

## Korbanot & Mindfulness

**Rabbi Maury Grebenau**

An area which is as ubiquitous and as esoteric as that of sacrifices. The Torah spends a great deal of time on *korbanot* but it is one of the areas of the Torah where most people feel the least connected. There are a number of approaches in the Rishonim in terms of the purpose and thrust of the *korbanot* and it is the school of the Ramban which I want to focus on today.

The approach of the Ramban is essentially that *Korbanot* are there to make us think. Every action and specific law is supposed to help us to consider our behavior and our lives and change for the better. This approach is also echoed by the Sefer HaChinuch and others. The Seforno (Vayikra 1:2) comments that when the Torah says “כִּי יִקְרִיב מִכֶּם” literally it means “when one of you brings” but the deeper meaning is that “when we bring of ourselves.” This is the same philosophy, the essence of the *Korban* is our own thoughts and approach to it.

For example, the *Chatas* which is brought when one accidentally (but in a way which is preventable) violates specific laws, is meant to lead to awareness. We are not to look back at our error and figure out how to improve upon our vigilance against sin. An *asham taluy* is even more so, this *korban* is brought when one is not sure if they have committed one of these sins. The message here is that even to perhaps have sinned is not to be taken lightly and also needs soul searching and rectification. We need to be aware and imbue our life with purpose and meaning.

The concept of mindfulness had been the main research of Dr. Ellen Langer, professor of psychology at Harvard University. She has written a best-selling book on the topic and has found that mindfulness increases health and enjoyment of life and opens us to new possibilities. In one study they asked people in an airport to do some arithmetic and then gave them a task to do which made them feel inept but half of them were given the title “boss” and half the title “assistant.” Finally, they were all asked to do arithmetic problems again. The group with the label of “assistant” did only half as well as they had before on similar problems. This phenomenon is called self-induced dependence and it is just one example of how not being mindful can cause us to be overly affected by our environment or even a simple label.

The Ramban understands *Korbanot* to be designed to increase mindfulness. They are supposed to slow us down and make us aware of our actions and their context, to increase our mindfulness as a recipe for a richer life. Today we do not have *Korbanot* but we know that *Tefilla* (prayer) is meant to be in their place<sup>1</sup>. *Tefilla* is meant to be the same sort of centering to help us to be more mindful about our lives.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Rabbeinu Yonah (Pirkei Avot 1:2)