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Norman Lamm Vayikra March 17, 1956

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1. The Book of VAYIKRA or Leviticus, which we begin to read today, and which deals primarily with the sacrificial service in the Temple, hashad less "mazal" than the other four books of the Torah. It was ridiculed by and rejected by the ancient pagan Rome and Christianity. The so-called "Higher" Bible critics leveled their severest criticism at VAYIKRA, dubbing the Priestly Code and asserting that it was the last book in order of composition. Reform and semi-reform attacked it with a vengeance similar to those mentioned above.

To defend the Bible against all theses critics and explain the whole of the Book is too formidable and time-consuming task to do here at this moment. Allow me, however, to restrict myself to only one aspect of the sacrificial order mentioned in this weeks portion. Perhaps if we will understand this one facet, we will convince ourselves that there may be untold treasures of thought and depth and insight in the rest of the Book though we do not understand it yet.

to the modern mind
The least understandable and most objectionable/of the various sacrifices mentioned is the KORBON CHATASS - the sin-offerings and the guilt-offerings. Briefly, when one committed a sin - a CHATASS - he was obliged to offer up an animal sacrifice, in the Temple, to atone for the transgression.

What are some of the objections offerred to the KORBON CHATASS? One argument is that by allowing the sinner to atone by sacrifice, we encourage further violations, for the same person will not hesitate to comit any crime or sin, knowing that he can always "whitewash" his transgression by merely offering a KORBON. Another criticism is that atonement by sacrifice is unnecessary and primitive. And then, as the most sophisticated of arguments, we are told that in these commandments as well as in a number of others, the Bible encouraged guilt-feelings which we are nowadays, with the knowledge of modern psychiatry, trying to do away with.

2. What can we answer to these serious charges? First, let us clear up once and for all the moral point. The Bible clearly distinguishes between two types of sin: the MEIZID, which is a willful crime, done with knowledge and mailce aforethought, and there is the sin comitted BI'SHGAGAH, unwittingly or without intention to sin. The first, the MEIZID or intentional sin, can never be expiated or forgiven by means of a sacrifice. Indeed, it is forbidden for such a person to offer up a KORBON CHATTAS. It is only the SHOGEIG, he who comitted the sin without intention or awareness, out of ignorance, who can find atonement through the sin-offering - and even then, the sacrifice was invalid if it was not accompanied with VIDUY - i.e. the confessional of repentance, sincere regret. In case the sin was against a fellow man, an ethical crime, then Judaism teaches that no atonement is ever possible unless the sinner makes restitution to the offended person and is forgiven by him. So that a KORBON CHATTASS is never a white-wash, and it is ridiculous to speak of the encouragement of crime as a result of it. There is not only no moral objection to the sacrificial service, but its moral plane has not yet been reached by twentieth century man.

3. The argument of "primitivism", that somehow animal sacrifice is savage and offends civilized taste, deserves broader treatment than I can give it in the confines of one talk. I will say but this: in an average life-time of 70 years, the American consumes over 10,000 pounds of animal meat. And (the following first advanced by Franz Rosenzweig in the biography of him by Glatzer, p.352) the argument of "primitivism" then sounds mighty awkward and even comical coming from the lips of such confirmed non-vegetarians.

4. It is however the last two questions that we must deal with at greater length. And let us attempt to explain the Biblical and Jewish patterns of thought from the very same discipline which has been used to attack them - that is, from psychology.

5. Keen observers of contemporary life have expressed amazement that the fact that in our culture the sense of guilt is so widespread and deep-rooted. If we scratch the surface, we find that people feel guilty about hundreds of things; for not having worked hard enough, for having been too protective - or not protective enough - toward children,

for not having done enough for Mother, ... for having done good things as well as for having done bad things; it is almost as if they had to find things to feel guilty about. (Above from Erich Fromm, "The Sane Society",p.205).

Knowing that the sense of guilt is as widespread as all that, it becomes important for each of us to think of it, ponder it, analyze it, and understand it. Well,then, what about it? Is guilt good, bad or indifferent?

6. The popular and deep-rooted misconception is that modern psychiatry is on a crusade against the sense of guilt, that it is out to condemn and abolish it. Nothing, of course, could be further from the truth. Abolish the sense of guilt and you have turned civilized man into a savage and society into a jungle because you have abolished the conscience of man which cannot operate without the sense of guilt. Would any sane person say that a murderer should not feel his guilt? - that citizens of a country which massacred 18 million people should not be bothered with guilt? Is it not obvious that a child who never learns to feel guilty when he does wrong, will necessarily grow up into an uninhibited savage?

Of course, psychiatrists themselves are to a large extent guilty of this condition. By exaggerating any one aspect of the human personality to tge detriment of others, you come out with strange results. If, like Freud, the totality of life is reducible to the sexual experiences of the infant, and guilt is a product of such experiences, then of course the only conclusion that one can draw is that it is silly ever to feel guilty about anything. The same is true if you reduce all mental life to any one facet, as Adler does when he ascribes all psychic experience to the aggressive instinct, the hunger for power. The trouble with these theories is that they are peculiarly one-sided. They are suited only to people who believe that they have no spiritual needs or aspirations (this is criticism offerred by Carl G. Jung,"Psychotherapists or Clergy" in "Modern Man in Search of a Soul" pp 224,5). They fail to consider man in his totality, in his whole breadth.

Judaism, of course, does not make that mistake. The idea of guilt in Judaism does not refer to moral blemish alone, to deviation from the sexual code. It refers to any of G-d's commandments broken by man. (see Geo. Foote Moore, "Judaism",vol.I,p.461) Judaism knows differences between sins of commision and omission (ASEI VE'LO SAASEI), between ethical (BEIN ADAM LE'CHAVEIRO) and ritual (BEIN ADAM LA'MAKOM) commandments, but never makes a broad distinction putting moral blemish on one side and religious sins on the other. It does not put sex in a separate category. It knows the Whole Man, not the Broken Man.

So that if guilt is understood in a one-sided way, as with certain schools of psychiatry, or in its fullest sense, as in Judaism, it is a patent fact that we could never do without it.

7. But not every kind of guilt feeling is desirable. And this true, healthy, genuine and desirable kind of guilt is not the neurotic, tormented, self-preoccupation which so often goes by that name. This second kind is a sterile and fruitless and unproductive sort of soul-searching which leads to nothing but self-torture, despair and still deeper involvement. It is about this unhealthy kind of guilt that the Hassidic teacher, Rabbi Isaac Meir of Ger said that the more we think and reflect about the wrong we have done the more are we caught in it. "What would you? Stir filth this way or that, and it is still filth. To have sinned or not to have sinned - what does it profit us in heaven? In the time I am brooding on this, I could be stringing pearls for the joy of heaven. That is why it is written: 'Depart from evil and do good' - turn wholly from evil, do not brood over it, and do good. You have done wrong? Then balance it by doing right." (as quoted by N.N.Glatzer in "Time and Eternity" - see Fromm, "Psychoanalysis and Religion", p.90 ff). What the Gerer was speaking of was not really guilt but fear - a sickly, diseased kind of fear.

8. The genuine, healthy kind of guilt is, however, most desirable. For that leads us to live in the right kind of relationship with others - whether G-d or man.

The world has certain legitimate claims on us. G-d demands of us obedience, honesty, uprightness. Our fellow-men demand of us integrity, faithfulness, decency. Being humans, we sometimes fail in discharging these duties. What makes us rectify them, and establish the proper relationships again so that we do do what is right? An intelligent, balanced and enlightened sense of guilt - not the morbid kind, but the healthy kind. Only when we do feel that guilt do we proceed to correct what is wrong. Rational guilt means responsibility, and that is the beginning of Ethics.

No wonder that one Rabbi gave a penetrating analysis of a verse in today's Reading. In speaking of the sin-offering, the Bible says VE'HAYA KI CHATA V'ASHAM - and it shall be if he sins and is guilty. Now we know that whenever the Bible uses the expression VE'HAY A, it is to introduce a happy and felicitous state of affairs. What, he then asks, is so happy and wonderful about sin? And he answers, when man recognizes his own CHEIT, when he is aware of having sinned and experiences the proper type of ASHAM, or guilt, then he is on his way to TESHUVAH, to repentance, to reestablishing the right relationships between himself and his G-d and his fellow-men. And no wonder, then, that one of the world's most prominent psychiatrists, Carl Jung (ibid p. 229) was able to say that of the hundreds of patients he has treated, of those over 35 years of age, there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life. VEHAYA KI CHATTA V'ASHAM - recognizing one's debts to G-d leads to Repentance, and that results in true SIMCHAH, in joy and mental health.

9. But how about the other kind of guilt? Is it not true, as wehave mentioned before, that many of us do suffer from this neurotic, troublesome and even torturing sense of guilt? Most of us, psychiatrists agree, are at one time or another, plagued by it, we allow the rational, healthy and intelligent guilt to turn into the other and wrong kind. It is difficult to distinguish between them and keep from crossing over the border from one to the other. Can we cure it by dismissing it? Can we solve the problem merely by condemning it? No, certainly not. How then does Judaism deal with it?

And the answer is, by providing for atonement. Psychologists agree that as this pressure of brooding guilt builds up, it seeks release through atonement, expiation, by doing away with it through some means. And atonement in Judaism comes in many forms. VIDUY, or the confessional, is one. Man confesses his sins, privately, to G-d. He releases the pressure of his guilt by admitting it to his Creator and asking for forgiveness. (And isn't the patient's talking to his psychoanalyst basically a confessional, and isn't it that which has the real healing powers? And is it not nobler to confess to G-d than to man, whether doctor or priest?) TAANIS or fasting is another form of atonement, and that is what we do on Yom Kippur. That part of repentance called KABALAH or resolution to avoid the same sins in the future, is an important part of the atonement process - perhaps the most important. TZEDAKAH, or charity-giving, is included in it.

Without these formalized and sanctified ways of atonement, the results can be tragic. For then the sense of guilt seeks atonement in unusual ways which, instead of providing a healthy release and reestablishing the proper relationships between man and G-d or fellow-man, only involve him in deeper and more troublesome enmeshment. Frequently, the tension of the struggle between a man's conscience and his primitive instincts can produce bitter results. Thus, in one typical case (see for we forget A.A. Brill, "Lectures on Psychoanalytic Psychiatry", p.107) this sense of guilt sought atonement by a need for punishment, and expressed itself through all kinds of terrible fears particularly the fear of becoming insane. Is that more humane than fasting on Yom Kippur?-than saying AL CHEIT? - than giving charity?- even than offering up the sin-offering?

10. Now, how about this matter of the sin-offering, of sacrificing an animal as a means of KAPARAH or atonement for a legitimate sense of guilt which requires release and expression? Was Moses a primitive, as some would have us believe? Was it only a heathen custom, or did G-d, Who commanded these laws and who created man, also probe deeper than we do into the inner recesses of his creature's mind?

No, Moses was not the primitive some of us sophisticates would like to believe, and yes, G-d knew a bit of psychiatry himself. And ij order to understand the value of the sin-offering

let me tell you briefly one of the discoveries of Freud which were expanded by his students (see Meninger's "Man Against Himself"). Two great instincts, he tells us, constantly strive and struggle in the mind of man. One seeks to build and combine and create. That is the Life Instinct. And one seeks to destroy and break-up and revert to lifelessness. That is the Death Instinct or Death Wish. The Life Instinct expresses itself also as love and creativity. The Death Wish takes the forms of destructiveness and hate (Meninger, ibid,).

Now most people express the Death Wish against one who is guilty of some sin against them. Sometimes we actually try to kill the person guilty of some terrible crime against us. Does not our society make use of capital punishment against the seriously guilty? Usually we just wish Death upon those guilty of hurting us. Now, when a person feels a great and overwhelming sense of guilt, when he feels he is terribly guilty, he will turn the death-wish against himself and, as a means of atonement, contemplate suicide. It is not often that that happens. It is often that the thought appears, unconsciously, in many forms, and sometimes even consciously. (Meninger, ibid).

Now we understand value of an animal sacrifice as a guilt or sin offering. For RAMBAN maintains that in these sacrifices, the person who offered them up always identified himself with the sacrificed animal, thinking: I really deserved that. So that instead of atoning for his guilt by turning the death-wish upon himself and therefore causing himself bodily injury or mental anguish or wild fears or even suicide, the person who felt the guilt would turn this death-wish upon the sacrifice, which takes his place! In this manner, then, man's great destructive tensions are harmlessly expressed, his guilt eased, and not in a manner which will lead him back to his wrong-doing and to guilt and the whole procedure over again. For in the bringing of this KORBON, he realigns himself with G-d, and he does TESHUVAH, he repents! - cleansed his mind, + elevated soul to new moral heights ...having purged of D-not, and given preference to Life forces within him.

This very idea was enunciated in different words by a great Rabbi who had no knowledge of psychiatry but who showed daring and brilliant insight. The author of NACHAL KEDUMIM comments about a verse with which the Torah, in our Sidra, introduces the whole chapter concerning the sin-offering. The Bible requires the sin-offering in case of VE'NEFESH KI SIMOL MAAL - if a soul acts treacherously to G-d. And the word MAAL, meaning treachery, is broken down by this Rabbi to its three component letters which, he says, form the initial letters of the words ME'ABEID ATZMO LA'DAAS - suicide! So he too recognized that, one, all sin is the activity of the destructive death-wish and two, the guilt attendant upon sin seeks release or atonement through suicide, and this is side-tracked and expressed in a harmless, helathy and deeply religious manner by the offerong of the KORBON.

11. What we have tried to do this morning is to show that we must not be hasty in judging the order of sacrifice ordained by the Bible. As an example, the sin and guilt offerings show us the great value and meaningfulness of this whole Book of VAYIKRA. For there 2 kinds of guilt, the rational and the brooding. The rational we must encourage. But it often turns into the unhealthy, brooding kind, and then it must have atonement. This is expressed in many ways. And since this ~~else~~ guilt often seeks release through the death-wish or suicide, the guilty person offers a sacrifice which he identofoes with himself, and thus acheives the proper elationship with his G-d not only without injury to himself, but with both mental and moral betterment.

Our Torah writrs:ADAM KI YAKRIV MIKEM KORBON...and our Rabbis commented that ADAM here means the highest and finest kind of man. ADAM ZEH LASHON CHIBAH..ACHVAH..REI'US... The ordaining of religious ways of atonement for man was an act of love, brotherhood and friendship by G-d to man. Let us prove worthy of that love by understanding appreciating + not condemning our sacred Torah.

Benedictions