

Vayikra: Why Animal Sacrifice is Relevant to Us Even Today

Maimonides and Jung: First 5 Short lines Then the Longer Version

Why does G-d command us to sacrifice animals? Isn't that an outdated practice?

All humans around the world and in history have the same unconscious psychological concepts and symbols within their minds. It is for this reason that different cultures have similar symbolism and ritual, though the cultures may have developed distant from each other in time or space.

All people, no matter how civilized, have certain symbols in their minds and impulses in their being—whether dormant or not—to do something like animal sacrifice.

Maimonides' approach is that that prayer and meditation is the ideal, and that sacrifice is not. As G-d does not change human nature, G-d chose to give Israel commandments to sacrifice to G-d, instead of extricating the arcane behavior.

When we bring offerings to G-d or learn about them we are keeping these uncivilized impulses at bay.

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Now the longer version....it's worth it this week...

It's very difficult for us to wrap our educated, contemporary minds around the idea of animal sacrifice. How could people be so enthralled by slaughtering animals and sprinkling blood on altars? Furthermore, why would G-d command us to bring offerings, when they seem to not be in line with the Torah's general approach to refining our character and sharpening our minds? Most opinions hold that we will bring sacrifices again, when the Third Temple comes, even though we will probably still be educated and contemporary-minded at that time. Why?

Maimonides has an intriguing approach to understanding the commandment of animal sacrifice. If one understands the depth of his approach, through utilizing contemporary psychological insight to elucidate, one can glean tremendous insight into much of human behavior that we witness on a daily basis, and begin to understand the depth of the Torah's commandments in this area and others.



Figure 1 - Temple of Dendur at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Maimonides writes [1] that G-d, in the universe as we know it, does not alter human nature. At the time that the Torah was given, the people of Israel had the rituals of animal sacrifice firmly ingrained in their nature. G-d, instead of extricating these behaviors, made them religious acts. Though animal sacrifice is not the ideal—prayer and religious meditation are—the hope would be that these behaviors could be detached from their pagan roots and, to quote a theoretical source for Maimonides' approach, that Israel “will eventually become disciplined”[2].

This is a beautiful approach, but the whole concept seems quite strange. Why do we have a religious commandment that is far from an ideal practice?

Borrowing from Jung to Clarify

The famous Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung demonstrates in his writings (1927) that humans have, in their unconscious mind, concepts and symbols that are universal to all people. Though people have lived far away from each other for centuries, all peoples insert the same messages and concepts into their cultures, religions, and art. This phenomenon Jung deems the *collective unconscious*, and each symbol or concept an *archetype*.

Symbols of mother figures and father figures are found in all cultures; archetypes of concepts like fertility and life & death are all around the globe, created not from collaboration, but from traces of concepts that are embedded in all peoples' unconscious minds.

On Pagan Rituals

Jung's comments beautifully lead us to the topic of animal sacrifice. When speaking of the fact that the same elements that are found in contemporary religious practice and the thoughts of civilized modern men are those that are

found in primitive tribes throughout history, Jung writes, "These things seem very remote to our modern, "enlightened" eyes....[but] the collective unconscious contains the whole spiritual heritage of man's evolution [3], born anew in the brain structure of every individual."



Figure 2 - Ancient Altar in Petra

You have the same brain as a "primitive" tribesman, and you tend to have the same symbols underlie your thoughts and the same fears as he, though they may be expressed in different symbols. The same archetypes underlie both minds.



Figure 3 - Mayan Temple, Central America.

Note the Similarity to the Sukuh Temple Below

Though there is no question that a developed, educated mind is a better one and can think more rationally, the same psychological traces of pagan humanity that are on a more conscious level when an African tribesman [4] is slaughtering a

chicken exist in our educated Western minds, though they man express themselves differently.

It is now no question why animal sacrifice is relevant even after Israel has dropped any desire to do so. The fight to keep pagan rituals at bay is one that is constant. The collective unconscious harbors these thoughts and feelings in each one of us.

This point can be witnessed by us in two ways. First of all, even highly educated people believe in mystical thinking! I have seen it with my own eyes in graduate level textbooks (communicating with people in the afterlife) and through meeting people with advanced degrees and high standing in government and society (good luck charms).

Also, and perhaps more importantly and the probable root of the previous example, people tend to elevate certain symbolic items and concepts above their proper level of importance. A cow may represent to someone the sensual pleasure of eating beef or a source of fertility, while chopping off the head of that cow may represent the devaluing of sensual pleasures or wealth. Blood may seem like a gross fluid which is a biological necessity, but it may reach deeply unconscious psychological traces that deal with life, death, and murderous tendencies.



Figure 4 - Suku Temple in Indonesia, thousands of miles away from the Mayan temple above.

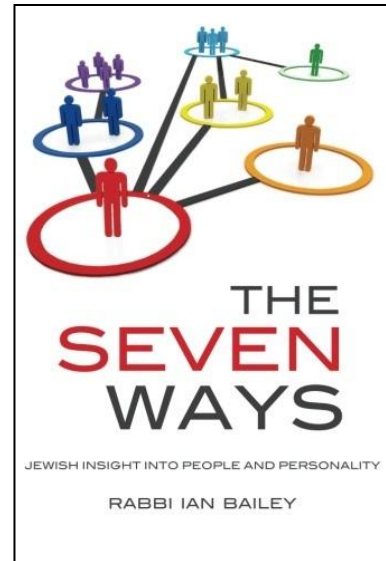
There are dozens of similarities among the accompanying statues, as well

The Temple Tale

When we have a temple, we bring sacrifices to keep these thoughts at bay. When we do not have a temple, I believe that, since there are less overt miracles in the world, there is less of a push from our Evil Inclination to do idolatry and pagan rituals [5], so the study of the laws of offerings will perhaps or are supposed to suffice in keeping the pagan inclinations at bay.

When we have a temple, people have the option of mistakenly conceiving of alternative miraculous causes (i.e. pagan gods) to offset the witnessing of miracles from G-d. This exists in our minds to give us a free-will choice as to whether we should follow G-d or no; otherwise overt miracles from G-d would be totally convincing of his existence.

(Of course, though we may feel that we are above doing these rituals, we may not abrogate the Law and worship idols [6]. I simply think that the Torah gave over the way to fight pagan thoughts at all times.)



Soul-less?

Maimonides approach is incredibly insightful. This commandment is not ideal in that it is not a meditative nor is it a refined behavior. However, it is necessary to keep pagan behavior and thoughts at bay, something that the great scholar mentions many times in his works. It is also why he codified the laws for the future, even though it could be assumed that we will be civilized at the time of the third temple. The reason is that. We will always have a part of our brain that has underlying archetypes and archaic behavior; it is our job to educate ourselves and continually refine our character to be more civilized and refined.

Deep Meaning

Perhaps one may feel that such a rational approach detracts from the depth of religious ritual.

“I’ve found that a rational understanding of these things in no way detracts from their value; on the contrary, it helps us not only to feel but to gain insight into their immense significance”[7].

[to gain insight into the seven universal archetypes order [The Seven Ways](#)]

Contemporary psychological insight, as usual, is found in our ancient tradition, showing us that it is more contemporary than ever.

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References:

Jung, C. (1976). *The Portable Jung, Chapter 2, The Structure of the Psyche*. Penguin: London. Originally published as part of “Die Erdbedingtheit der Psyche, in the symposium *Mensch und Erde* (Darmstadt, 1927).

[1] Guide for the Perplexed, Book 3, Chapter 32.

[2] This language is taken from Vayikra Rabbah 22:8.

[3] Let's just read this as 'development', as evolution proper is beyond the scope of this article.

[4] Of course not all African tribesmen are “primitive” or pagan in thinking; I use this example as it reflects the last documentary that I watched on this topic.

[5] This is a possible interpretation of the Agaddah in the Gemara in Sanhedrin 64A which speaks of the diminishing of the evil inclination for idolatry.

[6] If you think this doesn't happen today, think again. Not only are people in 2012 doing idol worship around the globe, but it goes on in our civilized society (of course people have freedom of religion to do so). One man told me that his girlfriend tried to convince him to pour yoghurt in front of her small statue and care for and anoint the little icon. This eerily overlaps rituals outlined in the Gemara Sanhedrin.

[7] Jung, Ibid.