



רגשות קודש Emotions of Holiness

Parashat Emor, which focuses mainly on priests and holidays, contains a short passage of three mitzvot relating to the slaughter of animals:

שׁוֹר אוֹ כֶּשֶׂב אוֹ עֵז כִּי יוֹלַד וְהָיָה שִׁבְעַת יָמִים תַּחַת אִמּוֹ ...

*When an ox or sheep is born,
it must remain with its mother for seven days...*

וְשׁוֹר אוֹ שֶׂה אִתּוֹ וְאֶת בְּנוֹ לֹא תִשְׁחַטוּ בַּיּוֹם אֶחָד.

*An ox or sheep, it and its offspring you shall not
slaughter on the same day.*

וְכִי תִזְבְּחוּ זֶבַח תּוֹדָה לַה' לְרִצְוֹנְכֶם תִּזְבְּחוּ. בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא יֵאָכַל...

*When you offer a thanksgiving offering to Hashem,
it shall be done in an acceptable manner for you:*

It shall be eaten on that day... (Vayikra 22,27-30)

The first mitzvah is that we may not bring a sacrifice of an animal that is younger than seven days old. The second is that in general, an animal may not be killed on the same day as its mother (though not its father). And the third mitzvah in this series is that we may eat the thanksgiving offering only on the day of its slaughter and the following night.

Though these mitzvot seem rather ordinary, the concluding verses of the passage show that the Torah considers them to be very special. They read as follows:

וּשְׁמֵרְתֶם מִצְוֹתַי וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם אֲנִי ה'.

וְלֹא תַחֲלְלוּ אֶת שֵׁם קִדְשִׁי וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, אֲנִי ה' מְקַדְּשְׁכֶם.

*You shall keep My commandments and observe them,
I am G-d. And do not desecrate My holy name,
and I shall be sanctified amidst the Children of Israel;
I am G-d Who sanctifies you.* (verses 31-32)

This means that one who does not observe the three preceding commandments is essentially “*desecrating G-d’s holy name,*” while he who does observe them thus “*sanctifies G-d’s name amidst Bnei Ysrael.*” Clearly, these mitzvot are quite critical, and they in fact touch upon one of the most exalted and holy values in the entire Torah.

Let us look again at the first of these three mitzvot. It tells us that “*only from the eighth day and onward will [a newborn ox or sheep] be desirable for a sacrifice offering to G-d.*” The baby animal must not be detached from its mother’s care for the first seven days of its life; “*seven days*” is the Torah-mandated period during which we must respect the emotions of mother-child bonding among animals such as cows and sheep. The mother spends this period nursing her young, granting it life and warmth. The Torah teaches us, as an ethical obligation of the first degree, to honor and respect this period of sacred motherly emotion that G-d has implanted in nature. We must allow even animals the chance to actualize this G-d-given blessing, manifest during the first week of life.

To be sure, we are not speaking of showing honor to an animal. We are talking of showing respect to the manifestation of kindness and compassion with which G-d has imbued these animal mothers. By honoring this lofty animal instinct, we are honoring G-d as well, as we will further explain below.

The Torah emphasizes that this applies even if one has an admirable goal, such as bringing a young animal as an offering to G-d; to do so within the first week is an offense against the holy emotions binding mother and newborn. Such an offering is therefore not “*desirable to G-d.*”

A similar idea is found in the second mitzvah in this passage, which forbids us to slaughter an ox or sheep and its offspring on the same day. Once again, we are warned not to violate the natural mother-offspring relationship. In the Torah’s view, “one day” represents a link. To slaughter a mother and offspring in one day shatters those sacred “bonds of life” and turns them into “bonds of death” – an unconscionable act and a terrible strike against G-d’s will that He has imbued in nature.

This concept also helps understand the greatness of the mitzvah of honoring one's parents:

כִּבֵּד אֶת אָבִיךָ וְאֶת אִמֶּךָ... לְמַעַן יִאָּרִיכוּ יְמֵיךָ וְלִמְעַן יֵיטֵב לָךְ...

*Honor your father and mother,
so that your days will be lengthened and it will
be beneficial for you...* (D'varim 5,16)

We must know that our parents invest all they have to give us life, warmth and love. This instinctive parental trait is rooted in the Divine compassion and kindness that was the very basis for His Creation of the world. Hashem loves His world and those He created in it – and He imbued these feelings deep within them as they engage in bringing future generations, whether they are human beings, animals or birds.

Thus, when we honor our parents, we are actually honoring Hashem, Who implanted within us a trace of His image, namely, our close bonds with the generation that follows us. And in the merit of the fulfillment of this commandment, the Torah here tells us, our **days will be lengthened** and G-d will grant us long life of goodness and blessing.

This clarifies the significance of the all-important phrase repeated three times in this passage: **I am G-d**, אֲנִי ה'. The Divine Name used here, that of *Havayah*, reflects the Divine Attribute of mercy, as we recite three times daily in the Ashrei prayer:

טוֹב ה' לְכֹל יְרַחֲמֵנוּ עַל כָּל מַעֲשָׂיו.

*G-d (Havayah) is good to all;
His mercies are directed to all His creations.* (Psalms 145,9)

Anyone who harms living creatures as they build and grant life to the world by raising their offspring, harms the glory of G-d. This is a desecration of G-d's name and a blow to all of Creation. This is why the Torah emphasizes in this passage:

... וְלֹא תַחַלְלוּ אֶת שֵׁם קִדְשִׁי ...

... and do not desecrate My holy name... (Vayikra 22,32)

In short: The first seven days of a young animal's life, when it is still connected to its mother, are "holy days," and desecrating them means desecrating G-d's Name.

Let us elaborate on a similar mitzvah before we proceed to discuss the third mitzvah above.

■ Sending Away the Mother Bird

As we said above, Hashem imbued deep within the soul of every living creature, powerful ties with its offspring. These are manifest in the way it grants them life, warmth, protection and caring. We must relate to this lofty instinct of motherhood with holy awe and admiration, and we must certainly not take advantage of it for our own uses. Let us note the mitzvah of *Shiluach HaKen*, sending away the mother bird before taking her chicks. In one of our lessons on Parashat Mishpatim, we explained as follows:

Hashem instilled in all animals the instinctive desire to protect and care for their young ones. The mother bird fulfills this mission and destiny most perfectly: She sits atop her eggs to warm them so that they will hatch into little chicks, and then she hovers over them to feed, warm, and protect them. We are commanded: “Do not take wicked advantage of this wondrous, holy moment of the joining of the mother and her young! Do not abuse this special moment. You know that the mother is so devoted to bestowing life upon her young that she will not fly away even when a hunter comes. You must therefore not violate this fulfillment of G-d’s will for the benefit of a mere hunt or other physical desires.”

And for fulfilling this mitzvah, the Torah promises us, measure for measure, life in kind, “*so that it will be good for you and you will have long life.*” (D’varim 22,7)

■ Sanctification of the Profane

We have seen that we may not desecrate the holiness in Creation. On the other side of the coin, we also find that there is a perpetual, positive commandment to actually **sanctify** the profane and take the world to a higher level of holiness. This concept appears in the third mitzvah mentioned above: “*Your thanksgiving (Todah) offering to G-d... shall be eaten on that day, and do not leave it over until the morning; I am G-d.*” (Vayikra 22,29-30)

The prescribed action for this mitzvah is exactly the opposite of the preceding two. The first two mitzvot are marked by the *separation* between two actions (between the birth and the slaughter, and between the slaughter of the mother and of her offspring), while here, in the case of the thanksgiving (Todah) offering, both the sacrificing and the eating must be done *together*, in one day.

After we bring this Todah offering, we are then permitted to eat of its meat - but only on that day; we must not leave any of it over until the next morning. The message is that when we want to show thanks to Hashem via a thanksgiving sacrifice, is this very desire of ours that sanctifies the animal, turning it from something profane into something sacred. But there is only a one-day period in which this pure desire is effective - and we must eat the offering on that very day that we slaughtered it with this aspiration. Once that day is over, this pure desire to thank G-d “expires” and is no longer linked to the eating, and the meat becomes unfit for eating at all.

We thus have two consecutive mitzvot that complement each other in a contrasting manner: It is forbidden to slaughter a mother and its offspring on the same day – but when it comes to eating, we must consume the thanksgiving sacrifice precisely on the same day that it is slaughtered. In the first instance, “one day” may not include two actions, while regarding the thanks offering, “one day” *must* include two actions. The Torah sums up this duality in one verse:

וְלֹא תַחַלְלוּ אֶת שֵׁם קִדְשִׁי וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל ...

*Do not desecrate My holy name,
and I will be sanctified amidst Israel... (22,32)*

This verse has both aspects. It begins with the negative command *not to desecrate* G-d’s command, corresponding to the ban on abusing the Divine motherly instincts imbued in living things – and it ends with the positive command *to sanctify* G-d’s Name, parallel to the concept of sanctifying the profane.

Ungratefulness, in the form of abuse of the parental bonds – bonds by which G-d grants the gift of life – is a desecration of that which is holy. At the same time, the gratefulness that we show by bringing a Todah sacrifice is our way of raising up the mundane to the level of sanctity.

■ Sacrifices in the Future

This discussion has ramifications on what will be in the future when the Holy Temple is rebuilt. For it is often asked: Is it really possible that the sacrificial service will be restored, with all its laws and details? After all, modern man’s perceptions are a far cry from what was prevalent 2,000 years ago; many people today are simply nauseated by the very thought of animal slaughter on such a massive scale, not to mention collecting the blood and burning the sacrifices on an altar.

We must remember, of course, that large-scale animal slaughter is an ongoing phenomenon. We have no Temple, but people all over the world still eat meat, and millions of cattle are killed every day to supply their needs. This does not seem to bother most people, especially when the meat is served up on sparkling dishes with fancy table-settings, cutlery and napkins... That is to say, when the slaughter is for sacred purposes, people's nausea overrides all, but when it comes to their animalistic needs, this sensation seems to give way to respectful appreciation.

Let us note that eating meat is not the ideal. Hashem did not permit Adam HaRishon to eat meat, nor were Bnei Yisrael permitted to do so unless the animal was originally slaughtered for a sacrificial offering in the Holy Temple (according to R. Yishmael). The act of offering a sacrifice includes an exalted dimension of sacrificing one's own soul and returning it to its very source – though it is “exchanged” for the soul of the animal.

However, the Torah takes into account the situation in Eretz Yisrael, where many in the north and south live far from the Beit HaMikdash in Yerushalayim:

כִּי יִרְחִיב ה' אֶל־לְהִיךָ אֶת גְּבוּלְךָ... וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲכַלְהָ בָּשָׂר...
כִּי יִרְחַק מִמֶּךָ הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר ה' אֶל־לְהִיךָ לְשׁוֹם שְׁמוֹ שָׁם...

*When G-d expands your boundary... and you want to eat
meat... If the place that Hashem has chosen to put His Name
there, will be distant from you... (D'varim 12, 20-21)*

Under such circumstances, the Torah continues, we are permitted to slaughter and eat meat wherever we want, even if not for a sacrificial offering:

וְזָבַחְתָּ מִבְּקָרְךָ וּמִצֹּאֲנֶה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן ה' לְךָ בְּאֶשֶׁר צִוִּיתְךָ
וְאָכַלְתָּ בְּשַׁעֲרֶיךָ בְּכֹל אֲוֹת נַפְשֶׁךָ.

*You may slaughter of your cattle and
of your sheep that Hashem has given you...
and you may eat in your cities,
according to every desire of your soul.*

It is very likely that when the Beit HaMikdash is rebuilt, hopefully soon in our own lifetimes, the ban on eating non-sacrificial meat will once again apply. This is because Jerusalem today is not more than a few hours' drive from any place in the country, and less than an hour by plane. It will therefore be no problem to have all meat slaughtered in Jerusalem for

sacrifices, as the problem of *“If [Jerusalem] will be distant from you”* will no longer be applicable.

However, once the meat is slaughtered for sacrifices in this manner, it becomes *kodshim kalim*, meat of low-level sanctity, which is permitted to be eaten only in Jerusalem. Will only those who can periodically bring their whole families to Jerusalem be able to provide them with meat? The answer is that we have also been promised that in future times, Jerusalem will expand all the way to Damascus, meaning that all of Eretz Yisrael will be sanctified with the holiness of Jerusalem. The Sages derived this from the following verse:

מִשָּׂא דְבַר ה' בְּאֶרֶץ חֲדָרָה וְדַמְשֶׁק מִנְחָתוֹ...

The prophecy of G-d's word in the land of Hadrach.

And Damascus is His resting place... (Zechariah 9,1)

In the Medrash we learn:

Is Damascus really His resting place? We know that His resting abode is only in the Beit HaMikdash, as is written: *“This [Zion] is My resting place forever”* (Psalms 132,14). Rather, in the future, Jerusalem will expand on all its sides until it reaches the gates of Damascus. (Shir HaShirim Rabba 7,3)

Based on this, the sacrificial slaughter will take place in the Beit HaMikdash, and the eating of its holy meat will be permitted throughout the Land, which will have the sanctity status of Jerusalem. True, it will not be as easy or widespread to eat meat as it is today, because it will always have to be slaughtered for the purpose of a sacrifice. But on the other hand, every portion of meat that we *do* eat will be on a higher level of spirituality, for it will have passed through the Mikdash. This will be a great upgrade in our quest to purify the physical, and refine and turn our lust for meat into a sacred emotion.

