



The Pardes Parsha Discussion by Rabbi Alex Israel

The Parsha Discussion: Emor Blemished Motivation?

Our *parsha* cautions the people of Israel that any sacrificial animal must be unblemished, without defect.

Anything blind, or injured, or maimed, or with a cyst, boil-scar, or scurvy—such you shall not offer to the Lord. (Lev 22:22)

Why is a blemish such a problem? Why are disfigured animals banned from becoming offerings to God? The prophet Malakhi explains:

When you present a blind animal for sacrifice—it doesn't matter? When you present a lame or sick one—it doesn't matter? Just offer it to your governor: Will he accept you? Will he show you favor?—said the Lord of Hosts. (1:8)

Blind, lame or sick animals are disqualified because they would be rejected by the “governor,” by a government official. In a national tax, damaged produce is unacceptable. Similarly, God says, whatever cannot be brought to a human as a gift, even as a tariff or tax, should also apply to God; and as such, animals must be intact and unmaimed.

Discuss:

- Should service of God reflect human etiquette?
- Jewish law suggests that one should dress for prayer in the manner that one would dress to meet an important person (eg. A job interview) “that the honor of heaven should not fall short of the honor of flesh and blood.” (Why do we need to be concerned with our attire during prayer? Why not pray in my pyjamas?)
- Should human interaction form the paradigm for our religious standards?

Why however, would a person go to the pains to offer a sacrifice but then offer up second or third grade animal? Rabbi David Stav suggests that that this reflects a common pattern of human behavior:

What transpires in the soul of a person who suddenly decides to offer a sub-par sacrifice?

Could the Torah be attempting to address a number of well-known human traits? The first is the feeling of intense enthusiasm that fades over time. We often see this when certain individuals are intent on showing everyone else what they are capable of, or how generous they can be. But once they return home, the enthusiasm simply subsides.

A radio host might be collecting donations and taking calls from donors, which are broadcast live. The donors get swept away and commit to donating, but their enthusiasm subsequently fizzles out.

In other words, maintaining enthusiasm over time is no simple feat. Sometimes, things that catch fire quickly are also extinguished quickly, so we need to warn enthusiasts not to “cool down” too quickly.”

This process occurs in another way, too. After a friend grows excited and wants to contribute a sizable donation, he might ask himself: “Does Hashem really care whether I bring Him a fancy sacrifice or a more modest one? After all, human beings are much more impressed by external appearances.” That person would build his house out of top-quality materials. He’d buy a new car once every few years. (<https://ots.org.il/parsha-point-emor-5777/>)

So, at first a person is religiously motivated. They make grand religious promises. But after a while, the religious urgency recedes and dissipates. A person offers a blemished sacrifice because although in a moment of religious elevation they obliged themselves to offer a sacrifice, now they are left with the obligation without the inspiration. As a result, they decide not to invest too much, and to bring even a damaged, cheaper animal. It’s all OK as long as the letter (-not the spirit-) of the law is fulfilled.

And so, please discuss:

Rav Stav is depicting a human instinct whereby we experience religious enthusiasm, only to experience second thought.

- Has this ever happened to you?
- Have you ever thought of donating a significant sum to charity but when it comes to it, you ended donating less?
- Why do we lose our enthusiasm and focus? Is spiritual disaffection inevitable, or can the slide be stymied, or even reversed?

- What is the modern equivalent or corollary of a “blemished animal”?

Shabbat Shalom!