



VAYIKRA

GUILT AND GRACE IN OUR APOLOGIES

The Offerings That Shape Our Repentance

PARSHAH OVERVIEW

Vayikra

G-d calls to Moses from the Mishkan (Tabernacle) and communicates to him the laws of the *korbanot*, the animal and meal offerings brought in the Sanctuary. These include:

1. The “ascending offering” (*olah*) that was wholly raised to G-d by the fire atop the altar;
2. Five varieties of “meal offerings” (*minchah*), prepared with fine flour, olive oil, and frankincense;

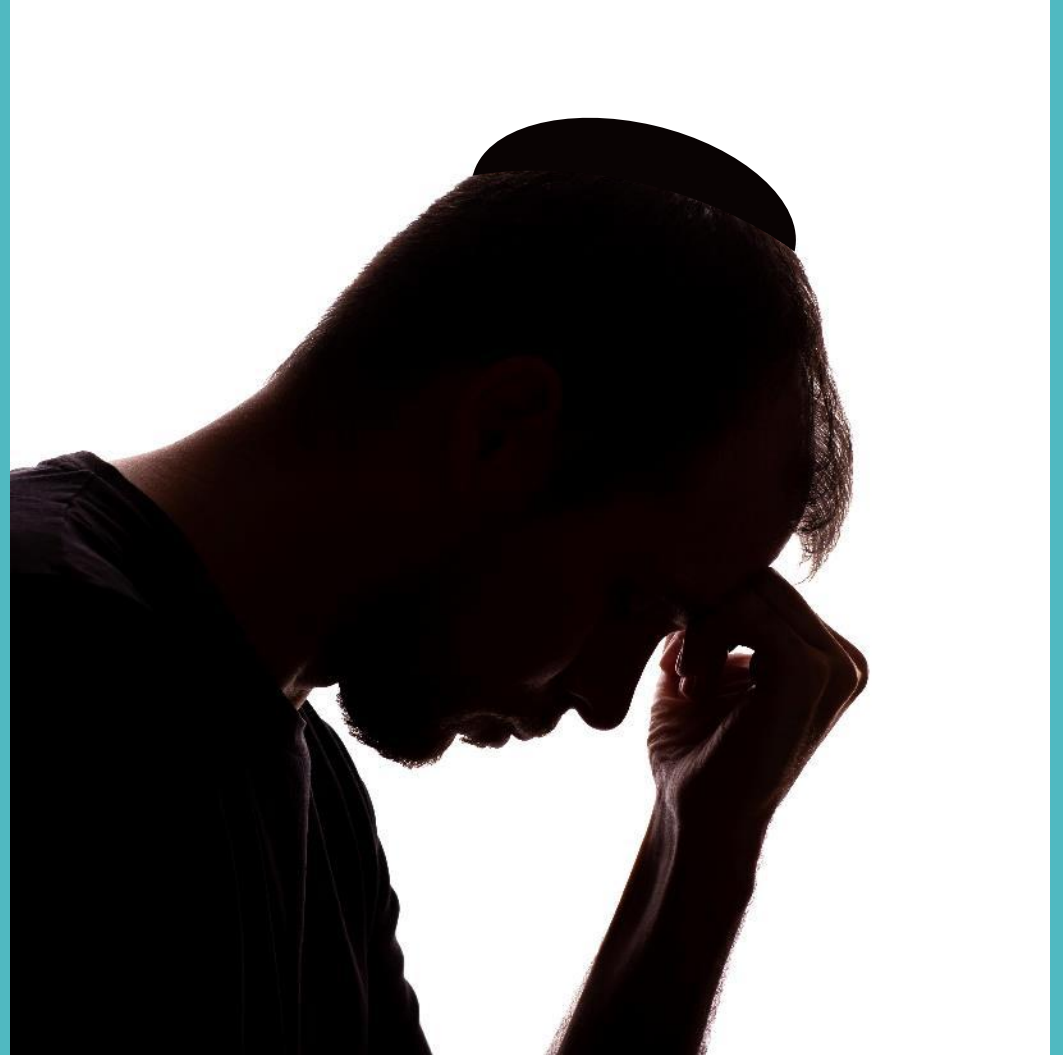
3. The “peace offering” (*shelamim*), whose meat was eaten by the one bringing the offering after parts were burned on the altar and parts were given to the *Kohanim* (priests);

4. The different types of “sin offering” (*chatat*) brought to atone for transgressions committed erroneously by the High Priest, the entire community, the king, or the ordinary Jew; and

5. The “guilt offering” (*asham*), brought by one who misappropriated property of the Sanctuary, who was in doubt as to whether they transgressed a Divine prohibition, or who committed a “betrayal against G-d” by swearing falsely to defraud a fellow human.

QUESTION FOR DISCUSSION

At what point should we draw the red line and transition from approach A to approach B?





THE SIN OFFERING

- Brought by someone who sinned inadvertently
- A female sheep is sacrificed

TEXT 1

Leviticus 4:32

וְאִם כֶּבֶשׂ יָבִיא קָרְבָּנוֹ לְחַטָּאת, נְקֵבָה
תְּמִימָה יְבִיאָנָה.

If one brings a sheep for one's sin offering,
bring an unblemished female.

TEXT 2A

*Maimonides, Mishneh
Torah, Laws of
Inadvertent Sins 9:1*

עַל חֲמִשׁ עֲבֵרוֹת מְבִיאִין קָרְבַּן אָשָׁם . . . וְאֵלוֹ הֵן: עַל
נְשִׁפְתָּהּ חֲרוּפָה, וְעַל הַגָּזֵל, וְעַל הַמְעִילָה, וְעַל טִמְאַת
נְזִיר, וְעַל הַצָּרַעַת כְּשִׁטְהָר מִמֶּנָּה.

Guilt offerings are brought for five sins. . . . They are: (A) intimacy with a betrothed maidservant, (B) robbery, (C) misappropriation of sacred articles, (D) contraction of ritual impurity by a Nazirite, and (E) purification from the affliction of *tzaraat*.

THE GUILT OFFERING

- Brought by someone who committed one of the five sins listed in the above reading
- A male sheep is sacrificed



TEXT 2B

*Maimonides, Mishneh
Torah, Laws of Unfit
Offerings 6:15*

וְשֵׂאִין אֲשָׁם אֶלָּא מִזְכָּרֵי הַכֹּבֵּשִׁים, וְאִין
לָהּ חַטָּאת . . . אֶלָּא נְקִיבָה.

A guilt offering can only come from a male sheep (ram). And a sin offering . . . can only be female.

QUESTIONS

1. Why is atonement for most sins achieved specifically with a female animal, whereas for five particular sins, only with a male animal?
2. Why do those five sins require a different offering with a different name?



THE TORAH'S LAYERS

- Literal
- Allegorical
- Homiletical
- Mystical

TEXT 3

Zohar, vol. 3, p. 152a

תָּא חֲזִי, אֵית לְבוּשָׁא דְאַתְחֲזִי לְכֻלָּא, וְאַיְנוּן
טְפָשִׁין כַּד חָמְאֵן לְבַר נֶשׁ בְּלְבוּשָׁא דְאַתְחֲזִי לֹוּן
שְׁפִירָא, לָא מְסַתְּפְלִין יַתִּיר. חֲשִׁיבוּ דֵהֵיּוּא
לְבוּשָׁא גּוּפָא, וְחֲשִׁבוּ דְגּוּפָא נְשִׁמְתָא.

כְּהֵאִי גִוּוּנָא אֹרְיִיתָא, אֵית לָהּ גּוּפָא, וְאַיְנוּן
פְּקוּדֵי אֹרְיִיתָא, דְאַקְרוּן גּוּפֵי תוֹרָה. הֵאִי גּוּפָא
מְתַלְבָּשָׁא בְּלְבוּשֵׁין, דְאַיְנוּן סְפּוּרִין דֵּהֵאִי עֲלֵמָא.
טְפָשִׁין דְעֵלְמָא, לָא מְסַתְּפְלִי אֶלָּא בְּהֵיּוּא
לְבוּשָׁא, דְאַיְהוּ סְפּוּר דְאַוְרִיִיתָא, וְלָא יַדְעֵי יַתִּיר,
וְלָא מְסַתְּפְלִי בְּמָה דְאַיְהוּ תַּחֲוֹת הֵהוּא לְבוּשָׁא.

אַיְנוּן דִּיִּדְעִין יַתִּיר, לָא מְסַתְּפְלֵן בְּלְבוּשָׁא, אֶלָּא
בְּגּוּפָא, דְאַיְהוּ תַּחֲוֹת הֵהוּא לְבוּשָׁא. חֲכִימִין
עֲבָדֵי דְמִלְכָּא עֲלָאָה, אֵיְנוּן דְקִיִּימוּ בְּטוֹרָא דְסִינַי,
לָא מְסַתְּפְלִי אֶלָּא בְּנְשִׁמְתָא, דְאַיְהֵי עֲקָרָא דְכֻלָּא
אֹרְיִיתָא מִמֶּשׁ. (וְלְעֵלְמָא) וְלְזִמְנָא דְאַתִּי, זְמִינִין
לְאַסְתְּפְּלָא בְּנְשִׁמְתָא דְנְשִׁמְתָא דְאַוְרִיִיתָא.

Come and see: A person's outer garment is visible to all. But some foolish people don't bother looking past the garment. They assume the garment is the body and the body is the soul.

The same is true for the Torah. The laws of the Torah are its body. This body is dressed in clothes; they are the stories of the Torah. The fools of this world only look at the garments, the stories, and know nothing more. They never peer under the garment.

Those who know better look past the garments and see the body. The wise servants of the supernal King, those who merited to be present at Mount Sinai, look past the body and peer into the Torah's soul, the mainstay of the Torah itself. And sometimes they look at the soul inside the soul.

Those who are wise
study the deeper
layers of Torah.



THE MYSTICISM BEHIND SACRIFICES

קָרָב — “sacrifice” or “drawing close”

korban

A sacrifice reconnects us with G-d,
repairing the distance that sin creates.

THE TWO WAYS A SACRIFICE RECONNECTS US WITH G-D

- A. With a “stick”
- B. Through nurture

TEXT 4

Rabbi Bachya ben
Asher ibn Halawa,
Leviticus 1:9

כָּל חוּטֵא, הֵן בְּמַחְשָׁבָה הֵן בְּמַעֲשֵׂה, הוּא מְצַד רוּחַ הַטּוּמְאָה לְהוּא מְתַלַּבֵּשׁ בּוֹ.

וְכֹאשֶׁר יִרְצֶה לְשִׁיתְכַפֵּר לוֹ יִצְטָרֵף וְשִׁיכֶלֶה וַיִּבְרִיחַ מִמֶּנּוּ אוֹתוֹ רוּחַ הַטּוּמְאָה, וְעַם זֶה הִיָּה נִטְהָר, וּמְכוּפָר.

וְלִכְךָ יֵשׁ לוֹ לְהַקְרִיב הָעֶזוֹ אוֹ הַשְּׁעִיר וְשֵׁהם מִחֶלֶק רוּחַ הַטּוּמְאָה וּמִהַצַּד הַהוּא וְאֵשׁ הַמִּזְבֵּחַ תִּשְׂרֹף וְתִכְלֶה הַכֹּל בְּיַחַד. וְשֵׁהֲרֵי הַחוּטֵא שְׂרָף אֶת עֶצְמוֹ בְּאֵשׁ שֶׁל יִצָר הָרַע, וְתִבֵּא אֵשׁ הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְתִשְׁלֹט עָלָיו לְכַלּוֹתוֹ לְגַמְרֵי כְלִיּוֹן חָרוּץ.

וְזֶהוּ שְׂאֵמְרוֹ, "אֵשׁ אוֹכֶלֶת אֵשׁ" (יוֹמָא כ"א, ב), אֵשׁ שֶׁל מִזְבֵּחַ אוֹכֶלֶת . . . אֵשׁ שֶׁל יִצָר הָרַע.

Our sins, both in thought and deed, are triggered by a spirit of impurity that pervades us.

When we want to atone for our sins, we must begin by destroying and expelling these spiritual impurities. This purifies us and atones for our sins.

To achieve this, we must sacrifice a goat or a sheep, animals that represent the spirit of sinfulness. As the fires on the altar burn and consume them, they also burn and consume the impure spirit within us. It works like this: the flames of the sinful inclination impassioned us toward sin; comes the fire of the sacred altar and consumes and destroys the impure fire in us.

This is the meaning of "fire consumes fire" (Talmud, Yoma 21b). The fire of the altar consumes . . . the flames of our sinful inclination.



THE “STICK” APPROACH

The altar’s flames purify our fiery passions. This graphic and intense process evokes deep shame for our sins.

TEXT 5

Rabbi Bachya ben
Asher ibn Halawa, *ibid.*

וְהַכּוּוֹנָה לְהַמְשִׁיךְ וּלְהַנִּיחַ
הָרוּחַ הָעֲלִיּוֹן בַּמִּדּוֹת
וּלְהַקְרִיב הַמִּדּוֹת אֵלָיו, וְזֶהוּ
הַיְחוּד.

וְזֶהוּ לְשׁוֹן, "תִּשְׁמְרוּ לְהַקְרִיב
לִי" (בְּמִדְבָר כח, ב). לֹא
אָמַר לְקָרֵב אֶלָּא לְהַקְרִיב,
כְּלוּמַר לְהַקְרִיב לִי הַפְּחוֹת
וְהַמִּדּוֹת.

וּלְכֹךְ נִקְרָא קָרְבָן, שֶׁהוּא
קָרוֹב הַפְּחוֹת וְהַמִּדּוֹת.

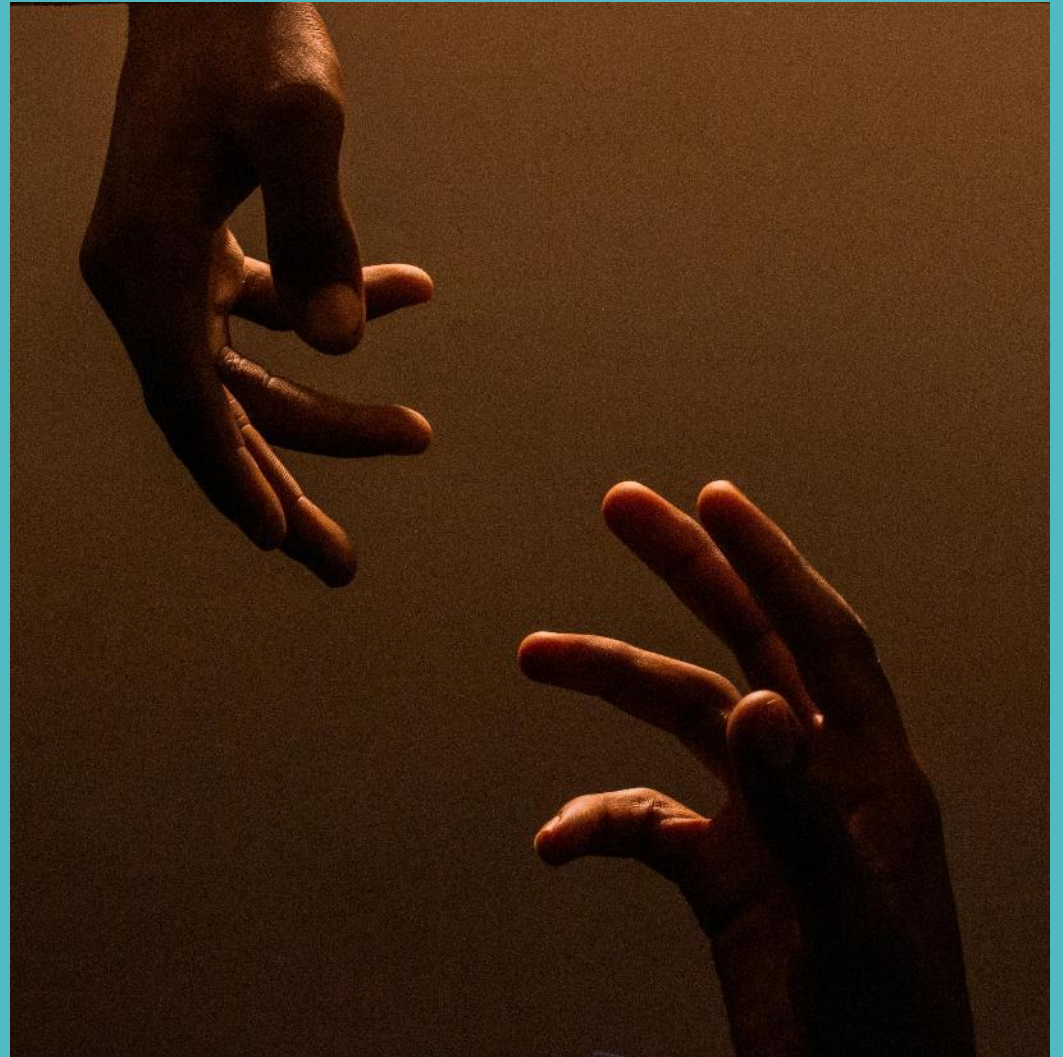
The purpose [of the offering] is to marshal the supernal spirit of G-d so it can touch our emotions and draw them closer to Him. This is called unification, becoming united with G-d.

This is the meaning of "Take care to bring them close to Me" (Numbers 28:2). It doesn't say it will draw Me close, it says it will draw them close—we must draw our energies and emotions to G-d.

This is why it is called a *korban*. It connotes *kiruv*: drawing one's vitality and feelings to G-d.

THE NURTURING APPROACH

The *korban* reminds us that G-d is always close, and He loves us despite our sins. The sin doesn't define us.



THE “STICK” APPROACH

A more masculine, direct, and firm method

THE NURTURING APPROACH

A more feminine, empathetic, and soft method

G-d gave us the Torah in both these “languages” to appeal to both masculine and feminine inclinations.

TEXT 6A

Exodus 19:3

וּמֹשֶׁה עָלָה אֶל הָאֱלֹהִים, וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו ה' מִן הַהָר
לֵאמֹר, כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבֵית יִשְׂרָאֵל וְתִגִּיד לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

And Moses ascended [Mount Sinai] to G-d, and G-d called to him from the mountain, saying, "So speak to the house of Jacob, and tell the Children of Israel."

TEXT 6B

Rashi, ad loc.

"כֹּה תֹאמַר". בְּלִשׁוֹן הַזֶּה וְכִסְדֹר הַזֶּה.

"לְבֵית יַעֲקֹב". אֵלֹו הַנְּשִׁים, תֹאמַר לָהֶן בְּלִשׁוֹן רַכָּה.

"וְתִגִּיד לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל". עֲנִשִׁים וְדִקְדוּקִין, פִּרְשׁ לְזִכָּרִים דְּבָרִים הַקְּשִׁין
כְּגִידִין.

"So speak." In this language and in this order.

"To the house of Jacob." This refers to the women. Speak to them with a soft tongue.

"And tell the Children of Israel." Tell them the punishments and the exact details. Be explicit with the men, with words harsh as wormwood.

תֹּאמַר לְבֵית יַעֲקֹב—“speak to the house of Jacob”

tomar leBeit Yaakov

G-d instructed Moses to speak in a feminine, inviting, and nurturing way to the women . . .

תִּגִּיד לְבָנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל—“tell the Children of Israel”

tageid liVenei Yisrael

. . . and in a masculine, direct, and frank way to the men.

ANSWER 1

Different sins require different approaches. Typical sin offerings address softer, surface-level sins and are therefore represented by female sacrifices. Guilt offerings atone for deeply ingrained sins that have penetrated our personality. Because these require a more firm and direct form of atonement, they are represented by male sacrifices.

TEXT 7

*Nachmanides,
Leviticus 5:15*

מָה טַעַם יִהְיֶה שֵׁם הַקָּרְבָּן הָאֶחָד חַטָּאת
וְשֵׁם הָאֶחָד אָשָׁם וְכוּלֵן יָבֵאוּ עַל
חַטָּא? . . .

וְהִנְרָאָה בְּעֵינַי כִּי שֵׁם אָשָׁם מוֹרָה עַל
דְּבַר גָּדוֹל אֲשֶׁר הֶעֱנִשׂוּ יִתְחַיֵּיב לְהִיּוֹת
שָׂמִים וְאֵבֵד בּוֹ מְלִשׁוֹן . . . "תֵּאשָׁם
שׁוֹמְרוֹן כִּי מָרְתָה בְּאֵלֶיךָ" (הוֹשֵׁעַ יד,
א). וְכֵן, "אֲשָׁמִים אֲנִחְנוּ" (בְּרֵאשִׁית
מב, כא), נֶעְנְשִׁים.

וְחַטָּאת מוֹרָה עַל דְּבַר נֹטָה בּוֹ מִן
הַדְרָה, מְלִשׁוֹן "אֵל הַשַּׁעֲרָה וְלֹא
יִחַטֵּיא" (שׁוֹפְטִים כ טז).

וְהִנֵּה אָשָׁם גְּזֵלוֹת וְאָשָׁם שְׂפָחָה חֲרוּפָה,
בְּעֵבוֹר שָׂהֵם בָּאִים אִף עַל הַמִּזִּיד יִקְרָא
קָרְבָּנִם אָשָׁם, וְכֵן אָשָׁם הַנִּזְיֵר.

Why is one offering called a sin offering and another a guilt offering if both atone for sins? . . .

I think that the word *guilt* (*asham*) implies a major sin that is punishable by being desolate and destroyed. Scripture implies this when it says, "Samaria will be desolate (*te'ashem*), for she [the region] betrayed her G-d" (Hosea 14:1). Similarly, "But we are guilty (*ashemim*)" (Genesis 42:21) and punishable.

The word sin (*chet*) implies veering off the path [and missing the mark]. This is implied by the passage, "Slings a stone at a hairbreadth and misses not (*yachati*)" (Judges 20:16).

The guilt offerings for robbery, intimacy with a consecrated maidservant, and the Nazarite who contracts ritual impurity atone for these sins—even when committed intentionally.

ANSWER 2

THE MEANING BEHIND THE NAMES OF THE OFFERINGS:

קָרְבַּן חַטָּאת

korban chatat

“sin offering”

→ חַטָּאת connotes
“missing the mark”

קָרְבַּן אָשָׁם

korban asham

“guilt offering”

→ אָשָׁם connotes an intentional
sin punishable by desolation

TEXT 8

*Maimonides, Mishneh
Torah, Laws of Unfit
Offerings 6:15*

כָּל הַקֹּדָשִׁים אֶפְשָׁר שִׁיתְעָרְבוּ מִן בְּמִינוֹ, חוּץ מִן
הַחֲטָאת עִם הָאֲשָׁם; וְשֵׂאִין אֲשָׁם אֶלָּא מִזְכָּרֵי הַכֹּבֵּשִׁים,
וְאִין לָהּ חֲטָאת מִן הַכֹּבֵּשִׁים אֶלָּא נִקְבָּה.

All offerings can intermingle and get mixed up except for sin and guilt offerings. For guilt offerings are always rams, and sin offerings are always ewes.



Sin and guilt offerings can never be intermingled because they are fundamentally different.

QUESTION

Why does the Torah go out of its way to separate sin offerings from guilt offerings if the difference seems so obvious?

ANSWER

The Torah draws a clear line to emphasize that intention matters. Since deliberate sins may feel foreign to a Jew's nature, we might excuse ourselves by blaming overpowering urges. But the Torah makes it clear that deliberate sins require a strong response.

TEXT 9A

*Talmud, Berachot
17a*

וְרַב אֶלְכָּסְנָדְרִי בְּתַר דְּמַצְלֵי אָמַר הֵכִי: "רַבּוֹן הָעוֹלָמִים, גְּלוּי וְיָדוּעַ
לְפָנֶיךָ שְׂרָצוֹנֵנוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת רְצוֹנְךָ, וּמִי מְעַכְבֵּ? שְׂאוֹר שְׂבָעֵיסָה וְשַׁעֲבוּד
מַלְכֵיּוֹת. יְהִי רְצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ שְׂתַצִּילֵנוּ מִיָּדָם וּנְשׁוּב לַעֲשׂוֹת חוֹקֵי רְצוֹנְךָ
בְּלֵב שָׁלֵם."

After concluding his prayer, Rabbi Alexandri used to say, "Master of the universe, it is revealed and known before You that we want to perform Your will. Who prevents it? The yeast in the dough [the evil inclination] and the oppression of government. May it be Your will to save us from their hands, and may we return to perform the edicts of Your will with a complete heart."

TEXT 9B

*Rabbi Yisrael Baal
Shem Tov, Keter
Shem Tov, sec. 24*

דְּשָׁמַעְתִּי מִמּוֹרֵי, זְכוֹרוֹנוֹ לְחַיֵּי הָעוֹלָם הַבָּא, בְּשֵׁם
רַבֵּינוֹ סְעִדְיָה גָּאוֹן, כִּי עֵיקַר בְּרִיאַת הָאָדָם בְּעוֹלָם
הַזֶּה, לְשִׁבּר מְדוֹת רָעוֹת הַטְּבָעִיּוֹת שָׁלוּ.

I heard from my teacher, may he be remembered for eternal life, who heard in the name of Rabbi Saadia Ga'on, that our primary purpose in this world is to deconstruct our natural negative traits.

TEXT 9C

Rabbi Yonah Tzvi
Kraus, Yatzak
Shemen, pp. 60–61

לִילָד יֵשׁ שְׁנֵי מְחַנְכִּים: (א) הוֹרֵיו אוֹ
רְבוֹתָיו שֶׁהֵם שְׁלוּחֵי הַהוֹרִים, (ב) הַחֲבֵרָה
וְהַסְּבִיבָה שֶׁהֵילָד נִמְצָא בָּהּ, כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמְרוּ
חֻכְמֵינוּ זְכוֹרֵנוֹם לְבִרְכָה בְּמַסְכַּת סוֹטָה דף
ז: "הַרְבֵּה שְׁכָנִים הָרְעִים עוֹשִׂים". וְכֵן
בְּפֶרְקֵי אָבוֹת כְּתוּב: "וּקְנֵה לָךְ חֵבֵר".
וְהַטַּעַם הוּא, שֶׁהָאָדָם מוֹשֵׁפֵעַ מְאֹד
מִהַסְּבִיבָה וְלוֹמֵד מִמֶּנָּה הַרְבֵּה, אוֹלֵי עוֹד
יֹתֵר מֵהוֹרָיו וְרְבוֹתָיו . . .

וְכֵן אָנוּ אוֹמְרִים בְּבוֹקֵר בְּבִרְכוֹת הַשַּׁחַר,
"וְהִרְחִיקֵנוּ מֵאָדָם רָע וּמִחֵבֵר רָע" וְרַק
אַחֲרָיו כֵּן, "וְדַבְּקֵנוּ בְּיֵצֶר הַטוֹב וּבְמַעֲשֵׂים
טוֹבִים". רוֹאִים כְּמָה כֹּחַ הַשִּׁפְעָה יֵשׁ
לְחֲבֵרָה רָעָה. שְׂאֵם אֶתָּה רוֹצֵה לִידְבֹּק
בְּיֵצֶר הַטוֹב וּבְמַעֲשֵׂים טוֹבִים, דַּבֵּר רֵאשׁוֹן
תַּתְּפַלֵּל שְׁלֹא יִהְיוּ לָךְ חֵבֵרִים רָעִים.

Every child has two mentors: (A) our parents, and teachers, who act as our parents' proxies; and (B) our environment, as our sages wrote, "Much is accomplished by the influence of bad neighbors" (Talmud, Sotah 7a). Our sages also wrote, "Acquire a good friend" (Mishnah, Avot 1:6). This is because our environment has a significant influence on us, and we learn much from it, perhaps more than we do from our parents and teachers. . . .

Accordingly, we pray every morning during the morning blessings, "Distance us from bad people and bad friends." Only after this do we add, "Inspire us to cleave to good inclinations and good deeds." This highlights the significant impact that negative friends can have. If you want to connect with your good inclination and good deeds, first pray that you be spared from negative friends.

POSSIBLE EXCUSES FOR DELIBERATE SIN

- our evil inclination
- unfortunate circumstances
- genetics
- negative influences

One might give themselves compassion instead of holding themselves accountable.



THE REVERSE PERSPECTIVE

Unintentional sins are worse than intentional ones because they expose a casual, careless attitude toward G-d rather than a momentary lapse.

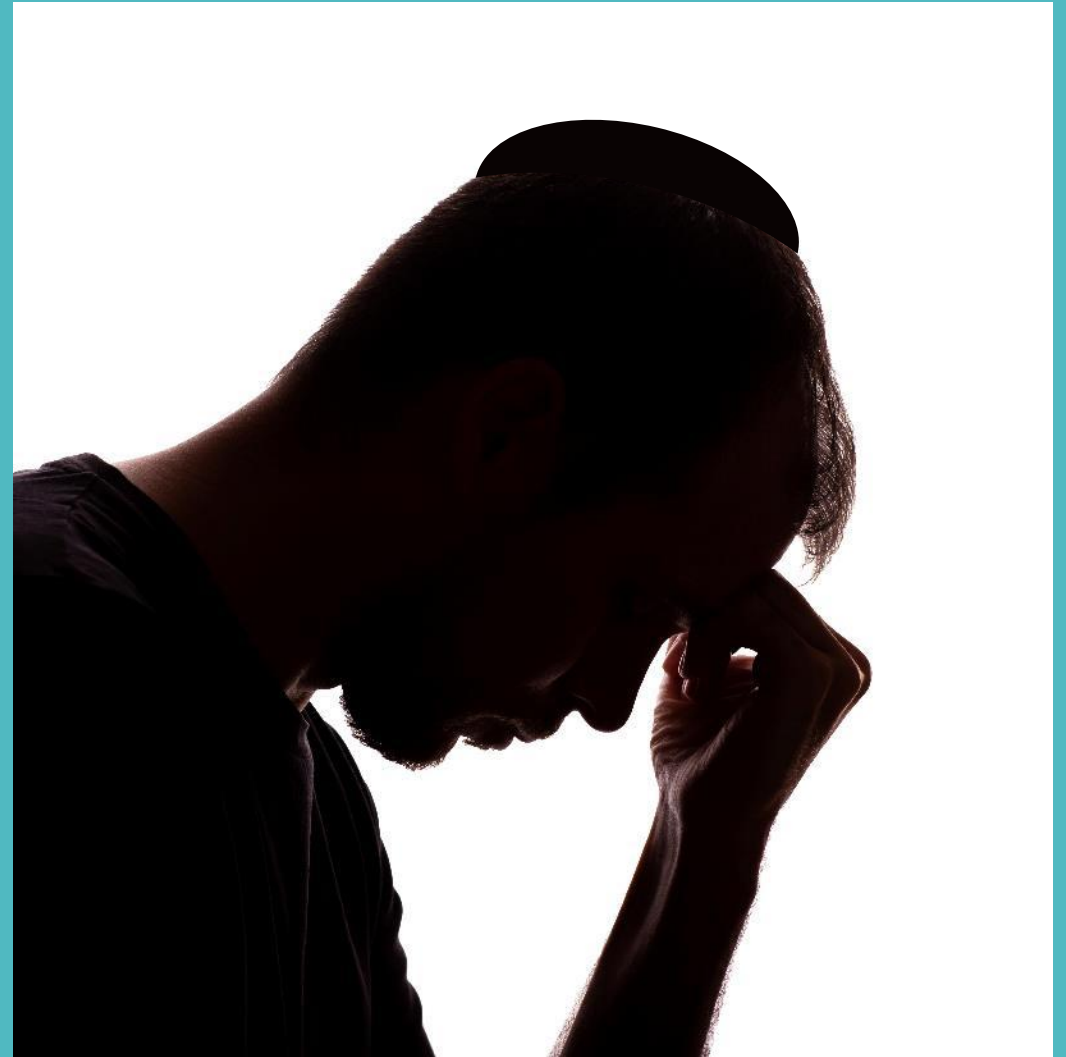
TEXT 10

*Maimonides, Mishneh
Torah, Laws of
Inadvertent Sins 5:6*

הָיָה לוֹ לְבַדֵּק וּלְדַקְדֵּק, וְאֵלּוּ בְּדַק יָפָה יָפָה וְדַקְדֵּק
בְּשֵׂאוֹלוֹת, לֹא הָיָה בָּא לְיַדֵּי שְׂגָגָה. וּלְפִי שְׂלֹא טָרַח
בְּדַרְיִשָּׁה וַחֲקִירָה וְאַחַר כֵּן יַעֲשֶׂה, צָרִיךְ כִּפְּרָה.

They should have inspected and been careful. Had they scrutinized and asked all the appropriate questions, they would not have come to inadvertent sin. Since they did not bother to investigate thoroughly and then committed a sin, they require atonement.

The Torah stresses that inadvertent sins are always met with the feminine response, while deliberate sins are always met with the masculine response.



TEXT 11

*The Rebbe, Rabbi
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, Likutei
Sichot 26, pp. 17-18*

שׁוֹרֵשׁ וְסִיבַת הַדָּבָר אֲמַנָּם יִתְכַן הַדָּבָר
שִׁיתְעַרְבוּ. וְהִינּוּ דְמַצַּד הַגְּבֵרָא, יִתְכַן דְחֻטָּא
שֶׁעָלָיו מְבִיא אֲשֶׁם אֵינוֹ חָמוּר כָּל כֶּף בְּסִיבַת
מַעֲשֵׂה הַחֻטָּא. וְהַחֻטָּא שֶׁעָלָיו מְבִיא חֻטָּאת
חָמוּר יוֹתֵר בְּסִיבַת מַעֲשֵׂה הַחֻטָּא. וְלָכֵן יֵשׁ
מָקוֹם לֹאמֹר שֶׁבְגִדּוֹן כְּזֶה מְסַפֵּיקָה לְאֲשֶׁם
עֲבוּדָת וְתַנּוּעַת כְּפָרָה בְּאוֹפֵן הַשְּׁנִי הַנִּזְכָּר לְעֵיל,
בְּאוֹפֵן וּבְלִשׁוֹן רַכָּה, וּבְנוֹגַע לְחֻטָּאת מוֹכֵרָח
דְּוָקָא אוֹפֵן הָא' הַנִּזְכָּר לְעֵיל, דְּבָרִים קְשִׁינ.

וְלָכֵן מְשַׁמֵּיעֵנוּ הַרְמַב"ם שֶׁאֵף שֶׁבְּמַצִּיאוֹת
בְּעֲבוּדָת ה' שִׁיף עִירוּב בִּיגִיָּהֶם, הִנֵּה בְּנוֹגַע
לְהַפְעוּלָה דְּהַחֻטָּא וְהַכְּפָרָה בְּעוֹלָם מַצַּד הַחֻפְצָא
שֶׁל הַחֻטָּא, שֶׁעָלָיו בָּא קָרְבַּן אֲשֶׁם, צָרִיף לְהִיּוֹת
דְּוָקָא זְכָרִי כְּבָשִׂים, אוֹפֵן הָעֲבוּדָה דִּיִּרְגִיזוּ אָדָם.
וּמַצַּד הַחֻפְצָא שֶׁל הַחֻטָּא דְחֻטָּאת, צָרִיף לְהִיּוֹת
נְקֵבָה דְּוָקָא, לְשׁוֹן רַכָּה, לְגִלּוֹת מְצִיאוֹתוֹ
הָאֱמִיתִית. דְּהִינּוּ הַטּוֹב שֶׁבּוּ.

When examining the motive and incentive for a sin, it is possible to confuse the sin offering with the guilt offering. The sinner might not be as culpable for the sins for which guilt offerings are brought as for sins for which sin offerings are brought. This could give rise to the suggestion that it is sufficient to repent in a nurturing manner for deliberate sins, whereas inadvertent sins call for harsh and frank forms of repentance.

Maimonides, therefore, comes along to tell us that though we might confuse the two when examining the motive for sin, we must examine instead the actual sins for which guilt offerings are required and their impact on the world. It then follows that the sacrifice for such sins must be male, implying a frank and deliberate approach to repentance. Similarly, when examining the actual sin for which sin offerings are brought, the sacrifice must be female. Our repentance must be gentle and nurturing, revealing the good within us, which is our true nature.



The Torah is clear:

An inadvertent sin should be met with a nurturing and understanding response.

A deliberate sin requires accountability, immediate action, and real change.

The Torah draws a red line:

A sin offering and a guilt offering are clearly distinguished, teaching that one always implies guilt and the other inadvertence.



KEY POINTS

1. In the days of the Temple, Jews brought sin offerings for inadvertent sins and guilt offerings for certain deliberate sins. The sin offerings were female, and the guilt offerings were male.
2. Today, we no longer bring offerings, but we still repent for our sins. Repentance can be male-like or female-like.
3. A male-like repentance is one characterized by frankness and even harshness. We acknowledge that we have become sinful and must undergo transformative change.
4. Female-like repentance is characterized by nurture and empathy. We remind ourselves that we are essentially good people who tripped up and sinned. It is unbecoming of us, and it won't happen again.
5. The nurturing form of repentance is appropriate for inadvertent sins. The frank form of repentance that calls for fundamental transformation is reserved for sins committed deliberately.

