

Rabbi David Mahler, Vayikra

Often, the accepted English translations of words are either strange, awkward or simply wrong. Is the spiritual disease of *tzara'at* really leprosy? Why don't we have an English translation for *t'fillin* which we can substitute for the word phylacteries? And finally, translating *Sukkos* as the Feast of Tabernacles is awkward at best.

I mention this because *Sefer Vayikra* introduces us to many of the laws of *korbanos*. *Korbanos* are usually translated as offerings or sacrifices. Rav Shimshon Rafael Hirsch states that translating *korbanos* as sacrifices or offerings is incorrect. The word offering is wrong because it implies that we are giving *Hashem* something, yet He does not lack anything. Additionally, we are not losing anything so it is not a sacrifice. Rather, the word *korban* is derived from the root "*karov*", meaning to come close or draw near. Through specific means, that of a physical *korban*, we are drawing nearer to *Hashem*.

Rav Shlomo Yosef Zevin, in agreement with Rav Hirsch's approach, expands on the idea of closeness to G-d. His analysis focuses on what it means to be close. He explains that distance and proximity are not merely spatial, physical terms. Two people can remain very close even when separated by oceans, and two people can be near one another physically, yet remain distant from one another. This is because distance and closeness can be determined by internal, spiritual connections. If two souls are connected, then they are close, and if they are disconnected, they are far from one another. It is in this sense that we speak of being close or distant from G-d. He is omnipresent, and so, he is never far away.

Though the majority of us do not see the absence of *korbanos* in our religious lives as tragic. In essence, we should be yearning for them each day.

The *gemara* (*Shabbos* 31) teaches that one of the first four questions we will be asked after our time on this earth expires is "Have you yearned for the coming of *Moshiach*"?

In the early part of the summer, Rabbi Aharon Lopiansky penned an important article on the idea of *moshiach*. He begins the letter by sharing the contents of a call he received when the virus was wreaking havoc on much of the country.

"Rebbi?" The voice on the other end of the line was a former *talmid* of his, presently teaching in an all girls' high school. "Basically, the girls want to know if

they should get their tambourines ready to celebrate and welcome *moshiach*.” The *rebbe* was referencing a *midrash* that praises the holy women who consciously brought instruments out of Egypt with full confidence that *Hashem* would answer their prayers and save them and all of *Am Yisrael* from the cruelty of the Egyptians. The women wanted to be ready to celebrate. The Rav goes on to say that he received other similar calls around that time.

In the article, Rabbi Lopiansky is critical of the popular view that we need *moshiach* because he will be a miraculous panacea for all of our worries and ailments. “When we describe *moshiach* as solving our health issues, shidduch crises, legal issues and so on, we are looking for a solution to a personal issue.” He goes on to say that our yearning has nothing to do with *moshiach*. It has to do with our blood pressure, bank accounts, the IRS or our child waiting for their bashert.”

So why do we want *moshiach*? Why must we anxiously await his arrival?

Pesach is one of the 3 pilgrimage festivals. We are to spend *Pesach*, *Shavuot* and *Sukkos* in *Yerushalayim* recharging our spiritual batteries by connecting to *Hashem*. As the *Kuzari* describes it, “to be invited to the King’s table.” *Moshiach* will restore a sense of presence and connection – *Shechina* – into our lives. *Hashem* will have a palpable presence in our world.

Poignantly, Rav Lopiansky describes what the longing for *moshiach* is supposed to be. “To me, it is a feeling like the painful hollowness and sorrow I experience when I attend a *simcha* where a family member is missing; where a parent has not come to a wedding out of anger; a child has not invited a parent out of spite; a son fallen in battle is not there; or a “lost” daughter is missing in the family picture. Because of the extraordinary joy that should have been felt, the emptiness is so sharply painful.

The picture painted by his words is what we lack, genuine closeness to *Hashem*. We need *korbanos*. We need to feel His embrace, His warm smile, His everlasting love.

As we study the intricacies of the “offerings and sacrifices” through the next few *parshios*, let us examine and reflect on the important relationships in our lives – friends, family and G-d. I pray we are close. I will continue to pray that we become even closer.