

Parshat Shemini

Nullification of The Self

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Chazal say that the sin for which Nadav and Avihu were killed was that they looked at Moshe and Aharon and said: "Soon these elders (Moshe and Aharon) will die and we will take their place as the leaders of the nation." Another explanation, along the same lines, is that they failed to consult Moshe before performing their service. It would seem, therefore, that they were punished for their arrogance and narcissism, and that the specific object of the "Aish Zara" had only incidental significance. However, the Torah itself focuses specifically on the Korban, which requires explanation.

In his essay, "Lonely Man of Faith," Rav Soloveitchik zt"l describes human nature in a dialectical manner, based on the two accounts of Man's creation in Bereishit. The first Adam is given the command "*vechivshuha*" – conquer the earth – representing "majestic man," who is driven to conquer the world and to strengthen his own ego. Though he is a social animal, his interactions with others, even his loved ones, are artificial and are done in a competitive manner solely for selfish purposes. So, too, his relationship with G-d is based in narcissism. This explains why the first Adam's wife was created along with him, requiring no sacrifice.

Contrarily, Adam the second is defined by "*Da lifnei mi atah omed.*" If one realizes he is standing before an Omnipotent being, he will nullify his own will and take on the will of his Creator. The second Adam's Chava required him to be made unconscious, and then to sacrifice his rib. In other words, he had to nullify his will and sacrifice of himself, which created a relationship based on truth, termed "*Ezer K'negdo.*"

There are times when man must operate as Adam the First, fighting and competing to conquer the earth. But when bringing a Korban, when man is meant to feel as if the goat or bird is in place of himself, and that he should be the one on the altar, "*da lifnei mi ata omed*" must take over. The act of a Korban requires a nullification of the self, and, as such, a Korban used as an expression of narcissism would be an abomination. For this reason, the Torah focuses their sin on the context of Korban.

This concept is illustrated harshly in the Haftarah for Parshat Mishpatim, where we are told that when the Jews took slaves unlawfully, the ultimate selfish act, they had essentially broken their covenant with G-d and sealed their fate of exile.

The Point: Unless man is willing to give of himself to others – he has, by definition precluded having any true relationships, whether with man or G-d.