

## Parshas Vayikra

# Sacrifices: The Ultimate Gift

*This week’s Torah portion is centered on the commandment of bringing sacrifices to G-d. While expressing this instruction, the Torah uses the description, “a pleasing aroma.” Through an in-depth analysis of Rashi’s explanation of this term, the uniqueness of this commandment is brought to light.*

Parshas Vayikra begins with detailing the various sacrifices that were to be brought in the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) and later in the *Beis Hamikdash* (Holy Temple).

Regarding many of the sacrifices that the Torah mentions, it employs the description of, “*rei-ach nicho-ach la-Hashem*,” a pleasing aroma to the Lord. The Torah tells us that when we bring sacrifices to G-d, G-d finds them pleasing.

The first of these expressions is found regarding the burnt sacrifice, which is mentioned in the beginning of the *parsha* (Torah portion). The verse states as follows:

### Text 1

Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: When a man from [among] you brings a sacrifice to the Lord; from animals, from cattle or from the flock you shall bring your sacrifice. If his sacrifice is a burnt offering from cattle, an unblemished male he shall bring it. He shall bring it willingly to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, before the Lord...And its innards and its legs, he shall wash with water. Then, the priest shall cause to [go up in] smoke all [of the animal] on the altar, as a burnt offering, a fire offering, [with] a pleasing aroma to the Lord.

*Vayikra 1:2-9*

The Torah tells us that the burnt offering creates a pleasant fragrance for G-d. Rashi comments on the meaning of this expression, “*rei-ach nicho-ach*,” and writes the following:

### Text 2

Heb. *nicho-ach*. [This word stems from the same root as the expression *nachas ru-ach*, “contentment.” G-d says: “This sacrifice] gives Me contentment, for I said and My will was fulfilled!”

*Rashi, ibid*

The commentators clarify that the intent of Rashi’s explanation is to negate a mistaken understanding that one may come to from the verse, by assuming that G-d enjoys the actual scent of the sacrifice.

### Text 3

A pleasing aroma, for the purpose of G-d’s contentment. Rashi explains [that the sacrifice brings] satisfaction to the Holy One, Blessed be He that His will was fulfilled, and negates that He derives pleasure from the scent of the sacrifice. This is because it says in the verse<sup>1</sup> “If I were hungry I would not tell you...”

*R. Eliyahu Mizrachi, Vayikra, 1:9*

<sup>1</sup> Tehillim 50:12.

R. Eliyahu Mizrachi (R'aim) explains, that because it not possible to say that G-d derives pleasure from the physical scent of the sacrifice, Rashi therefore explains that the meaning of these words is not that the Almighty acquires physical pleasure from the scent, G-d Forbid, but rather that He is content that His words have been carried out.

### Unsatisfactory

While true that G-d does not derive physical pleasure from the sacrifices, it is problematic to explain that this was Rashi's intention in his commentary.

Were Rashi's intent to have been to negate a basic fallacy in understanding the pleasure G-d receives from sacrifices, he should have explained this the *first* time the Torah employs the language, "a pleasing aroma," and would not have only brought out this point in our *parsha*.

This expression that the sacrifice is a "pleasing aroma" is found initially regarding Noach's offering, brought after the conclusion of The Flood. Were Rashi to have found it important to explain that G-d does not derive physical pleasure from the scent of the sacrifice, he should have explained this point in *Parshas* Noach.

The verse there says:

#### Text 4

And Noach built an altar to the Lord, and he took of all the clean animals and of all the clean fowl and brought up burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled the pleasant aroma, and the Lord said to Himself, "I will no longer curse the earth because of man, for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth, and I will no longer smite all living things as I have done.

*Bereishis* 8:20-21

There, too, the Torah uses the term, "the pleasant aroma," yet Rashi was not prompted to explain that G-d enjoyed the aroma in a spiritual sense as opposed to a physical one.

If negating the physical enjoyment was indeed Rashi's intent our verse in *Parshas* Vayikra, it would seem pertinent for Rashi to have clarified this point earlier, regarding Noach's sacrifice, and not to have waited to explain this basic principle three books later.

Not only is the instance of Noach the first time this language is employed, and therefore should have been clarified, but additionally, the wording of that particular verse, indeed imply that G-d *does* smell the sacrifice.

For, regarding the sacrifice of Noach the verse says, "The Lord smelled," clearly suggesting that G-d actually smells the sacrifice.

Because the verse employs this peculiar language, there seems to be a need to clarify that G-d, in truth, does not get pleasure from the *scent* of the sacrifice, but *only* from the fact that His will was carried out.

There, however, Rashi does not explain that the pleasure that G-d derives is spiritual in nature.

From the fact that Rashi does not offer explanation concerning Noach's sacrifice as he does in our verse, it is clear that Rashi is not negating this possible confusion, yet is rather explaining something else, which is only pertinent in the *Parshas* Vayikra, and *not* in the story of Noach.

### An apparent difference

Nevertheless, it is possible to defend the position of R'aim through the following observation:

Seemingly, one can distinguish between the uses of the words, "the pleasant aroma," stated

regarding Noach and the words, “a pleasing aroma to the Lord,” stated in our Torah portion.

Based on this difference, it is possible to explain why Rashi did not feel the need to explain that the “pleasant aroma” was spiritual in nature in *Parshas Noach*.

By the former, the term employed is “the pleasant aroma,” and it does not say who enjoyed this aroma. The verse does not describe it as “a pleasing aroma to the Lord,” as it does in *Parshas Vayikra*.

Because of this variance in the text, it is possible to suggest that the intent of the words, “the pleasant aroma,” which are stated concerning the sacrifices brought after The Flood, is that it was a pleasant aroma for *Noach*, and therefore there is no need to negate the possibility of G-d attaining physical pleasure.

(Though the verse states that “the Lord smelled,” it can simply mean that these sacrifices were accepted by G-d. The actual pleasure of the scent however, can possibly be attributed to Noach.)

However, since, in our *parsha* the language that is used is “a pleasing aroma to the Lord,” it is clear that it is G-d who finds the scent pleasurable. It was therefore pertinent for Rashi to explain that G-d does not derive benefit from the scent of the sacrifice itself, but rather from the fact that His will has been fulfilled.

Accordingly, it is understood why Rashi did not explain that the scent was pleasurable to G-d in a spiritual sense in *Parshas Noach*, and instead explained this point only in our *parsha*.

The discrepancy postulated by this interpretation is insufficient though for multiple reasons:

- A) Rashi is extremely precise in his commentary, and one can even learn from the words of the verse that he

bases his commentary upon, regarding the manner that he developed his explanation. In his commentary on *Parshas Vayikra*, Rashi titles his explanation only with the word, “pleasing,” and does *not* include the words, “aroma to the Lord.” It is therefore understood that Rashi is not attempting to clarify the words “pleasing scent,” as suggested, but is rather explaining the meaning of the word “pleasing” in its own right.

- B) In the verse regarding Noach the Torah says, “And the Lord smelled the pleasant aroma.” There, it seems that there is all the more reason to negate the possibility that G-d enjoys the actual smell. (Were this expression to have merely meant that G-d accepted the sacrifice, it could have employed an alternative language other the words “and the Lord smelled,” such as the wording used in regards to the sacrifice of Hevel: “and the Lord *turned* to Hevel and to his offering.” From the fact that the verse regarding Noach *does* indeed use the language of smelling, seemingly Rashi should negate that the smelling was physical.)
- C) It is obvious that the pleasing fragrance the verse refers to was not the *physical* scent of the sacrifice. Since, when the sacrifice was burned, both the flesh of the animal and the bones would be consumed, and the odor was in fact repulsive rather than pleasing. It is thus already clear that when the verse says it is a pleasing smell, the verse is not discussing the physical smell. Negating that G-d enjoys the physical scent of the offering is not pertinent to explain.

In light of the above points, the question remains: why did Rashi not explain that the

pleasing scent of Noach's sacrifice was in that His will was fulfilled and instead did not explain this fundamental point until our *parsha*?

### Explanation

From the above, it is certain that Rashi's intent is not to negate that G-d doesn't derive pleasure from the physical scent of the sacrifice, as this is obvious.

Rather, Rashi is motivated to explain what the pleasure that G-d derives from the sacrifices is.

*This point is only important to explain in regards to the general sacrifices, and is not necessary to explain in Parshas Noach. There, it is obvious why G-d derived pleasure from Noach's sacrifice.*

When Noach exited the Ark after the world had been decimated, Noach experienced a feeling of pleasure, due his tremendous gratitude of being spared from the destruction of The Flood. Noach's bringing of a sacrifice to G-d was to express this thanks to the Almighty. When Noach expressed his gratitude to G-d, G-d in turn reflected his appreciation as well, as Mishlei articulates:

#### Text 5

As in water, face answers to face, so is the heart of a man to a man.

*Mishlei 27:19*

When Noach expressed his pleasure and appreciation to G-d, this effected in kind, that G-d received pleasure from him, thus the expression of "a pleasing aroma."

This mirrored appreciation of the Almighty was to the extent that the verse says, "I will no longer curse the earth because of man." G-d was satisfied with Noach's offering to the point that

He promised never again to destroy mankind. This was the complete opposite of the anger that G-d possessed during the time of The Flood.

However, when in *Parshas Vayikra*, which discusses the general sacrifices, the verse stresses that these offerings bring "pleasure" to G-d—*here*—the reason for the pleasure is not clearly apparent.

This expression of G-d expressing his pleasure in the actions of mankind are used in reference to sacrifices and not in regard to any other *mitzvah*.

Why does G-d derive more pleasure from the sacrifices, than from any other *mitzvah*? Why specifically concerning sacrifices, does the Torah tell us that G-d derives pleasure?

While it is self-understood that the pleasure which G-d derives from the sacrifices is from the idea that one is serving G-d and not from the physical scent, it is not understood what is exceptional about sacrifices more than any other *mitzvah*.

What is distinct about this particular manner of serving the Almighty that does not exist by other *mitzvos*, and for which reason the expression of G-d's pleasure is stated specifically by sacrifices, and not in regard to other commandments?

This is the question that Rashi wished to answer in his explanation of the verse, through explaining that the pleasure in the offering of sacrifices comes from the idea of, "I said, and My will was fulfilled!" For it is this specific characteristic, which only the sacrifices possess, from which G-d derives a special pleasure.

#### What's the point?

This concept can be appreciated through a general preface concerning the *mitzvah* of bringing sacrifices:

Many commentators<sup>2</sup> explain the curious commandment through clarifying the reason for this *mitzvah* and the gain achieved by the human being who brings a sacrifice.

Yet, although many other commentators explain its objective, it does not seem that Rashi explains a reason for the sacrifices.

While in general, the goal of Rashi's commentary on the Torah is not to explain the reasons for the *mitzvos* (his objective being instead, to explain the simple explanations of the verses), it seems that in this case, he should have indeed shed light on the purpose of the *mitzvah* for the following reasons:

- A) The sacrifices incorporate many *mitzvos*—both quantitatively, in that they include many specific requirements and instructions, and qualitatively, in that they were the main service performed in the *Mishkan* and *Beis Hamikdash*—the places where the Divine Presence rested. Explaining the reason for this *mitzvah* sheds light on a central theme of many commandments.
- B) The question concerning sacrifices is not merely, “what is the reason for this *mitzvah*,” for, sacrifices seem to be something that completely *negates* reason! The idea of one burning (part, or the whole of) an animal atop an altar seems to have no purpose. Man does not gain anything by destroying the animal, and it is obvious that it is impossible to say that G-d enjoys the physical burning of the animal. Why then, would one destroy Jewish property for no purpose?!

Although there were sacrifices prior to the giving of the Torah, which were expressive of one's giving of his belongings to the Almighty, this

cannot be the purpose of sacrifices. This is so for the following two reasons:

- A) It is possible to express giving one's belongings to the Almighty without destroying the object. This was done by the portions that were given to the priests and the Levites.
- B) The Torah seems to imply that G-d desires the sacrifices for Himself, and not that it is man's expression, demonstrating that all his wealth is from G-d.

It is this question that Rashi relates to in stating that “[this sacrifice] gives Me contentment, for I said [My commandment], and My will was fulfilled!”

Through these words he illustrates, that this idea of fulfilling G-d's will is the end-all of the *mitzvah* of the sacrifices. In this commandment, one in which there is no observable benefit, the aim is that an individual should bring a sacrifice for the *sole reason* that this the will of G-d.

Meaning to say: when one brings a sacrifice, it is not that there is some sort of benefit that man is simply not aware of, and that when he brings a sacrifice, he believes that he is accomplishing some unfathomable end, rather, his *entire intent* in bringing a sacrifice is to fulfill G-d's will.

It is because of this reason that there is a particular pleasure that the Almighty derives from sacrifices, one of which He does *not* derive from other *mitzvos*. For, only in sacrifices can it be said that the *mitzvah* is performed *only* for G-d's will.

#### **Sacrifice vs. edicts**

This understanding however, does not suffice for explaining the unique pleasure that G-d derives from the sacrifices, as, regarding the *mitzvos*

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<sup>2</sup> See Even Ezra, Vayikra 1:1; Ramban, Vayikra 1:9.

that are classified as *chukim* (edicts) as well, it seems they too, are commandments that surpass human intellect and are only fulfilled because they are the will of the Almighty.

Why does the Torah express that G-d derives a unique satisfaction from the *mitzvah* of sacrifices, which He does not receive from any other of the *mitzvos*—including the ones that are beyond human comprehension?

This can be observed in Rashi's own explanation concerning the *mitzvos* of *chukim*:

### Text 6

Things that are only the decree of the King, without any rationale, and with which the evil inclination finds fault, [saying,] “What is [the sense of] the prohibition of these [things]? Why were they prohibited?” For example, [the prohibitions of] wearing *shatness* [a mixture of wool and linen] and eating pork, and [the ritual of] the red cow and their like.

*Rashi, Shemos 15:26*

Rashi explains that the *mitzvos* of *chukim* are without rationale and that they should be performed only because they are the “decree of the king.” Yet, we do not see that G-d derives any special pleasure from the fulfillment of these commandments.

Presumably though, this can be explained based on the explanation of Ramban, who explains that the *mitzvos* of *chukim*-type *mitzvos* are not whatsoever without reason, they rather have a reason that man cannot grasp:

### Text 7

The intent in them (the *chukim*) is not that they are the decree of the King of Kings...without reason...rather the *chukim* are edicts of the King, which He decrees through his kingship without *revealing* their gain...we accept them out of awe of His kingship...however all of them have a proper reason and an actual benefit.

*Ramban, Vayikra 19:19*

Accordingly, it can be explained, that this is the focal difference between *chukim*, and the *mitzvah* of the sacrifices.

Concerning the other *mitzvos*, including *chukim*, there exists a reason, however we humans do not understand them. The gain that is received through the *mitzvah* is therefore concrete, although we are not aware. When we do the *mitzvos* of *chukim*, the satisfaction that the Almighty receives is *not* that we did something because He willed it, but rather He has satisfaction from whatever these *mitzvos* are meant to accomplish.

Regarding the sacrifices though, the entire idea is that G-d said something that we listen to (with no side reason, even one unrevealed to us).

Thus, it can be explained that this is the reason why the Torah specifically says that sacrifices are “a pleasing aroma” for G-d, while it is not stated with all other *mitzvos*.

### Without reason

While this makes sense according to Ramban, according to Rashi this answer is inadequate.

When Rashi explains the idea of the *chukim*, he describes them as *mitzvos* “without any rationale.” His opinion is not that the purpose of the command exists and is merely hidden from

our understanding. According to Rashi's view, the *chukim* as well, have no separate reasons.

If this is so, why does G-d derive particular pleasure from sacrifices, which he does not receive from other edicts that similarly have no reason?

### Rashi's words

This question can be explained however, through taking a look at the specific words that Rashi uses when explaining this thought.

Rashi states that G-d receives pleasure from sacrifices "for I said and My will was fulfilled." This language does not seem to make sense at first glance:

- A) G-d's pleasure is seemingly from the fact that the individual actively *fulfilled* G-d's request. Why then, is a passive language employed? Rashi should have rather stated, "for I said and *you fulfilled* my request."
- B) If the emphasis is that the sacrifices are purely G-d's *will*, Rashi should have expressed this idea with the term, "I commanded." Why does he instead use the words "I said," which do not seem to express the idea of this *mitzvah* being His will?

It is specifically through these peculiarities in Rashi's words that the difference between sacrifices and edicts can be understood.

### For G-d's sake

With this specific terminology Rashi is explaining the uniqueness of the sacrifices, in association to *mitzvos* that are classified as *chukim*.

Though the *mitzvos* of *chukim* do not have a particular reason to them, there is indeed something specific that is accomplished through fulfilling them. The intent of the *chukim*, which have no specific reason, is to implant within the

Jewish people fear of Heaven and submission to G-d. One should fulfill these *mitzvos* just because they are the edict of the King of Kings.

That being said, upon the performance of the *mitzvah*, the individual in fact derives gain—acquiring the yoke of Heaven.

However, when it comes to sacrifices, the emphasis is that this commandment is done purely for the Almighty's sake.

### Text 8

They shall be holy to their G-d, and they shall not desecrate their G-d's Name, for they offer up the fire offerings of the Lord, the food offering of their G-d, so they shall be holy.

*Vayikra 21:6*

The verses stresses that it is not man that gains from the sacrifices, but G-d. The sacrifices are called the "food offering of the Lord," so-to-speak.

For this reason, Rashi stresses that the intent in the commandment of the sacrifices must be that "I *said*, and My will was *fulfilled*." One should not bring a sacrifice for any personal benefit, but rather solely because it is the will of G-d.

Regarding sacrifices, the person's intent should *not* be that he is accepting the edict of the Almighty (as an expression of his own devotedness to G-d), rather, his motive should be purely that the will of G-d should be carried out.

It should be as if there is no *individual* bringing the sacrifice, but that the sacrifice is being brought by *itself*. A person should not feel his own identity when bringing the sacrifice, he should rather identify with the will of G-d. This



underscores the point that the sacrifice is for the Almighty and not for man.

This is the specific satisfaction that is found only with the commandment of the sacrifices, and not with any other *mitzvos*: it is an act that is done entirely for G-d, without any gain for man.

To express this idea, Rashi chooses to employ the language, “I said,” as opposed to the words, “I commanded.” A command expresses that there was an instruction that the individual is fulfilling. It indicates that there is some advantage in man carrying out the decree of G-d, even if his mind cannot comprehend it.

Here, the point is the opposite: man is simply allowing G-d’s will to be fulfilled. The focus is not that *he* is doing what G-d wants, but that *what G-d wants should be done*. The emphasis is that *because* it is G-d’s desire, the person therefore wishes for it to be fulfilled.

### Only some sacrifices

According to the above, it is also understood why this language of “a pleasing aroma” is only used pertaining to some of sacrifices and not concerning others.

The expression is found regarding the *Olah* (burnt offering), *Mincha* (a flour offering), and *Shelamim* (peace offering) as well as personal *Chata’os* [sin offerings], but not concerning regular *Chata’os* or *Ashamos* (a variant type of sin offerings).

One can suggest simply, that the reason that concerning *Chata’os* or *Ashamos* the Torah does not say that they are “a pleasing aroma,” is because they are brought on sin and therefore G-d does not derive specific enjoyment from them.

(Although the language is employed concerning personal *Chata’os*, it can be explained that concerning lighter sins, it is indeed a pleasure

when man wishes to bring a sacrifice to atone. However, more severe sins, due to their very nature, the sacrifices bring atonement, but one cannot say that they bring pleasure.)

This however, does not completely explain the issue, as we see that the verse does not even make use of this language for sacrifices that are brought as thanks-giving (the *Todah* offerings). The Torah describes these offerings as follows:

### Text 9

If he is bringing it as a thanksgiving offering, he shall offer, along with the thanksgiving offering unleavened loaves mixed with oil, unleavened wafers anointed with oil, and scalded flour mixed with oil.

*Vayikra 7:12*

The Torah tells us the exact prescription for the thanksgiving offering, but does not tell us that it is pleasing to G-d.

Equipped with our understanding though, we can indeed appreciate the difference between the thanks-giving offering and other offerings.

The reason that the verse does not use the words “a pleasing aroma” concerning general *Chata’os* and *Ashamos* is because they are not brought for the Almighty, but rather to atone for the *person’s* sin. Because there is a benefit apart from the will of G-d, they are not particularly pleasing to the Almighty in a way that surpasses other *mitzvos*.

For this same reason the Torah does not use this language concerning sacrifices of thanks-giving either, for they as well express, that the person needed a miracle and received it. There was a benefit for the individual and he therefore thanks G-d that he was the benefactor of this



miracle. In this offering it is not emphasized that it is a sacrifice for G-d, but rather that man appreciates what G-d does for him.

The sacrifices by which the primary stress is that the sacrifice is indeed for G-d, without any other side achievement, are those (mentioned above) that serve as a *nadava*, a gift to the Almighty, which are discussed in the beginning of our *parsha*.

It is by these particular offerings that accentuate the individual's wish to give to G-d, without any personal gain. It is therefore particularly in those instances where G-d derives a special pleasure.

*(Based on Likutei Sichos 32, Vayikra 1, reworked by Rabbi Dovid Merkel. To see other projects and to partner in our work, see: [www.Neirot.com](http://www.Neirot.com). )*