



From the desk of
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Office of the Rabbinate of Elad, Rosh HaAyin and Herzelia

עיר התורה שקרובה אליך

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TORAT

Parashat Vayikra

HAMELECH

Corona Taking Control

Before we begin, let us stop and think about what is happening in the world around us. A few months ago, no one heard of "corona". Now it is all people talk about and think about all day long. Hundreds of thousands fell victim to this microscopic virus and they can't do a thing about it. With all their medical know-how and up-to-date technology, thousands keep dying daily, with no antidote in sight. After all the billions of dollars which have been invested in medical research in the past few decades, along comes a new virus and takes over the entire world.

The economy is collapsing: airports are closed, businesses are shut down, international commerce has come to a halt. People remain indoors, their hearts filled with fear and dread of the unknown.

Theaters and stadiums are locked tight, and worst of all, *shuls* and *batei medrash* are no longer able to function smoothly.

All of this demands that we think about the situation. Whenever we, as a People, have encountered difficulties, we always assembled in our synagogues and poured out our hearts in prayer to the One Above. Now, this too has been taken from us.

When Hashem closes our *shuls*, what is this like? This brings to mind the Gemara in Masechet Suka which speaks of rain on *Sukkot*. What are we to do when it rains on *Sukkot*? We are to humbly leave our *Suka* and enter our homes. This is likened to a servant who came to pour a drink for his master and the master took the pitcher of

water and poured it on the servant's face. The master is indicating that he does not appreciate being tended to by this servant at this point in time.

So too, when Hashem sends rain on *Sukkot*, He is telling us to go indoors. He is saying, "I do not want your *mitzvah* of *Suka* right now."

The same is true with us at this time. If Hashem closes our *shuls*, He is telling us, "I do not want your *tefillah betsibbur* right now."

So what does He want? *Tefillah* has always been the response to trying circumstances. But now *shuls* are closed. So what are we to do?

What is a *Korban*?

Let us look into the *parashah* and see what lessons we can learn to help us greet this all-new challenge.

Last week we said, "*Hazak Hazak venit-hazek.*" We concluded Sefer Shemot. The *Geulah* is in place. We now must learn how to offer up sacrifices in the Holy Tabernacle. Sefer Vayikra teaches us how. Certainly, we may not suffice with outward motions. Regarding such, the prophet wails, in the name of Hashem, "Why do I need all of your many sacrifices? I am fed up from your burnt offerings of rams and fat of fatty animals. I have no desire for blood of cows, sheep and goats." (Yeshaya 1:11)

So, what type of *korban* does Hashem want? Ramban (Vayikra 1:9) teaches us what to think about as a *korban* is brought. He writes: A person has thoughts, words and actions. If a person sins, he brings a *korban* and rectifies each of these



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three realms. He leans upon the *korban* with all his might, corresponding to the action. He confesses his sin, corresponding to speech. The animal's kidneys and innards are burned, corresponding to man's thought processes and desires. The animal's forelegs and hindlegs are burned, corresponding to man's hands and feet. The animal's blood is applied to the altar corresponding to man's soul.

What should we be thinking as our *korban* is being brought? That we sinned with our bodies and souls. Really, all that is being done with that beast should be done to us. That is what we truly deserve for disobeying the command of the Holy One, Blessed is He. But Hashem, in His Great Kindness, allows us to atone by offering living creatures in our stead. Its life is taken instead of mine. Do you see that blood splattered upon the altar? It should be my blood, which should have gushed out of my slaughtered neck. But, Hashem accepts the animal's blood instead. How utterly compassionate is He.

Now, that *kohein* over there is cutting up the slaughtered animal. He hands certain parts to a *kohein* who takes them to throw them into the fire upon the *mizbei'ach*. What am I to think? Those parts should be from my own innards. That is what I deserve. But Hashem in His infinite mercy accepts those parts instead of my own *kishkes*.

Other animals parts are given to the *kohanim* to eat. The *kohanim* will then pray for me.

The Most Important Ingredient

The Ramban spells it out for us. The main part of the *korban* is to bring the person to humility. He

is to acknowledge his shortcomings and misdeeds and sincerely regret having committed them. All of that which is done with the *korban* is meant to arouse us to honest introspection and repentance. It is called "*korban*" because its purpose is to bring man "closer" to Hashem. A sin creates a distance. The *korban* brings us back.

"*Odom ki yakriv mikem*" – a man, when bringing a *korban* is to bring "of himself." That is the ultimate purpose. Bring of "yourself." How? By subduing your desires, exercising control over your passions, not giving in to your every whim and fancy. Uproot negative tendencies, such as arrogance and conceit. That way, you will bring your whole being so much closer to Hashem *Yitbarach Shemo*.

It makes no difference how much money you spent on the *korban* (except for instances where a certain minimum amount is delineated). Whether the well-to-do brings his bull or the pauper with his flour, the main thing is how it is brought; the humility which accompanies the *korban*.

Humble the Great

When Hashem begins to command Moshe regarding *korbanot* He opens with the word "*Adam*." An "*Adam*" is to bring a *korban*. "*ADaM*" is an acrostic. It stands for Avraham, Moshe and David. These Biblical figures are singled out for their humility. Avraham said, "I am dirt and ashes." (Bereishit 18:27) David said, "I am a worm and not a man; disgraceful of men, despicable of nation." (Tehillim 22:7) Moshe said, "Who are we etc." (Shemot 16:7)



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The Little Alef

The opening word of the *parashah / sefer* is *Vayikra*. It is spelled with a small Alef. Why? "*Vayikra*" is a term of endearment, a high level of prophecy. "*Vayikar*" is a term of happenstance, connoting that Hashem gave a prophecy to the unworthy. Thus, we find "*Vayikar*" in reference to Bilaam's prophecy, for he was indeed unworthy.

Hashem told Moshe to write "*Vayikra*," displaying that Moshe was a most worthy candidate for receiving the very highest level of prophecy. In his humility, Moshe preferred to leave out the "*Alef*" altogether so that it would read "*Vayikar*," as if to say that Moshe was on a low level of prophecy. Hashem insisted that Moshe write "*Vayikra*." Moshe requested permission to write a small *Alef*, so as to minimize his greatness as much as possible. (Baal Haturim)

Some say that the small amount of ink saved by writing a small *Alef* instead of a larger one is what gave Moshe his glowing countenance. Indeed, it was indicative of his superb humility.

Hold the Honey

Further on in the *parashah*, we are instructed not to allow leaven nor honey upon offerings. Even though these would have enhanced the offering greatly, nonetheless, they are to be withheld. Why? Because they represent haughtiness and conceit. Leaven causes dough to rise. Honey disguises the true essence of the ingredients and makes any food seem to be much tastier and sweeter than it really is.

So Hashem tells us to skip these two ingredients, once again stressing the importance of humility in the bringing of offerings to Hashem.

Which Animals?

There are two types of four-legged mammals: Domesticated ones and those that live out in the wild. *Korbanot* are to be brought exclusively from domesticated animals. Why? Because, while loose and wild animals hold their heads up high, humbly walk the cows, sheep and goats. Herein lies the message that the most important aspect of the sacrifice is the humility which accompanies it.

In Lieu of *Korbanot*

As of now (hopefully this will change before you read this), we do not have a *Beit Hamikdash*. Our *tefillot* take the place of *korbanot*, as the verse says (Hoshea 14:2), "Our lips pay for bulls," and Rashi expounds: Those bulls which we should have brought as offerings, let the appeasing words of our lips take their stead."

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi says: *Tefillot* were instituted to take the place of the *Korban Tamid* (Berachot 26b).

Shulhan Aruch (98:4) teaches that *tefillah* is like bringing a *korban*. Therefore, one must pray: a) with proper concentration and intent; b) whilst standing; c) in a set location; d) with nothing interrupting between himself and the wall in front of him. e) One should wear elegant clothing during prayer, just like the *kohanim* don special vestments. Not everyone can afford this. Nonetheless, one should at least make sure to *daven* wearing clean clothing.

Prepare to Pray

Tefillah is of utmost importance. Nonetheless, people tend to treat it lightly (Berachot 6b).



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Therefore, when we go to *shul* and *daven* (or, for those who are unable to do so, when we prepare to *daven* at home), we should not just do it to say the words and get it over with. Rather, we are to realize that we have a whole lot to ask Hashem to help us with. We need *tefillah*. It is a gift. It is an opportunity. It is a privilege to be given an audience with the King of the world. We are granted this privilege so often that we tend to treat it lightly.

It behooves us to take the time to study our prayers before we utter them. Anyone who is going to speak to an important government official thinks twice and three times and more before deciding exactly what to say. Even though we have a script written for us by holy and wise men of yore, we still must study it so that we know how to say our lines with proper empathy and concentration. The Monarch we approach reads thoughts and emotions!

These are our *korbanot* of today. Let us show Hashem that we value them. Pious men in the days of the *mishna* would spend an hour preparing themselves for each prayer. *Tefilla* is "service of the heart." (Taanit 2a)

We should devote some time before each prayer to stop and think: What am I about to do? Hashem knows what is best for us; so how does it help to pray? Sometimes a decree was made due to a person's current level. After prayer in contrition and humility, he becomes a "new person" and it could be that a certain harsh decree was never issued for this "new" person.

For example, King Hizkiyahu was deathly ill. The prophet told him to take leave of his dear ones because his time had come. But King Hizkiya

refused to surrender to imminent death. He had a tradition from his great-great-grandfather King David that even if a sharp sword lays upon one's neck, he is not to despair. He is to pray fervently for salvation and compassion.

This he did, and only moments later, the prophet returned, saying that Hashem has heard your prayers and is granting you fifteen more years to live!

So, tell me, does *tefillah* work or not? Even when the situation seems desperate and bleak. We still have what to hold on to. We still have what to hope for. We still have the gift of prayer. But we must do so with all our heart. Hizkiya was only answered because he prayed from the depths of his heart.

A Friday *Brit*

Reb Mordechai Pagomeransky (of blessed memory) was once travelling on a train together with a man who was a *mohel*. They were so involved in their discussion that they missed their stop. This was an intercity train. The next stop was in a faraway city. They had no choice but to get off the train. It was Friday and it seemed like they were stuck in this unknown town for Shabbat.

The *mohel* was beside himself. He was flustered and kept blaming himself for not having noticed their stop. Reb Mordechai retained his calm composure. He said confidently, "A Jew does not get lost for no reason. We were put here for a purpose."

With that, they asked a passerby if there was any Jew in the city. They were directed to a house which had a *mezuzah*. They knocked and a



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Jewish-looking man opened the door. He looked at them and said, "*Shalom Aleichem*, please come in. My wife had a baby a week ago and I hope to make a *brit* today. The only problem is that I had sent for the *mohel* in the neighboring town, and he just sent back a message that he fell ill and cannot come today. I am right now *davening* that somehow I should be able to do the *brit* today."

Reb Mordechai smiled and said, "Hashem has answered your *tefillot*! This man here is an experienced *mohel*."

The *mohel* added, "And Hashem has also sent you a great *tsaddik* to be your *sandak*!" pointing to Reb Mordechai.

Reb Mordechai turned to the *mohel* and said, "You see! Hashem knows exactly what He is doing!"

We see here the power of prayer. The father prayed for his son's *brit* to be on time and Hashem sent him a *mohel* and *sandak*.

Just Outside of Ofakim

A young couple in Ofakim had been married nine years without children. They really wanted to raise a family. The husband came to Rav Shimshon Pinkus to pour out his heart. Rav Pinkus listened and told him to return at midnight.

Curious, the man returned at midnight and Rav Shimshon told him, "Let's go to my car."

Rav Shimshon drove on the empty road for about twenty minutes. He brought the car to a stop in the middle of nowhere. He told the *avreich*, "Get out here and pray. I will come back in a half an hour to pick you up."

Without much choice, and a bit scared of being there alone in the middle of the night, the *avreich* stood at the side of the road and prayed.

After half an hour, he saw headlights approaching. Rav Shimshon pulled up and looked at him in the eye. Rav Shimshon said, "Where are the tears? Try again. I'll come back in another half hour. This time, really pour your heart out to Hashem. No one else can hear you even if you scream. Shout out to Hashem, tell Him exactly what you want and why. Share with Him your pain and your wife's pain. He's listening."

Rav Shimshon left, and the *avreich* got to work. He took Rav Shimshon seriously and *davened* like never before. His heart opened wide as did wellsprings of tears which streamed down his cheek.

When Rav Shimshon next returned, he seemed satisfied with the look on the young man's face. Rav Shimshon drove him home and said, "Good night."

Less than a year later, the couple had twins!

Just Outside of Yerucham

A *rebbe* in Yerucham learned with a *bochur* every afternoon in the *rebbe's* house. One afternoon, shortly after the *chavruta*, the *rebbe* saw this *talmid* from a distance from his living room window, which looked out towards the desert. The *talmid* was talking to an Israeli soldier and the soldier went back to his army helicopter and the *talmid* headed back to Yeshiva.

This was most unusual. The *rebbe* was quite curious, but he did not have to wait very long. That same day, the *talmid* came and told his



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rebbe his story of *hashgacha pratit*. He had taken a walk in the desert just outside Yerucham and suddenly he felt excruciating pain in the arm. He had bumped into a large cactus with a humongous thorn which pricked him and was causing a major blood loss. He felt as if he was about to faint, and with his last bit of strength he called out to Hashem for help.

Just then, a helicopter appeared and landed not far from him. Encouraged at this unusual appearance, he began running towards the helicopter, showing them his bloody arm. The soldier jumped out of the helicopter with a first aid kit and bandaged his arm. He gave him a drink of water, verified that he was feeling better, and took off.

Before the soldier left, the *talmid* asked, "What made you land just then?"

"Well," he said, "My phone rang and I wanted to talk to my friend after landing so that he could hear me better, so I found somewhere quickly to land."

Once again, we see the tremendous power of sincere *tefillah*.

Just Outside the Window

Here is yet another amazing story illustrating the unlimited power of prayer.

Family Alef and Family Bet (fictitious names, true story) were neighbors in the same building. Family Gimmel lived one building over. Family Alef was adding on to their apartment, so Family Bet decided to do the same. Mr. Bet contacted the *kablan* who agreed to begin working on the addition in four weeks' time, Sunday morning, for two months. During those two months, Family

Bet would have to find somewhere else to live. This was easier said than done. It was tremendously draining to search unsuccessfully for an available apartment. No one seemed to want to rent out a place for only two months. They all wanted a year's lease.

Finally, it was Motzai Shabbat, and Family Bet had yet to find another option. The workers would show up tomorrow. They had already agreed that if Mr. Bet would postpone the construction, he must pay for the workers' wages anyway.

Mr. Bet felt under immense pressure. He went out to his porch to breathe some fresh air. While he was there, he uttered a prayer. "Hashem," he began, "only You know how much pressure I feel. I've been trying for a month to find a place to live for two months, unsuccessfully. Please help! Only You can help me! I don't know what to do!"

As if out of nowhere, a thought came to mind. Mr. Bet now remembered that on Shabbat, he had seen children of Family Gimmel exit the *Beit Knesset*, but instead of coming along with him to his street, they turned up a different street. Who knows? Maybe they moved? And if so, maybe they had looked into a number of apartments and had come across one which would fit Mr. Bet's family for two months? It was worth a try!

So, Mr. Bet dialed Mr. Gimmel's number and began explaining his desperate situation. Mr. Bet finished speaking and there was a moment of silence.

Then, Mr. Gimmel, after his pause of disbelief, expressed it. "I don't believe it!" he exclaimed. "We needed to move to a larger place. My



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previous landlord, right next door to you, said that we would have to pay until the end of the lease, which is in exactly two months. I really was not fond of paying double rent for two months, but it seemed to be the only option. I'd be delighted to sublet it to your family!"

And the deal was made! Here, with a prayer, Mr. Bet got a nearby apartment. He did not have to pay any movers. He could be in close proximity to keep his eye on the progress of the addition. And all for a very reasonable price, much cheaper than he would have had to pay had he found an apartment for only two months.

Never before had he felt that Someone was listening so closely to his prayers. Never before had he prayed so sincerely.

Wake Up and Smell the *Geulah!*

Rabotai! It's time to wake up! What are we waiting for?!

We are now engulfed in a situation which the world has never known before! For the entire world to be totally disabled by a tiny microscopic virus! How vulnerable and helpless are we! How humbling!

We must admit that mankind as a whole has really been patting itself on the back for quite some time; how successful we have been at coming up with new inventions on all fronts (mostly made in China), how the economy has been booming, how medical experts have known how to deal with almost everything under the sun, etc.

Hashem is trying to wake us up. He wants to see how we react when He closes our *shuls*. He

wants to show us that He is not interested in mere lip service while our hearts are far away.

He wants us to use our time in quarantine to turn to Him in sincere prayer. He wants to see us humbled.

And then... and then... and then... "And this is what Hashem says: I shall gather you from amidst the nations and from the lands where you have been dispersed. I shall bring you to the soil of Israel. I will give you a unified heart; a new spirit I shall place inside of you. I shall remove the heart of stone from your flesh. I will replace it with a soft heart, so that you will abide by My laws. You will be for Me a nation and I will be for you an Elokim (Yechezkel 11:17).

May we soon merit to see the fulfillment of the prophecy, "Like the days of your exodus from Egypt, I will show you miracles." (Michah 7:15) "I will grant you honor and respect among all the nations as I bring back your return." (Zephania 3:20)

May Hashem soon be acknowledged by all as the Almighty Master, Sole Monarch. May all knees kneel to You, may all tongues swear to You, may all people bow and prostrate themselves before You, and accept upon themselves the yoke of Your Sovereignty.

May Hashem be recognized as King over all the land. On that day, Hashem will be recognized as One, and His Name will be One.

May our eyes behold Your return to Zion in the near future, compassionately, with the rebuilding of the *Beit Hamikdash*, speedily in our days, Amen, may this be Thy Will.

Sincerely,
Mordechai Malka