

March 21, 2015
Vayikra
(And He Called)
Leviticus 1:1 - 5:26

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The tabernacle, the tent of meeting, is built. The presence of the Lord fills the tabernacle. No one can enter the tent of meeting and no one can leave to go about her work. All is suspended. No coming, no going. This is the end of the book of Exodus.

And here at the beginning of Leviticus, the call to movement begins:
"God called to Moses, speaking to him from the Communion Tent. He said, "Speak to the Israelites, and tell them the following: ..."
Leviticus 1:1-2, Vayikra

This portion is then filled with exact instructions for a variety of often-bloody sacrifices. The mystics read these as metaphor, as a means for drawing near (*korban*), as an active means of return to union with the whole, with the Divine, with our God beyond articulated understanding.

In this meditation, we will be contemplating this portion, looking at the nature of separation and return to union with the Divine.

We will listen to the words and to what echoes or arises in the silence. Whatever fills our awareness is our offering. We lift all up to a larger and larger context, where the self becomes just a small part of the whole.

Before we begin this contemplation, I would like to add a bit of explanation here. What does it mean to move from separation to union? How can any point be an entry, a gateway to return? We can use our usual internal noise, even the noise that arises during this contemplation, as a vehicle for return. This following example may seem trivial, but it also makes it easier to understand that we are always working toward union. It is an odd example, which is also in earnest:

In Judaism we have something called a blessing path. It is a long list of blessings we can use for each experience we have, moment-by-moment. It is a formalized practice, which intends to teach us how to remember God at all times. There is actually a blessing we can say when we see an ugly person. It goes: Thank you God for making people different.

What I love about this blessing is that it acknowledges our petty, judgmental mind without judging it. It simply provides its antidote: to remember that all air breathers have their place, and no one is better or less essential than anyone else. The thought of the perceived ugly person and the prayer become the offering and the means of putting the thought in a larger and compassionate context.

This example can help provide a base understanding for this work we are about to begin. Everything becomes an offering.

The portion lends its self well to a meditation in three parts. The first part of this contemplation works with the fact that the "man" who brings the offering is Adam, the primordial Adam, closest to the undifferentiated, both male and female, that part of soul which is capable of knowing God. That original Adam is the purest part of us, our core that yearns to draw close to the Divine. This yearning is our vehicle. This is where our offering begins.

The second part speaks of the community of Israel, or of our group, of humanity. Or it can speak to our own fragmented nature. There is an inevitable inflation of the leaders, or an inflation of an internal aspect of self that thinks it has the best and most important truth about our selves and everyone else. This leads to separation and an elevation of a part within us, whether it is our critical mind, or the part that feels responsible for everything. This is the same with our specific leaders in our community and in the world. They fail to see themselves as a small part of the whole. This offering is the path to return the fragment to the whole, to peace, to *shalom*. Here all the particulars are necessary fragment of the whole.

The third part of this contemplation is our individual work, our personal *teshuvah*, learning to identify the passions that get us in trouble, and harnessing them for the good. It is our yearning to draw close again, for restoration, which brings us to the work of return. The passions, the arousal itself, become the offering. When the passions are raised up, there is transformation into wisdom.

We are moving from the undifferentiated and the universal, to the community of individuals, or the community within us, to our own personal obstacles. And all become offerings of communion, of joining, of returning.

You are welcome to begin to draw further inward, focusing your attention on your breath, finding a way to sit as comfortably as you can, moving toward stillness. When you have a desire to move, note the intention to move before you move. The sounds of the room, or the world outside this room, all become part of the field of awareness. All of your habitual reactivity becomes highlighted in the relative silence. Make room for it all, and return to the breath and the constantly changing sensations of just sitting here.

Niggun

Silence

Part One

I will talk, and you can listen. You may find that you stop hearing me, as the words become part of an internal process.

Moses is called by God, called by God out of the House of Meeting, for the first time since its creation. God speaks to Moses who speaks to us all. We receive our instructions.

The Tabernacle is the remedy for our inevitable sins, for the anticipated separation from God. Our offerings are the cure.

We cannot offer any more than we are capable of bringing. That is known.

Moses is called. He hears the instructions: "If a man should bring an offering to the Lord." This is not the usual word for man, but instead the eternal Adam brings the offering, and follows the instructions.

The eternal Adam within us brings the offering.

Adam, barely differentiated from Heaven and Earth, made of light, before the separation of male and female, before names or words.

We come to know this eternal Adam by entering our sense of separation and finding our yearning for union, reunion.

From the Zohar:

"Those who yearn for one another, but are not always together, are called lovers; whereas those who are always together, unconcealed and never parting, are called companions. So these are companions, and those are lovers; these are in rapture, in unity constantly, whereas those are in yearning intermittently. This is consummation of all, so the Assembly of Israel may be blessed, and then joy pervades all the worlds."

(Zohar VII, [3-4a], p. 5, Daniel Matt, translation)

The separation and the union are both necessary. The longing of the lover is essential.

With the yearning, everything is burnt but the hide.

We bring the burnt offering; it becomes pure smoke, and rises up. This action is the completion of the inner thought. This burnt offering, *olah*, allows us to initiate a connection to God. It can be brought in joy, and the pleasing odor fastens the bond of faith.

This breath, this intention, this yearning, as it rises up, can be our offering.

Chant:

Lev tahor, b'ra li Elohim

Create in me a pure heart, oh Creator

Psalm 51:12

Silence

Part Two

As we sit here, the whole can be present, and within the whole is the fragmentation.

The second group of sacrifices pertain to the group, to the tribes of Israel, to us humans, to all air breathers—all the living beings, to us as individuals, with all of our parts.

What happens when our leaders miss the mark? Of course this will happen. It is a matter of “when” and not “if”.

What happens when parts of us get inflated? We call ourselves the best in the world; we call ourselves the worst in the world. We call our self a god or a demon. We get absorbed in a fraction of a truth and call it everything.

This comes into our awareness. We begin to notice what was unknown. We raise it up.

We bring salt with our offering. No leavening to puff things up. No honey to try to sweeten the deal. Always salt. Salt of the earth. A basic mineral. This is our peace offering. Part we eat, absorb, transform, part we offer up, we burn, and the sweet odor rises.

This is the peace offering because it makes peace between the higher and lower realms, and the various quarters of the world.

Here we hold the fragmentation within the whole, all with compassion and respect.

Chant:

**Ani shalom, shalom ani
I am peace, peace is me**

Silence

Part Three

Here is the realm of the personal, what we carry with us, the burdens that separate us from our core of original purity, from primordial Adam, from our intimates and from God. This is the work of restoration.

We bring what we hide in the recesses of our hearts.

We bring no more than what we are capable of bringing.

We offer up all our desires and passions. All our stirrings. We can bring this as offerings every day, in each moment.

From the Zohar:

And happy are the righteous who [e]stablish the upper realm, and happy are the penitent who restore all things to their places.

(Zohar, Vol V, Soncino edition, p. 356)

A metaphor from the Zohar:

It is as if a man in great passion seizes his weapons and goes out to kill someone, but a certain wise man meets him at the door and detains him, and while they are arguing with one another his anger cools down, and instead of going out to kill, he only goes out to reprove. Who was it on whom the man vented his passion? Surely the man who stood at the door! So the Holy One, blessed be he, said to Israel: "my sons, fear not, for I stand at the door, only brace yourself up on this day and give me strength.

And through what? Through the shofar. For if the sound of the shofar is properly produced and listened to with devotion, then it mounts aloft.

Transmit the sound of the shofar to all the worlds with concentration of thought, with wisdom, and with devotion, that through him chastisement may be removed from the world.

(Zohar, Vol V, Soncino edition, p. 359-60)

Waking up, calling out with intention, so all passions can have this doorway. The mezuzah. The presence. A practice.

And then we can make known what we hide from ourselves. The strength is present, allowing us to know what we don't want to know.

It is though pride that we sin and forget our sins.

It is though the strength to know our darkness that we find noble humility and communion. We move from darkness to light. And from this light there is joy.

Chant:

B'shuvah vanachat tivashayun

You shall triumph through stillness and teshuvah.

Isaiah 30:15

Silence

Ending

Our relationship with ourselves, with others and with God are all the same thing.

We work to become conscious within the silence, to find the strength to witness what we hide. We can then offer up all of who we are. This practice is continuous. It becomes our joy.

We bring our offerings for restoration of the original communion with grace, mercy and love, for blessings.

And we offer up these tunes, this song, for ourselves, the community and to the God beyond articulated understanding.

Niggun