

Reflections of Redemption

Essays on the Weekly Torah Reading and Moshiach,
Based on the talks of the
Lubavitcher Rebbe,
Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson

Reprinted for Parshat Acharei-Kedoshim, 5786
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by
Rabbi Dovid Yisroel Ber Kaufmann, Ph.D

Acharei

OFFERING THE ESSENCE

This week's Torah reading describes the Yom Kippur service in the Sanctuary. This anticipates the natural state of affairs during the times of Moshiach. Then the volitional, external mode of service will become identical with the intuitive, internal mode. This also parallels the difference between the sacrificial offering and the incense offering. Understanding the difference explains the merit of Aaron's sons, who died bringing an uncommanded incense offering. Aaron's sons felt so unified with G-dliness that they automatically offered "incense," their very essence and being on the altar.

In the days of Moshiach, "the world will be filled with knowledge of G-d, as the waters cover the ocean bed." At the moment, it may be difficult to conceive how our perceptions will change in the times of Moshiach. We must realize, however, that the change will be only of perspective and priority. Currently, we connect to G-d volitionally: in thought, speech and action we attempt to fulfill G-d's commands. In the times of Moshiach, the connection will be innate and automatic: as a matter of course we will be aware of and fulfill G-d's Will, because the mitzvos will express not just the relationship between G-d and the Jewish people, but their unified essence.

These are not two approaches to serving G-d, or expressing our relationship with him. Rather, the volitional is an external mode of service, while the intuitive is an internal mode. Now, the external mode is dominant, except at certain times such as Yom Kippur. Now, we fulfill the commandments of the Creator, but as an individual, one with a separate identity. This is an exterior service, where the individual and the mitzvah – and thus the One who gave the mitzvah – remain separate and apart from each other.

But there is also an interior service. Here the mitzvah is fulfilled in such a way that the individual becomes attached to the Creator, adhering to Him so that they are like one entity. This will be the norm in the times of Moshiach. And this is what we experience, in part, on Yom Kippur.

Further, these two ways of serving the Creator, of performing the mitzvos, parallel the two types of offerings brought in the Temple. The sacrifices parallel the exterior service. They were performed on the outer altar. While they fulfilled a Divine command, they did not unite the individual with G-d in a complete union. The other type of offering was the incense. This was brought on the inner altar and parallels the individual's inner service. This offering with "inwardness of the heart" achieved a unity between the Creator and the Jewish people.

This week's Torah portion illustrates the nature of the external service, that of sacrifices, and the nature of the internal service, that of the incense. The Torah reading begins: "And the L-rd spoke unto Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they approached the L-rd and died." The word for "approach" also means to "come close" or "draw near." Their death was connected with an attempt to become closer to G-d.

From this perspective, their actions seem admirable. To actualize their attachment to G-d, they were willing to abandon this world. Their souls expired not because of a sin, but because of a great desire to experience G-dliness. And yet the Torah tells us elsewhere, in the portion of *Shemini*, that they died because they put incense in their fire pans and offered an unauthorized fire that G-d had not commanded them. This description clearly makes their act sinful. Yet here the opening verse, taken by itself, seems to describe an admirable approach.

So, did they die as transgressors, as a result of a sin, or as *tzaddikim*, as a result of their great attachment to G-d?

The narrative in *Shemini* actually supports the latter viewpoint. Moses explains to Aaron, “This is what L-rd said, that through those attached to Me I will be sanctified.” Since the incident occurred at the dedication of the Tabernacle, Moses obviously means that their death sanctified the Tabernacle. Their action of approaching G-d with an “unauthorized fire” must be viewed as exemplary, as the catalyst for the Tabernacle’s sanctification.

Accordingly, the statement that they offered “unauthorized fire that G-d had not commanded them” is not a criticism of Aaron’s sons, but the highest praise. They went “above and beyond” the limitations of the command. They literally devoted themselves to their desire for a revelation of G-d.

Thus the Torah emphasizes the type of service they performed: it was incense they intended to offer, because incense and their approach to G-d were mutually dependent. The degree of their attachment, manifested in an expiration of the soul, expressed itself in the offering of incense before G-d. As mentioned above, the incense altar was placed within the inner sanctum of the Tabernacle.

To elaborate: the outer altar had an effect on the external part of the person, namely, the thought, speech and action, which are described as the “garments” of the soul. Through the sacrifice on that altar, the person came to a full and proper fulfillment of the mitzvos in thought, speech and action.

But there is a deeper, more primal level of the soul. There, a person’s attachment to G-d comes through a revelation of the innermost aspect of the soul. Such a revelation automatically affects the thought, speech and action. Rather than observing the mitzvos because G-d commanded it, one does so naturally, fulfilling G-d’s Will as the intrinsic consequence of revelation. This is the offering of the incense altar.

Even the Hebrew words for “sacrifice” and “incense” allude to

the difference between an external and an inner offering, which they represent. The Hebrew word for "sacrifice" comes from the root "to approach," or "draw close." Notwithstanding a person's closeness to G-d, there still remains an individual, separate and apart, who performs the mitzvos. The word for "incense" comes from the root for "attachment" or "conjunction." At this level, one does more than approach G-d through thought, speech and action; one becomes united with G-d in essence.

Aaron's sons experienced an open revelation of the innermost aspect of their souls. At such a level, they did not need to be commanded to fulfill G-d's Will. They felt so unified with G-dliness that they automatically offered "incense," their very essence and being on the altar. Thus, what they offered was not commanded, because all their actions automatically and of themselves fulfilled G-d's Will.

But why did the incense offering and death of Aaron's sons sanctify the Tabernacle? And what is the connection between this incident at the beginning of the Torah reading and the priestly service of Yom Kippur, which follows?

As there are two levels of service within the human being, so there are two degrees of Holiness, two ways in which the Divine Presence manifests itself. In the first case, the Divine Presence occupies the Tabernacle, descending upon the children of Israel but remaining separate from them. In the second, the Divine Presence inhabits the Sanctuary, penetrating to the essence of the physical structure, making even the stones holy. The first, a mere occupation, parallels the external service, the sacrifices. In the second, there is an indwelling that penetrates to the very essence, paralleling the internal service, the incense offering.

Aaron, the high priest, was responsible for the sacrifices and bringing the Divine Presence upon the people. His sons went further, revealing the essence and uniting the soul with the Divine Presence.

And this is the nature of the service of Yom Kippur, to so elevate the soul and reveal its essence and unity with G-dliness, that one's Divine service occurs as an automatic consequence of the connection. This inner service is the highlight and focal point of Yom Kippur: on that day, the Kohen Gadol entered the holy of holies to perform – an incense offering. Yom Kippur is the day of atonement because at the level of incense, at the level of essence, the Jewish people are not a separate existence from G-d. Thus, there is no 'place' for sin nor weakness of the Divine connection.

This is the level of every Jew in the days of Moshiach.

(Based on Likkutei Sichos 32:98-105)

Kedoshim

REMOVING G-D'S FIERCE ANGER

Theft is compared to idolatry. G-d's fierce anger remains as long as there are wicked people – thieves. Idolatry also angers G-d. All other sins can be corrected by a positive action, restoring the original situation. Theft requires more; it requires teshuvah.

This week's Torah reading contains one of the two admonitions against stealing. As our Sages explain, in the Ten Commandments, "Thou shalt not steal" means kidnapping. In this week's Torah reading, "Thou shalt not steal" prohibits the theft of money.

Regarding such theft, our Sages declare that stealing is comparable to idolatry. A thief is like an idol-worshipper. When the Sages use such an expression, it's not just a metaphor to indicate the seriousness and severity of the transgression. Rather, it indicates a similarity between the essential nature of such a violation and that of idolatry.

Why, of all transgressions, is monetary theft akin to idolatry? What unique feature do they share? The question has a practical urgency: when Moshiach comes, all forms of idolatry will be removed. Indeed, removal of idolatry is a prerequisite for Redemption, as we acknowledge thrice-daily in the Aleinu prayer: ". . . therefore we hope to You, L-rd our G-d, that we may speedily behold the splendor of Your might, to banish idolatry from the earth – and false gods will be utterly destroyed . . . Then all the inhabitants of the world will recognize and know that every knee should bend to You . . . and they will all take upon themselves the yoke of Your kingdom . . . And it is said: The L-rd shall be King over the entire earth; on that day the L-rd shall be One and His Name One."

Of course, when Moshiach comes thievery and other such activities will also cease. In a general sense, this is understandable, since every transgression is a violation of G-d's Will, and thus idolatry in miniature. In the era of Redemption, when "all eyes will see" and "the whole world will be filled with knowledge of G-d," fulfilling G-d's commandments will be the automatic and natural thing to do. Recognizing and feeling G-d's presence will prevent such violations.

Idolatry is the paradigm, the beginning of all transgressions. In a sense, all others are simply parts, greater or lesser segments of idolatry. At this level, every moment we **don't** violate a commandment, we destroy a little piece of idolatry, and thus bring Moshiach closer. By negating the negative, so to speak, we bring the positive: by not stealing, we reveal G-dliness.

Still, since the Sages declared there to be a direct correspondence, there must be a special connection between theft and idolatry. Stealing, an act between one person and another, parallels idolatry, an act between man and G-d. This point of comparison, this essential aspect that theft and idolatry share, emerges from the prohibition to steal from a condemned idolatrous city: When an entire city is enticed into idolatry, Torah commands that the inhabitants be killed and its contents burned. Since there might be a temptation to save some of the valuables, the Torah warns us not to take anything belonging to the condemned city. Even though the death penalty applies to the inhabitants, their possessions are not like lost objects.

Here, the prohibition against stealing is very specific: one may not take any object from a city condemned for idolatry. One might think that such objects are ownerless, and thus free. But the Torah ordained differently: all the items of a condemned city are prohibited. Since we are prohibited to take them, taking them would be stealing.

The Sages also provide a reason: such a theft keeps G-d's "fierce anger" in the world. "As long as there are wicked people in the world, there is fierce anger in the world." The wicked people referred to cannot be the idolaters themselves, since they have already been killed. Rather, the wicked are those who would take the possessions of the idolaters, the contraband of the condemned city. Thus, the Sages conclude, "When the wicked are removed from the world, G-d's fierce anger is removed from the world. Who are these wicked? Thieves."

We now have the following correspondence: just as idolatry inhibits Redemption, so stealing, specifically from an idolatrous city, inhibits the removal of G-d's fierce anger from the world. On the other side, just as removing idolatry is a prerequisite for Redemption, as we acknowledge in the Aleinu prayer, so too, removing the wicked – the thieves – is the prerequisite for removal of G-d's fierce anger. (Obviously, only the severest transgression brings G-d's "fierce anger" into the world in the first place. The greatest sin against G-d is idolatry. Idolatry arouses G-d's fierce anger, but stealing keeps it in existence, preventing Redemption.)

What differentiates stealing from other sins? Generally, a sin exists only as long as a person is sinning. For example a person who eats non-kosher food violates the laws of kashrus only while he is eating. When he's not eating treif, he's not violating a commandment. Similarly, a person who hits someone else has transgressed only at the moment he strikes the other person. But so long as a stolen object has not been returned, the thief is still and continuously stealing. Once the stolen object is returned, the thief no longer transgresses. From then on, the individual no longer violates the prohibition. *But he has not retroactively repaired the past.* That requires *teshuvah*.

In most cases, the sin has a limited lifespan, so to speak. When

one stops violating the mitzvah, the sin ceases to exist. Therefore, G-d's anger ceases when the transgression ceases. With most transgressions, G-d's anger depends on the action, stopping when the sinful action stops. True, from the moment of the violation, the individual is obligated to do *teshuvah*. But the sin itself, having ceased to be, has no lingering effect on the world.

But theft, like idolatry, is different. Even when one stops acting in a sinful manner, the sin continues to exist. A thief's resolve to never steal again, by itself, does not remove or correct the sin itself. As long as he does not do *teshuvah*, G-d's fierce anger remains in the world. Similarly, one does not have to be worshipping idols every moment of the day to provoke G-d's fierce anger. That idolatry exists, that one in fact worships idols, even if that isn't happening right now, is sufficient to arouse G-d's fierce anger. The effect of theft or idolatry continues even when the individual is no longer stealing or worshipping idols. G-d's fierce anger remains so long as the wicked remain. And there's only one way to remove or transform the wicked: *teshuvah*.

What is true about theft is also true in a more limited sense about every transgression: until we do *teshuvah*, G-d's displeasure persists. With every sin comes the imperative to do *teshuvah*. As important as *teshuvah* is in general, it becomes ultimately significant in bringing Moshiach; as the Rambam rules, the Jewish people will eventually do *teshuvah* and immediately they will be redeemed. When considering other transgressions, a person may reason that, since he will definitely do *teshuvah* anyway, it's acceptable to delay it. The delay may seem especially justified if one becomes involved in other good things.

Or, one can resolve to do something good, a mitzvah. But there's no urgency to fulfill the resolution; we may become busy with other interests. However, since delaying *teshuvah* sustains G-d's "anger"

in the world, such conduct is improper. G-d's displeasure stays beyond the moment of transgression; it remains continuously; delay affects not just the individual, but the entire world.

Our *teshuvah* becomes responsible for removing G-d's displeasure and transforming the world. Doing good benefits not only the individual, but the entire world. And once one does *teshuvah*, its effect also continues onward. Everything depends on our actions. We, through our *teshuvah* and positive actions, can bring the ultimate Redemption one moment sooner.

(Based on Likkutei Sichos 17:205-214)

BESURAS HAGEULO

The Announcement Of The Redemption

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From what was said previously, one may discover several lessons regarding the service of the Jews to bring the Redemption, and what must be done to prepare for the Redemption, as we stand now at the end of exile, “golah,” with the Redemption coming momentarily.

...Worldly affairs themselves and the nations of the world themselves (even in the time of exile) are (in truth) assisting in the service of bringing the Redemption.

It may be suggested that at the end of the time of exile, close to the Redemption, this assistance appears in a more open fashion.

We see this especially in the recent generations and even more in recent times, specifically in the latest days:

In previous generations, (most) Jews lived among countries which in general were a hindrance and an obstacle, etc. ([the trouble] will not rise twice)¹ to the service of G-d.

However, in recent generations, (most) Jews live among benevolent governments, primarily this country² (in which the largest number of Jews and Jewish institutions are located). This enables the Jews to achieve an inner Redemption in their service, so that they should perform the service which will bring the actual Redemption. Then the benevolent government will also help the Jews to return to the land of Israel (in the language of Scriptures:³

1. The language of Scriptures - *Nachum* 1:9. And see *Likkutei Sichos* volume 23, page 306, note 55.

2. [*The United States. Translator's note.*]

3. *Yeshayahu* 66:20.

And they will bring all your brethren, etc.).

And in this last year we see how this attitude towards the Jewish people has spread to other countries, even to that country,⁴ which (until recently) placed limitations on the freedom of the Jews in their observance of Torah and mitzvos, and also on their emigration from that country. Their attitude has now been reversed, for they permit Jews to observe Torah and mitzvos and allow Jews to leave there (without the previous restrictions). On the contrary - they are now helping the Jews to travel to the Holy Land. This is a prelude of the assistance the nations of the world will give the Jewish people to go out of exile and into the Holy Land, in the complete and true Redemption.

In addition to the direct assistance from the nations of the world to the Jews, we also see instances where the nations of the world themselves perform acts of goodness and kindness, which reveal even more that there is a Master to this palace.⁵ All of this is a preparation for “And the kingdom will be the L-rd’s”⁶ in the complete and true Redemption.

It was not this way previously, when specifically the Jewish people (even though “You are the smallest of all the nations”⁷) accomplished the intention of making a dwelling place in the lower world,⁸ while several governments of the nations of the world behaved in a cruel fashion to each other. Their main occupation was their own benefit, either by conquering the other countries, etc.

4. *[The Soviet Union. Translators note.]*

5. See *Bereishis Rabba* beginning of chapter 39.

6. The end of *Ovadyah*.

7. *Va'eschanan* 7:7.

8. *[The Previous Rebbe explains in his discourse Basi L'gani that G-d's intention behind creation was to make a dwelling place for G-dliness in even the lowest physical realm of existence, that is, this world. Translator's note.]*

Among the obvious things which occurred very recently, where we see how the world and the nations of the world are preparing and assisting the way to the Redemption, are the areas of tzedekah and education, two fundamental foundations for civilizing the world, “He formed it to be inhabited.”⁹

The recent events have become well-known and publicized (in all the newspapers). This country (founded on tzedekah and kindness, as is known) has used its great power to help and rescue people in a distant region of the world (far away from the country), even though the citizens of this country receive no direct benefit.

This country sent many people and soldiers from its army to assist the refugees in those places, together with food, clothing and medicine. Instead of using the planes for conquest, and instead of using the food and clothing for its own citizens, it used them to rescue unfortunate people, particularly small children, from the cold, and indeed, from the very opposite of life.¹⁰

One sees thereby the compassion of the citizens of this country: when they heard and saw the suffering of others, not their own relatives, and with whom they had no connection - the country was aroused to help them. According to the principles of this country regarding tzedekah, it helps people throughout the whole world, and it doesn't even wait to be asked to help.

Similarly, it's also known that recently the leader of this country came out with a declaration and detailed directive regarding children's education. This was consistent with a declaration the president made at the beginning of his tenure, concerning his ambition to be remembered as the “education president” for the

9. *Yeshayahu* 45:18.

10 [The Rebbe - in the spirit of the Talmudic dictum to employ clean and positive language - frequently employed the euphemism “the opposite of life.”
Translator's note.]

actions and large, positive reforms that he would introduce to strengthen education in the country.

...And this is in addition to the many things that daily occur by Divine Providence, whether in general or in relation to each one in their personal matters. The purpose of all this is to reveal even more how the world is helping to make a dwelling place for G-d in this lowest world and bring the Redemption.

(This includes the discovery last week of precious stones and pearls in the farthest corner of the world, through the blessings of G-d. (This is analogous to “The princes brought the onyx stones and the stones for the ephod and breastplate.”¹¹ (These were used for the priestly garments, that were [miraculously] brought to them by the clouds.¹²) The intention is they should be used for adorning brides, increasing tzedekah, etc.)

The practical conclusion of what has been said is: the Redemption comes precisely through the service in exile, from revealing the master of the world in “exile,”¹³ so that this generation, the last generation of exile, will be the first generation of Redemption.

And G-d helps us see in the recent world events how the world itself is assisting and leading to the Redemption.

This simply means - as mentioned above - that every Jew must

11. *Vayakhel* 35:27.

12. *Targum Yonasan* on the verse.

13. [There is a play on words in the Hebrew: exile is “golah” and redemption is “geulah.” The difference between them in Hebrew is the letter “Aleph.” The word “Alufo” means L-rd or master. The letter “Aleph” also has the numerical value of one. Thus, the “Master of the world” is the “Alufo of the world.” He is also the “Alef” - the only One. By revealing the “Alufo,” the “Alef” is also revealed, which transforms “golah” (without an alef) into “geulah” (with an alef). Translator’s note.]

increase in “our actions and our service” in general that bring the Redemption, including and particularly - as talked about in the previous gathering - learning the Torah concerning Redemption, in the Written Torah (that “all¹⁴ the books are filled with this subject”) and the Oral Torah: Mishneh, Gemara, Midrashim, etc.

(From the talk of Shabbos Parshas Acharei-Kedoshim, 13 Iyar 5751)

14. Rambam, *Laws of Kings*, chapter 11, halacha 2.

IN LOVING MEMORY OF A DEAR FREIND

Reb Pesach Betzalel ben Reb Leib ע"ה Fleischman

Passed away on 3 Elul, 5784

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