Chapter 9b

my notes

Up From the Well – Reconciliation with God

God decided to leave man's conduct to his own free choice,
and if he had not sinned, he would have been immortal.
—Bereshit Rabbah 8,11

The problem of justice (continued)

We are empty handed… In the last lesson we learned that nothing we can offer to balance the scales of justice is enough, because everything we have already belongs to God, including our very lives. Yet the Torah is filled with commands to offer sacrifices. Why?

> *"The tree growing up from Mosaic Judaism—the common root of both religions—forked into two distinct branches. For their part, the Talmudic rabbis took these prophetic teachings [Micah 6:6-7; Hosea 6:6] to mean that atonement for human sin can be achieved without the cost of death. Rabbinic Judaism most often refers to the following verses to make this point:*
>
> > *"Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God. Your sins have been your downfall! Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to him: "Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips. (Hosea 14:1–2) NIV*
>
> *"This, said the rabbis, is proof that the path to atonement for sin does not require sacrificial death. Instead, I have heard it said at Chever Torah that God will accept four things as compensation for human disobedience of his law: prayer, Torah study, obedience to* mitzvot *(especially charity), and repentance combined with fasting. According to the rabbis, these are 'the fruit of our lips.'*
> *"Now I recall my earlier exploration of the idea of holiness and purity, and the debate between Jesus and certain Pharisees over the question of external observance versus internal purity. Jesus said impurity does not come from disobedience to the Law, but rather from "out of the heart." He taught that sinfulness is a condition, not a choice, and my disobedience is a symptom of what caused me to disobey, not the disease itself. Similarly, obedience is only a symptom of spiritual health; obedience is not righteousness itself. Real obedience—heartfelt obedience—can only come after the scales of justice have been balanced and genuine righteousness restored. Jesus taught that obedience to the commands of Torah is correctly viewed as a result of reconciliation, never as a requirement for reconciliation. So when God asks, 'Can you leave this well the way you found it?' according to Christianity the question contains a double entendre." (TGAM)*

- In the Hosea passage quoted above, what is the first action required? What two requests are made? Does the offering come before these things, or after? What does this tell you about the purpose of the offering?
- Note the quote from TGAM above: "…obedience is only a symptom of spiritual health; obedience is not righteousness itself." What new light does this shed on verses like John 14:23-24?

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The purpose of blood… It has already been mentioned that the Rabbis referred to **Hosea 14:1-2** as proof that sacrificial death is no longer required, but see the verse below. Note that it clearly establishes a connection between sacrificial death and atonement for sins:

> *"Sacrificial death is taught from cover to cover throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, even in the words of the very prophets who spoke against relying on it as a quid pro quo. Perhaps the clearest example of this is found in these verses:*
> *16 You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. (Psalms 51:16–17) NIV*
> *"Here, once again, the Hebrew Scriptures insist that God does not want me to approach with bribes in my hands and pride in my heart. Instead, he demands the humble acknowledgment that I have absolutely nothing to offer in return for his forgiveness. Through confession and repentance I must throw myself upon his mercy alone. So far, this is nothing new. It is this kind of thing that inspired the rabbis to teach that the sacrifices of animals are totally unnecessary. But consider the very next words of this Psalm:*
>
> > *18 In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem. 19 Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings to delight you; then bulls will be offered on your altar. (Psalms 51:18–19) NIV (TGAM)*

- Compare verse 16 above ("You do not delight in sacrifices…") to verse 19 ("…there will be righteous sacrifices…"). How can we explain this apparent contradiction?
- What happens between these verses to cause the change in attitude toward sacrifices?

A similar theme is found in **Ps 50**. Consider the transition that takes place in the following seven verses:

> *9 I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, 10 for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. 11 I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. 12 If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it. 13 Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? 14 Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High, 15 and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me." (Psalms 50:9-15) NIV*

- What is the apparent contradiction here?
- Compare the Psalm quoted above to **Micah 6:6-8**. What similar lesson do the two passages teach about the nature of any sacrifices we might offer? Would this message also apply to "the fruit of our lips"?
- Note the final verse of this same Psalm (**Ps 50:23**). What new light does this shed on the purpose of animal sacrifice? (Hint: consider the purpose of other aspects of the tabernacle, such as the "lamp stand" or *menorah* with its "buds and blossoms" (**Ex 25:31**) which may have symbolized God's

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appearance to Moses in the burning bush, and the twelve pieces of the "bread of the Presence" or *lechem paniym* which may have symbolized the manna God fed to the twelve tribes of Israel, then see **Ro 5:9-19**.)

- If justice is "eye for eye, tooth for tooth, life for life," is it really fair (or just) for Jesus to sacrifice himself in our place. In other words, does true justice require each sinner to pay his own price for his sins? (Hint: see another definition of justice found in **Zech 7:9** and compare **Eph 2:8-9**.)

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