually represents. The Torah states that this mysterious Korban is voluntary and that it is atonement for the person offering it upon the Mizbeiach. For what is this atonement? Many prominent Rabbis, including Rav David Zvi Hoffmann, describe the Olah as the Korban that atones for one’s lack of passion for Hashem and His Mitzvot. Rav Hoffmann further explains that this Korban represents the devotion, love, and self-sacrifice that is required of a person to fulfill Hashem’s Mitzvot successfully. It is also of course, the most perfect analogy to the characteristics that a true Shaliach of his nation and his land must possess in order to be successful in his Shlichut. A volunteering spirit, a willingness for self-sacrifice, an abundance of love and passion, and a sense of unmatched devotion.