

Vayikra

“Speak to the people of Israel, and say to them: When any of you (adam, lit. “a man of you”) presents an offering of cattle to Hashem, he shall choose his offering from the herd or from the flock.” Leviticus 1:2

Rashi cites a legal determination made by the Sages in Vayikra Rabbah based on this verse:

“Why is this term for “man” (adam) employed here? Since “Adam” also means Adam, its use suggests the following comparison: what was the characteristic of the first man, Adam haRishon? He did not offer sacrifice of anything acquired by way of robbery, since everything was his! So you, too, shall not offer anything acquired by way of robbery.”

Maharal (Gur Aryeh) explains that it is based on this that Rashi makes the claim earlier, in the beginning of the verse, that the Torah is dealing with voluntary offerings. These offerings are promised by their owners of their own free will. Once they are promised, however, they must be brought. He says it is obvious that when someone has a pre-existing Torah obligation to bring an offering, he may not discharge his obligation with something that is not his to give! Therefore, the Torah must be teaching us that there is an even stronger moral standard: voluntary offerings cannot be stolen either.

The Kli Yakar notes that this is not the only reference to theft in the parsha. There are at least two others. The Torah tells us that a bird-offering must be sacrificed without its crop (notzah), which is discarded. The Sages explain:

“Benotzasah means together with its entrails....The word notzah is really an expression for anything that is loathsome....In the case of a fowl...which feeds itself from what it picks up of other people’s property (lit., “of robbery”) it states, “he shall cast the entrails away”, because it (the bird) eats that which is stolen.” Rashi ibid. 1:16

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And again, at the end:

“...when one has thus sinned and, realizing his guilt, would restore that which he got through robbery or fraud, or the deposit that was entrusted to him, or the lost thing that he found...”
(ibid. 5:23)

The Kli Yakar argues that it is evident that there is some connection between sacrifice and theft. He explains that the relationship is inverse: they are opposites. Theft pushes God’s Presence (shechinah) away, while sacrifice brings it near. Perhaps the reason for this is that sacrifice is meant to symbolize giving of the self, the recognition that there is One above whose Presence eclipses ours infinitely. Theft reflects the very opposite of that attitude-- nothing is more important to the thief than his own desires, not even the loss he causes to others. Let us do our very best to cultivate in ourselves the attitude of sacrifice.

“Love without sacrifice is like theft.”

Nassim Nicholas Taleb

Shabbat Shalom
Rabbi Asher Coleman

