

Parashat Va'yikra centers on the system of sacrifices at the heart of Biblical Judaism. Several sections of the reading take the form,

When a person does X ... and brings a sacrifice of type Y

In many instances, the word translated as "person" in the *Etz Hayim* is *nefesh*, more often translated as "soul" with a connotation of "life" and an implication of moral seriousness. This form appears in the *Etz Hayim* at p. 595, v. 1; p. 599, v. 27; p. 601, v. 1, 2; p. 602, v. 4; p. 603, v. 15; p. 604, v. 17; p. 604, v. 20.

However, the first occurrence of this form has a variant wording. At p. 587, v. 2, translated as "When any of you presents an offering ...", the Torah does not use *nefesh*; rather, it says *adam ki yakriv* – more literally, "when a man presents an offering." So what are we to learn from this variant wording?

We can begin with the observation that for the Torah to talk about a "man" rather than a "soul," we might expect the more commonly used word *ish*, rather than *adam*, be used for "man." Thus, our question becomes, why *adam* – man (or person) rather than *nefesh* – soul? The Midrash offers multiple answers, including the following.

R. Berekiah said: MAN (ADAM) alludes to the first Adam. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel: 'Let your offering be like the offering of Adam, who, since all things were in his ownership, offered not anything acquired by robbery or violence, so you, too, offer not anything acquired by robbery or violence....'¹

Adam owned the world – who could he rob? Who would it benefit him to abuse violently? So, since he didn't rob or abuse violently, we should follow his example.

Another interpretation: MAN (ADAM) is an expression of love, brotherliness, and of friendship.²

Here, the editors of my reference use footnotes to explain "love" by citing *Pirkei Avot* – "Beloved is man in that he was created in the image of God."³ They explain "brotherliness" and "friendship" by noting that all mankind descends from Adam.

Another explanation given by the Midrash begins by quoting *Vayikra* 1:2:

WHEN ANY MAN (ADAM) OF YOU BRINGS AN OFFERING. Why does it not say *ish* (man)? Why does it say precisely ADAM? So as to include proselytes. [But] OF YOU – excludes [an Israelite who became] an apostate.... R. Simeon b. Gamaliel [said] ... When a would-be proselyte comes to accept Judaism, a hand should be stretched out towards him to bring him beneath the wings of the *Shechinah*....⁴

References

[S] *Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals*, Rabbinical Assembly, New York, 1998

[VR] *Vayikra Rabbah – The Midrash Rabbah, v.2: Exodus and Leviticus*, R. Dr. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., Soncino, London, 1977

¹ [VR] 2:7, p. 25

² [VR] 2:8, p. 25

³ [S], p. 266, v. 18

⁴ [VR] 2:9, pp. 27 - 29