



# Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

## This Issue Contains:

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Murray <schnoz@erols.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I want to ask a question about something that has been disturbing me since I learned of it: namely, ritual animal sacrifice in Judaism. I find the whole notion of burnt offerings and animal sacrifice, mentioned throughout the bible, repugnant. We (the Jews) often talk about paganism, yet the concept of animal sacrifice in our bible is, in my opinion, a pagan practice. I realize that there are many passages in the Bible that cite means of atonement for sins other than animal sacrifice; but, I find the very mention of this practice, and the fact that it is even considered, to be a flaw in our religion and the antithesis of what a merciful G-d should ask. Please help me with this as it really bothers me.

Dear Murray,

One thing I think is important to note is that most types of sacrifices brought in the Temple were not 'burnt offerings,' but were actually eaten by the *kohanim* and by the people who brought the sacrifice. Only a relatively small portion of the animal — some of the fats — were actually burned on the altar.

In other words, let's say a person recovers from a life-threatening illness and wants to make a big celebration, inviting all his family and friends. In the Temple days, the right way to do it was to 'invite' G-d as well. That is, instead of serving normal, everyday meat, he goes to the Temple and offers a 'thanks-giving' sacrifice. Part of the meat is given to the *kohanim*, certain of the fats are burned on the altar and the rest is served at the thanks-giving celebration.

The Torah is telling us that everything we do can be imbued with holiness. Not only things like giving charity or fasting on Yom Kippur. Even activities like eating meat can be invested with holiness if we remember to share with others (giving to the *kohanim*) and include thoughts of thanks to G-d (offering some of the fat). This idea — elevating the mundane — can then be put into play during all our daily activities.

Sacrifices also served to nullify belief in idol worship. Maimonides notes that all species used for sacrifices were animals worshipped by pagans. By sacrificing them we declare: "Don't worship these animals! Use them in the service of Hashem!" For example, the Egyptian's believed in a ramgod; hence, the Passover sacrifice is a lamb, which is then eaten at the Passover 'seder' celebration.

'Sin offerings' produced a powerful psychological effect on people, and helped them act righteously in the future. A person bringing a sin offering would think: "What's happening to that animal should really be happening to me!" These, too, were eaten by the *kohanim*.

By helping humans live more righteously, share with others, feel thankful and repentant, and fulfill the commandments, an animal's existence gains an eternal meaning.

Sources:

- Moreh Nevuchim III
- Herodotus 2:31
- Ramban 1:9
- Biblical Archaeology Review, May/June 1995, p. 61

Michael Turniansky

<mt0013@epfl2.epflbalto.org> wrote:

I have tried other electronic forums for an answer, for I didn't want to bother you yet again. But I have a question:

What is the proper blessing for papaya? Is it "borei p'ri ha'adamah" ("Who creates fruit of the earth") like the pineapple, to which I think it may be related, or "borei p'ri ha'eitz" (Who creates fruit of the tree)?

Dear Michael Turniansky,

Although a papaya tree lasts for several years and produces an annual crop like a tree, in other respects it is similar to a vegetable. For instance, unlike other trees, papayas produce fruit during their first year.

Since a papaya has some tree-like features and some vegetable-like features, it's unclear what the proper blessing is. In such a case, the blessing "borei p'ri ha'adama" is appropriate. You can say "Borei p'ri ha'adama" ("Who creates fruit of the earth") in a case of doubt because, after all, fruit which grows on a tree also grows from the ground.

I asked this question to a noted halachic authority who told me to say "borei p'ri ha'adamah" due to the doubt.

Sources:

- Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 203
- Kaf Hachayim 213:13, Yachave Da'at 4:52

## Yiddle Riddle

Once upon a time, a young man came to a rabbi and asked, "Rabbi, please tell me while I stand on one foot: What is the foundation upon which the entire Torah is based?"

The Rabbi answered "Whistle till the fish comes backwards."

What did he mean?

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