BS”D

Parshas Shlach 5776

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*What must a child do for his father? Just show him respect by giving him a gift.*

A Thank-You to Hashem

After the Parsha concludes the story of the spies, the Torah tells us the supplementary laws of the bringing of sacrifices. In Halacha, these are referred to as “nesachim” (libations) that include the flour, oil, and wine which must accompany the burnt or peace offering.

The Torah goes on to say that a *ger*, i.e., a convert, should bring the same offerings as the born Jew.

Why is it necessary to say this? Once a person converts to Judaism, he is fully Jewish and is bound by all of the laws of the Torah. Why is this Mitzvah singled out as also applying to the ger?

Actually, this is not the only Mitzvah so singled out. In our own Parsha there is another case:

The Torah prescribes the special sacrifice one brings if he performed an act of idol worship under the mistaken notion that the act was permitted. It also states that one who knowingly performs an act of idol worship is “cut off” from his people (known as *kareis*).

In both cases of idol worship, the Torah states that these laws apply equally to the ger.

There are many other places where the Torah specifies that a specific Mitzvah applies to a ger as well as to a born Jew. It is beyond the scope of this article to deal with all of these places. I would like to offer an explanation here, in the case of the libations. But I will first briefly discuss a few of the other places where a ger is singled out and a possible reason or reasons for this.

By the original Pascal (Pesach) sacrifice, the Torah says that a circumcised stranger (the ger) shall eat of the Pascal sacrifice. As the Torah puts it, “There shall be one law for the citizen (born Jew) and for the ger who dwells among you (Shmos 12:48, 49).

The Torah in Parshas B’haalosecha discusses the law of the make-up Pascal sacrifice (Pesach Sheini) for one who could not bring the sacrifice on time, on the 14th of the first month. Instead, the sacrifice is brought on the 14th day of the second month. Once more the Torah states that a ger brings the Pesach and the Pesach Sheini. The Torah concludes, “There shall be one law for you… stranger or citizen.”

First the Torah says that the ger who joined the Jewish people in Egypt at the first Pesach may partake of the sacrifice. Even though he was not enslaved having joined the Jewish people upon their leaving Egypt, he certainly brings the sacrifice.

Then the Torah in Parshas B’haalosecha adds, says the Ramban, that in subsequent generations, a ger, too, brings the Pesach. Even though neither he nor his ancestors actually left Egypt, nevertheless he brings the Pascal sacrifice because he becomes fully a part of the Jewish people.

Another example of where the ger is singled out is in Vayikra at the end of Parshas Emor. The Torah says one who curses G-d shall be put to death. It adds (24:16), “The ger is like the native-born; if he curses the Name he shall die.”

The Sforno explains that this law is preceded by the story of the man with a Jewish mother and an Egyptian father who cursed G-d and was put to death. The Torah wants to make it clear that he was not punished because he wasn’t a “pure” Jew and was a ger of sorts. No, says the Torah. This law applies without prejudice to everyone equally, the ger or the native-born.

Let’s get back to our question: Why is the ger specifically included in the bringing of the libation offering?

The Abarbanel says that, as we know, a non-Jew may bring a sacrifice to Hashem. The rule is, though, that he does not bring a libation with his sacrifice. So we might think that this individual who *could* have brought a sacrifice before he was Jewish should now also bring the sacrifice in the same manner, that is, without a libation. Therefore, the Torah must say that he does in fact bring the libation.

This does not seem to me to be a very convincing interpretation. True, as a non-Jew, this person could have brought a sacrifice without a libation. But he’s a ger. He’s Jewish now. So isn’t it obvious that he brings a sacrifice like any other Jew?

I’d like to offer a possible explanation:

There are two approaches in the commentaries as to why, right after the story of the spies and the decree that the generation that left Egypt would not enter the land of Canaan, the Torah followed immediately with the laws of the libations.

The Sforno explains that before the sin of the golden calf, sacrifices were acceptable as is; no libations were necessary. After the golden calf, the daily burnt offering required libations but individual sacrifices did not require libations. Finally, after the sin of the spies, even individual sacrifices required libations. Thus the offerings discussed here in the Torah represent the lower spiritual level of the Jews after their sin that required the libations in order to be acceptable.

The Ramban has an almost opposite explanation. The Torah here tells us the laws of libations that go into effect when the Jews enter the Land of Canaan. Hashem was comforting the new generation, those under twenty who would one day enter Israel. He was saying to them, do not be afraid that you will not make it into the land. You *will,* and here is a Mitzvah that you will perform there.

I suggest that in either interpretation the libations are connected with the sin of the spies. Now, when a stranger, a ger, joins the Jewish people, we might think he doesn’t have to bring the libations. His ancestors were not part of the Jewish people during the time of the spies, so he need not bring the libations. Therefore, the Torah tells us that he must. Once he becomes a ger, he is not simply an individual Jew; he is part of the Jewish people as a whole, and all the laws that apply to them apply to him.

Let me conclude by paraphrasing a beautiful Midrash (Breishis Rabah 17:1):

A father is expected to do many things for his son. G-d, our Father, did these things for the Jewish people.

A father is responsible to circumcise his son. So, too, Hashem commanded Yehoshua to circumcise the Jews when they entered the Land of Canaan.

A father must redeem his son if he is taken captive. So, too, Hashem redeemed us from Egypt.

A father must teach his son Torah. Hashem does the same to us. “I, G-d, your G-d, instruct you for your benefit” (Yeshaya 48:17).

A father must teach his son how to earn a living. G-d teaches us the Mitzvos which are, in fact, our life.

A father must find his son a wife. So, too, G-d tells us be fruitful and multiply.

A father must provide food and clothing for his son. So G-d does the same. “I clothed you with embroidered garments… the food I have given you, the fine flour, the oil, the honey.” (Yechezkel 16:10,19)

A father is supposed to provide his son with property. So G-d gave us the Land of Israel.

And what must the child do for his father? Just show him respect by giving him a gift. So G-d asks us to bring a sacrifice and to bring libations.

G-d has given us so much. All we have to do is show appreciation. When you give someone a gift, it is usually not the actual gift that matters. It is the showing of gratitude and thanks.

Our prayers should be thanks to G-d. Our actions should be thanks to G-d. Indeed, our very lives should be an expression of thanks to the A-lmighty, our Creator and Sustainer.