

Parshat Tzav
What Can Sacrifices Teach Us About Peace?
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While Parshat Tzav discusses all of the main categories of sacrifices, its discussion of the Shelamim sacrifice is the most extensive. In relation to the laws of the Shelamim, the Torah stresses the necessity of maintaining purity of the sacrificial meat and purity of anyone who eats it. Anyone impure who eats sacrificial meat will be liable for karet, the punishment of excision from the Jewish people. The Torah also warns not to eat the sacrificial meat after the allotted two days. Anyone who eats from the korban after this time will also be liable for karet.

These rules actually apply to all korbanot: All korbanot must be eaten in purity. All of them must be eaten by their allotted time. Why does the Torah bring them in the context of Shelamim? I think that this is because of the unique nature of the Shelamim. Only the Shelamim can be eaten by laypeople, people who are not kohanim. It seems that Torah assumes that kohanim will be meticulous with purity (after all, they need to be pure to enter the Temple) and with eating the sacrifice within the allotted time. When laypeople are granted access to the sacrifices, however, there is a concern that they will not consume them appropriately. The warnings and punishments that the Torah adds regarding the Shelamim, therefore, reflect the added risks in allowing laypeople to partake in the korbanot.

This is connected to the name of the korban, “Shelamim,” which is tied to *shalem*, complete, or *shalom*, peace. Shelamim are a peace offering to God, and they also bring peace and connection between God and the people, even the laypeople, who eat from this sacrifice themselves.

In Midrash Vayikra Rabbah (Chapter 9), an aggadic midrash from the time of the Amoraim, the discussion of Shelamim invokes thirteen homilies on the “greatness” of peace, גדול שלום. For example:

בר קפרא אמר גדול שלום שדברו הכתובים דברי בדאות בתורה בשביל להטיל שלום בין אברהם לשרה, הדא הוא דכתיב (בראשית יח, יב): אחרי בלתי היתה לי עדנה ואדני זקן, אבל לאברהם לא אמר כן אלא (בראשית יח, יג): ואני זקנתי.

Bar Kappara said: Great is peace, for the scriptures spoke false words in the Torah, to cast peace between Abraham and Sarah. That is what is written: “Now that I am withered, am I to have enjoyment – with my husband so old” but to Abraham he did not say that, rather: “for I am old.”

בר קפרא אמר חורי גדול שלום, מה אם העליונים שאין להם לא קנאה ולא שנאה ולא תחרות ולא מצות וריבות ולא מחלוקת ולא עין רעה צריכין שלום, הדא הוא דכתיב (איוב כה, ב): עשה שלום במרומי, התחתונים שיש בהם כל המדות הללו על אחת כמה וכמה.

Bar Kappara said another statement: Great is peace, for if the higher ones (i.e., angels), who do not have jealousy or hatred or competition, or quarrel, or evil speech, or disagreement, or evil eye, need peace, that is what is written “He imposes peace in his heights,” the lower ones (i.e., humans), who have all these traits, so much more so.

אמר רבן שמעון בן גמליאל גדול שלום שדברו הכתובים לשון בדיות בתורה להטיל שלום בין יוסף לאחיו, הדא הוא דכתיב (בראשית נ, יז): כה תאמר לי יוסף אָנָּה שָׂא נָא, וְלֹא אֲשַׁכַּח בְּיַעֲקֹב דְּפִקֵּד כָּלָם.

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel said: Great is peace, for the scriptures spoke false words in the Torah to cast peace between Joseph and his brothers, that is what is written “So shall you say to Joseph, Forgive, I urge you, the offense” and we do not find that Yaakov ordered anything.



אמר רבי יוסי הגלילי גדול שלום שאפלו בשעת מלחמה אין פותחין אלא בשלום, הדא הוא דכתיב (דברים כ, י):
כִּי-תִקְרַב אֶל-עִיר לְהִלָּחֵם עָלֶיהָ וְקִרְאתָ אֵלֶיהָ לְשָׁלוֹם

R. Yose said: Great is peace, for even during a time of war, we open only with peace, that is what is written "When you approach a town to attack it, you shall offer it terms of peace."

אמר רבי שמעון בן חלפתא גדול שלום שקשבברא הקדוש ברוך הוא את עולמו עשה שלום בין העליונים לתחתונים, ביום הראשון ברא מן העליונים ומן התחתונים, הדא הוא דכתיב (בראשית א, א): בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ, בַּיּוֹם הַרְּבִיעִי בָרָא מִן הָעֲלִיּוֹנִים, הַדָּא הוּא דְכָתִיב (בראשית א, ו): וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי רְקִיעַ, בַּשְּׁלִישִׁי בָרָא מִן הַתַּחְתּוֹנִים, (בראשית א, ט): וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִקְוּוּ הַמַּיִם,

R. Shimon ben Halaftha said: Great is peace, for when God created his world, he made peace between the higher [elements] and the lower [elements]. On the first day, he created from the higher and from the lower, that is what is written "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth". On the second day he created from the higher, that is what is written "God said, Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water". On the third day he created from the lower, "God said, Let the water below the sky be gathered..."

רבנן אמרו גדול שלום שקשבמלך המשיח בא אינו פותח אלא בשלום, שנגמר (ישעיה נב, ז): מֶה נְאוּוּ עַל הַהָרִים רְגְלֵי מְבַשֵּׂר מְשֻׁמֵּעַ שְׁלוֹם.

The rabbis say: Great is peace for when the anointed king (the Mashiach) comes, he will not open with anything but peace. For it says: "How welcome on the mountains are the footsteps of the herald announcing peace."

In these derashot peace is something both small and grand. Both private and public. Human and divine. Peace is desired in the home, between man and wife, and in the heavens, between the angels; between the higher and lower elements – the sky and the earth, and within the family, between siblings. Peace is invoked even during wartime with Israel's enemies, and it will be the first message of the mashiach.

Some of the derashot also describe compromises or even lies that God or the Torah make, for the sake of peace. Peace is so important that it is worth it. We learn this also from the korban Shelamim, the peace offering: the Shelamim are the most vulnerable of korbanot, but this vulnerability allows a connection, a "joint meal," so to speak, between God and Israel.

To achieve peace and to cultivate relationships, we need to take risks, we need to give space for vulnerability and to trust that the other party will not abuse that vulnerability. There is a chance that we will be hurt and violated or defiled, but we also open ourselves for the opportunity of an unmediated and real connection.

I end with a prayer for peace in Ukraine, and around the globe.

Shabbat Shalom



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