

## Parshas Metzora

# A Wealthy Man’s Sacrifice

*The Torah speaks of different offerings that a rich and poor man bring to atone for their tzara’as. In Rambam there seems to be a discrepancy in the way that this law is formulated. This Sicha resolves the discrepancy and explains the way that the Jewish people are truly one.*

This week’s Torah portion continues with the laws of the *Metzora*, one who was afflicted with the spiritual plague of *tzara’as* (leprosy). It enumerates the detailed procedure that enables his atonement, including the particular offerings that he must bring.

The Torah differentiates between the offering that a wealthy individual must bring and that of an indigent:

### Text 1

And on the eighth day, he shall take two unblemished [male] lambs, one unblemished ewe lamb in its [first] year, three tenths [of an ephah] of fine flour mixed with [olive] oil as a meal offering, and one log of [olive] oil... But if he is poor and cannot afford [these sacrifices], he shall take one [male] lamb as a guilt offering for a waving to effect atonement for him, and one tenth [of an ephah] of fine flour mixed with oil as a meal offering, and a log of oil.

*Vayikra 14:10-21*

The Torah also allows for an individual to bring a sacrifice in his fellow’s stead. Concerning this idea, Rambam presents the following law:

### Text 2

When a rich man says: "I take responsibility for the sacrifices of this *Metzora*," and the *Metzora* was poor, he must bring the sacrifices of a wealthy man, for the person who took the vow has the financial capacity.

If a poor person said: "I take responsibility for the sacrifices of this *Metzora*," and the *Metzora* was wealthy, he must bring the sacrifices of a wealthy man, for the person who took the vow obligated himself to bring the sacrifices of a wealthy man.

*Rambam, Laws of Atonement 5:11*

### Why do the rules change?

This law does not seem to be understood:

While Rambam’s second statement regarding the poor man being obligated to bring the sacrifice according to the wealthy man’s ability is comprehensible, his first statement seems puzzling.

Rambam writes that when a **rich** man obligates himself to bring the sacrifice of a **poor** person, he must still bring a sacrifice equivalent to that of a **wealthy** man, since he has the “financial capacity” to do so.

This is not understood. Why should it make a difference if the *rich* person has the financial capacity to bring a more expensive sacrifice, if the *Metzora* in whose stead he is bringing the sacrifice was poor? Wouldn’t it stand to reason

that he merely accepted the poor person's sacrifice; why then must he bring a sacrifice of that of a rich individual?

While the Talmud answers this query, it too is not completely clear. The Talmud states,

### Text 3

Although he who vowed [to fulfill the individual's sacrifice] is rich?! The Divine Law says: "And if he be poor," and he is not poor.

*Talmud, Erchin 17a*

Essentially, the Talmud explains that because the individual who is bringing the sacrifice is not a pauper, he therefore cannot bring less expensive than a poor individual brings.

As mentioned however, there is difficulty with the Talmud's statement as well.

While the Torah gives the instruction in general regarding a person's financial requirement in bringing an offering, that "if he be poor" he brings the sacrifice of a pauper and if he is rich he brings the sacrifice of a wealthy man, this is only in the scenario in which the rich person *himself* has the *obligation* to bring a sacrifice because he has what to atone for.

In our case though, the rich individual has no *personal* obligation to bring a sacrifice at all. His entire responsibility is merely to bring the sacrifice of the *poor individual* that he accepted upon himself through an oath to bring the sacrifice of another individual.

Why then, in such a case, should he be responsible to bring the sacrifice of a rich *Metzarah*? His entire responsibility is his acceptance of fulfilling the sacrifice of the poor afflicted individual and he should seemingly only

be responsible to bring a sacrifice of equal value to the poor man's obligation.

### Precise wording?

Furthermore, the second statement of Rambam is problematic as well, from a different perspective:

He states that "if a poor person said: "I take responsibility for the sacrifices of this *metzarah*," and the afflicted person was wealthy, he must bring the sacrifices of a wealthy man."

Rambam says that in the case of a **poor** person taking on the sacrifice of a **wealthy** individual, he must bring the more expensive offering. He explains this by stating that "the person who took the vow (the poor individual) obligated himself to bring the sacrifices of a wealthy man."

Though this seems reasonable that if he accepted upon himself the sacrifice of a rich person he must bring the sacrifice that the rich person would have brought, the wording that Rambam uses here does not seem accurate according to this explanation.

Rambam should have stated that the reason the poor individual who made an oath brings a more expensive sacrifice is because of "*the metzarah*," rather than focusing on the other individual, "*the person who took the vow*."

I.e., The purpose of the expensive sacrifice being brought is in order to properly absolve the rich *metzarah* of his responsibility and bring atonement to him. The reason that the one who accepted upon himself to bring his fellow's sacrifice, must bring a more expensive offering on his behalf is not due to the fact that this person *vowed* to bring the expensive offering by taking upon a wealthy individual's obligation, but because this is the *only offering* that will atone for the rich individual.

### Contradicting rulings

An additional problem with Rambam's statement here is that it seems to be in conflict with what he states in another law, which he wrote prior to this one.

In the Laws of Sacrifices, Rambam writes the following:

#### Text 4

When a person says: "I promise to bring the sacrifices of this person afflicted by *tzara'as*," or "...this woman who gave birth," if the afflicted person or the woman were poor, the one who took the vow should bring the sacrifices of a poor person. If they were wealthy, the person who took the vow must bring the sacrifice of a wealthy person, even though he is poor.

*Rambam, Laws of Sacrifices 14:9*

The two abovementioned places in which Rambam speaks about this subject seem to contradict one another.

In the above law, Rambam writes that "if the afflicted person or the woman is **poor**, the one who took the vow should bring the sacrifices of a **poor** person."

Rambam here does not make a distinction as to whether the individual who took upon the vow was poor or not. In either case, he brings the sacrifice of the poor individual.

However, in the first law he seems to rule differently. There Rambam writes, that "when a **rich** man says: 'I take responsibility for the sacrifices of this *Metzora*,' and the *Metzora* was **poor**, he must bring the sacrifices of a **wealthy** man."

Does Rambam believe that when a rich individual makes an oath to bring the sacrifice of a poor individual that he must bring a more expensive sacrifice or that of a poor person?

The Kesef Mishna settles this contradiction with the following explanation:

#### Text 5

[Rambam] was not particular to explain here, as he relied on what he wrote there.

*Kesef Mishna, Laws of Sacrifices 14:9*

According to the Kesef Mishna, the law is that a rich individual must bring the sacrifice of a wealthy person, even in a scenario where the person that was actually obligated to bring the sacrifice was an indigent. Rambam however did not feel the need to be explicit about this, as he clarifies this later in his *Yad HaChazaka*.

Yet, this answer can only be accepted if one assumes that Rambam would indeed rely on a clause that he would write only later.

Being, however, that there are those who don't agree with this principle<sup>1</sup>, and that although it may be sensible to assume that Rambam would rely on something that he had written *previously*, it is unreasonable to assume that he would rely on something that he would only write later.

Therefore, the answer of the Kesef Mishna does not suffice in explaining the contradiction in Rambam's words.

#### Two Perspectives

In order to recognize how both rulings can be understood, one must appreciate that there are

<sup>1</sup> See *Yad Malachi*, Klalei H Rambam 6.

two separate laws at play, each with their own characteristics and stipulations:

There are the Laws of Sacrifices (in general), and the Laws of Atonement. Due to their respective differences, Rambam comes to separate conclusions in each case.

- A) *Laws of Sacrifices* – these are the regulations pertaining to an *oath* that a person may make to bring a specific offering. According to the vow that is made, such is his obligation.
- B) *Laws of Atonement* – these are the laws concerning those in need of atonement. According to the *nature* of the specific individual, there are certain qualifications as to the offering that is able to affect his atonement.

Through understanding the differences between these laws, one can now make sense of seemingly contradictory rulings of Rambam.

According to the classification of the **Laws of Sacrifices**, in which he is obligated to fulfill the specific *oath* that was made, it is enough that a rich individual who brings a sacrifice on the behalf of a pauper offers a smaller sacrifice of the poor man's level. (Conversely, if he accepted upon himself the sacrifice of a wealthy individual, he would bring a more expensive sacrifice).

After all, his actual *oath* was, "I promise to bring the *sacrifices* of *this* person afflicted by *tzara'as*," which obligates him to bring the *poor man's* sacrifice at the value that the pauper's obligation was set at *then*. He is thereby fulfilling his oath when he brings the sacrifice of the poor individual.

Yet, concerning the **Laws of Atonement**, in which the obligation rests upon the nature of the one requiring atonement, the rich man is obligated to bring a sacrifice commensurate with *his own* financial ability.

No matter the capacity or obligation of he who originally was obligated to bring the sacrifice, the rich individual who made an oath must bring the sacrifice required by a wealthy man in order to bring *atonement* for the indigent individual.

To understand the reasoning behind these laws, one must appreciate two stipulations concerning sacrifices. The first law is as follows:

### Text 6

A sin-offering and a guilt-offering may be brought only for a sin. They may not be brought because of a pledge or a vow. [Hence,] if one says: "I promise to bring a sin-offering" or "...a guilt-offering," his statements are of no consequence.

*Rambam, Laws of Sacrifices 14:8*

As the law explains, a person may not simply vow to bring a sin offering. A sin offering can only be brought on account of an actual transgression, and when there is none, his oath to bring such a sacrifice is meaningless.

However, though one may not bring a sin offering as a random pledge, he *may* do so to atone for *another* person's sin. This second point is presented in the continuation of the law:

### Text 7

[When] one says: "I promise to bring the sin-offering, burnt-offering, guilt-offering, and peace-offering of so-and-so." If that person

agrees, he may allow him to bring those sacrifices for him and he [that person] receives atonement thereby.

*Rambam, Laws of Sacrifices 14:10*

This idea of one individual being able to bring a sacrifice for another reveals two innovative points:

- 1) **From the perspective of the laws of making an oath:** When a person declares, "I promise to bring a sin offering..." his pledges are of no consequence, as there exists no standing obligation to bring the offering. However, in a situation where the individual says, "I promise to bring the sin-offering...of *so-and-so*," being that for this second individual an *obligation* for the sacrifice *does* exist, the person's oath is valid, and he is thereby required to bring the offering on account of this *pledge*.
- 2) **From the perspective of atonement:** Even though the *obligation* to bring the sacrifice falls only on the person who sinned or is in need of atonement, the Torah nevertheless makes a revolutionary ruling that one individual can bring atonement for another individual's sin. Since every Jew is a guarantor for his fellow, he can therefore bring a sacrifice in his friend's *stead*, and affect *atonement* for his friend's sin!

This concept finds its source in the Talmud:

**Text 8**

All Israel are guarantors one for another.

*Talmud, Shavuot 39a*

Because every individual Jew is responsible for his fellow, he has the ability to bring a sacrifice that will actually atone for his fellow's sin.

### **Making it all clear**

This is the focal difference between these two seemingly contradictory laws regarding one who takes upon sacrifice of another, and the clarification of first question on the Rambam as well.

Rambam had written each of the variant rulings in a different category of laws:

When Rambam stated that "if the afflicted person or the woman is poor, the one who took the vow should bring the sacrifices of a poor person," this was mentioned in the section of the **Laws of Sacrifices**, regarding the laws of fulfilling his *oath*.

Rambam therefore said that the patron must bring the sacrifice according to the financial status of the *original* individual who was obligated in the sacrifice—the pauper. For, as a result of the patron's *oath*, he became bound by the sacrifice of *this* person—the sacrifice of a poor individual.

Nonetheless, concerning the **Laws of Atonement**, he is not bringing the sacrifice in order to fulfil the obligation of his own *oath*, but is offering this sacrifice in order to affect *atonement* for the individual who requires it—in this case, the *Metzora* who was afflicted by *tzara'as*.

For this reason, Rambam rules in the chapter concerning these laws, that even if the patron was wealthy and the afflicted person was poor, "he must bring the sacrifices of a wealthy man,

for the person who took the vow has the financial capacity.”

Being that in general, a rich person who seeks atonement must bring a more expensive offering and this patron is wealthy, he must therefore bring the more expensive sacrifice.

The reason is that when a Jew absolves the duty of his fellow as a guarantor for him, the patron is now not only fulfilling an *oath*, but he, so-to-speak, takes on the *obligation* of the person who requires a sacrifice, the *Metzora*. It is as if *he himself* had sinned, and needs to atone in the appropriate manner according to his personal financial means.

Thus, if the one accepting his fellow’s offering is wealthy, even if the original *Metzora* or woman was poor, he must bring a sacrifice of a wealthy man.

### **The second statement**

In the same vein, Rambam’s second statement in the laws of atonement and his seemingly inaccurate wording is clarified as well.

Rambam wrote that if a pauper took responsibility for the sacrifice of a rich person, he must bring the sacrifices of a wealthy man, “for the person *who took the vow* obligated himself to bring the sacrifices of a wealthy man.”

Above, the question was posed as to why Rambam wrote that the reason for this requirement was because of the oath, and did not write that the reason was due to the original *obligation* of the wealthy individual. According to what was explained above however, this can be understood as well.

Rambam’s intention in expressing the law in this manner is due to the nature of the laws of oaths, as mentioned above:

Although, from the standpoint of *atonement* one follows the status of the person who is actually

bringing the sacrifice (being that he takes on the status of the original person upon himself), from the perspective of the *oath*, he must fulfill the oath exactly as the afflicted person had pledged.

So, while from a perspective of atonement he would only need to bring the sacrifice of a poor person—although the individual who needs atonement is wealthy—from the standpoint of an oath he must bring the sacrifice of a wealthy individual.

Since the individual stated, “I take responsibility for the sacrifices of this afflicted person,” and that individual was wealthy, he must bring the sacrifice of a wealthy individual.

### **Not enough**

This explanation is not adequate though.

In both statements Rambam writes that the individual who makes an oath brings the sacrifice on account of the individual whom he made the oath regarding. In both situations his sacrifices are not only because of an oath, but to absolve his need for atonement.

It would therefore stand to reason that the aspect of *atonement* as well transfers to the poor patron. It is this for this reason that he must bring the sacrifice of the rich individual, although he himself is poor.

This, however, needs clarification. Why, when a **poor** individual brings the sacrifice for a **wealthy** individual to atone for him, must the sacrifice be according to the means of the wealthy individual?

### **“Inheriting” the means**

This difficulty is resolved though, through understanding the following idea:

Although the one who made the oath to take upon the sacrifice of the *Metzora* is an indigent,

and the sacrifice should thus be established accordingly, nevertheless, since through his oath he became *obligated* in the sacrifice of a *rich individual*, it is considered as if he too has the *ability* to bring the sacrifice of a rich man.

When the poor person accepts to bring the sacrifice of a wealthy individual, it is considered as if he *too* is wealthy. He must therefore bring a more expensive sacrifice, as the wealthy person would have done, even though in actuality he is poor.

This is because the actual oath motivates the person to have the ability to bring the more expensive sacrifice.

The Talmud demonstrates the above idea as follows:

### Text 9

I have sworn, and I will keep Your righteous judgments<sup>2</sup>. But is he not under a perpetual oath from Mount Sinai? — But what [R. Giddal] teaches us is that one may stimulate himself. R. Giddal also said in Rav's name: He who says, 'I will rise early to study this chapter or this tractate,' has vowed a great vow to the G-d of Israel. But he is under a perpetual oath from Mount Sinai, and an oath cannot fall upon another? Then [again] if he informs us that a person may thus stimulate himself.

*Talmud, Nedarim 8a*

When a person accepts upon himself the sacrifice of a wealthy individual, this *itself* gives him the ability to indeed find the means to indeed bring the sacrifice of a wealthy individual.

### The lesson

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<sup>2</sup> Tehilim 119:106.

From this can be learned a tremendous lesson concerning the strength of Jewish unity.

Firstly, we can see the extent of the effect one can have on their fellow, in that through his own sacrifice he can bring atonement to *another*.

An individual is able to not only bring a sacrifice for his fellow when his fellow is poor, or doesn't have the ability to bring it on his own, but even when the afflicted person is *wealthy* and has the means to bring the offering on his own, his friend can bring it in his stead.

This manifests in that when the one who made the oath to fulfill the sacrifice of his fellow, it is as if he himself is in need of atonement and we therefore follow what he can afford; it is as if he himself is obligated in the sacrifice.

### Text 10

The verse states<sup>3</sup> "You shall neither take revenge from nor bear a grudge against the members of your people." When a person is cutting meat and he cuts himself, should he then cut his other hand?!

*Talmud Yerushalmi, Nedarim 9:4*

This is the true degree of the unity of the Jewish people—that we are all one corpus. It is for this reason that when there is a blemish in one Jew, it extends to his fellow; because another person's pain, is in truth, his own.

This idea is expressed in the law that when a Jew gives of his own ability to affect an atonement in his fellow, although he is an indigent, the Torah places him in the category of a wealthy person, since they are all in truth like one individual.

<sup>3</sup> Vayikra 19:18.

Were he himself to have been a *Metzarah*, he would *not* be obligated to bring the sacrifice of a wealthy person, but when he accepts the responsibility of *another*, he *himself* is considered rich!

When a person does indeed accept the sacrifice of a wealthy person, this opens channels that he too should be wealthy.

The story is told about the Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe<sup>4</sup>: Once he requested from an individual a certain sum of money to print the works of the third Lubavitcher Rebbe. The individual from whom he requested the donation did not have the means, but he nevertheless accepted the project upon himself. The Rebbe blessed him and after a short time he became wealthy and was able to fulfill the full sum of the printing.

The resolution to give more than he was able to give itself, is what opened new channels for this individual, so that he could fulfill his resolution.

So too, in our scenario. When the Almighty sees that a person goes out of his limitations—not withstanding that he himself is a pauper—and attempts to atone for his fellow who is rich, G-d opens new channels for him so that he can fulfill his obligation as a rich individual.

*(Based on Likutei Sichos 27, Metzarah 1, reworked by Rabbi Dovid Markel. To see other projects and to partner in our work, see: [www.Neirot.com](http://www.Neirot.com).)*

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<sup>4</sup> See Igros Kodesh, Previous Lubavitcher Rebbe 8:513.