Jewish Tribune – Vayikra

**Chazak Chazak on Vayikra?**

Imagine the surprise. You are in shul and the leining of parshas Vayikra has just finished. All of a sudden, everyone shouts out:

**לָקֵל אֲשֶׁר שָׁבַת מִכָּל הַמַּעֲשִֹים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי**

(To Hashem who rested from all His actions on the seventh day)

What is going on? We said “Chazak chazak” last week! What’s this?!

Isn’t this one of the beautiful additions to our Shabbos morning davening, said after “Kel Odon” before the Sh’ma? Sometimes also sung at a Chassidish tisch, but after leining on parshas Vayikra?!

To understand why this custom arose, we turn to a fascinating comment of Rav Kloniymus Kalman Halevi Epstein, a talmid of Reb Elimelech of Lizhensk and the Chassidic leader in Krakow between 1785 and his death in 1825. Better known by his famous work on Chumash, Me’Or Vashemesh (referred to by some Rebbes as the Shulchan Aruch of Chassidus), he says he heard about this minhag from his contemporary Reb Menachem Mendel of Rimanov.

What is behind this unusual practice?

The last possuk of our sedra reads:

 וְכִפֶּר עָלָיו הַכֹּהֵן לִפְנֵי ה' וְנִסְלַח לוֹ עַל אַחַת מִכֹּל אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה לְאַשְׁמָה בָהּ

And the kohen shall make atonement for him before Hashem, and he shall be forgiven for any one of all (cases) where one may commit (a sin), incurring guilt through it.

The last two words - לְאַשְׁמָה בָהּ – are **ראשי תיבות** (an acronym) for**לָקֵל אֲשֶׁר שָׁבַת מִכָּל הַמַּעֲשִֹים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי**

But what has Shabbos to do with parshas Vayikra and korbonos? And furthermore, we generally don’t like finishing on a sour note. We try to avoid ending the leining with words of guilt ringing in our ears! Spoils the kiddush…

The Me’or Vashemesh explains that the geulah will only be achieved through teshuva. As the Gemoro in Sanhedrin (97b) says:

**אם ישראל עושין תשובה נגאלין**

If Klal Yisroel repent they will be redeemed

Just as korbonos effect atonement and achieve kapporah, so too, shemiras Shabbos.

As the Gemoro in Shabbos (118b) says:

**כל המשמר שבת כהלכתו מוחלין לו**

Whoever keeps Shabbos according to halacha, he is forgiven.

And to merit the geula, the Gemoro (Shabbos 118b) adds:

**אלמלי משמרין ישראל שתי שבתות כהלכתן - מיד נגאלים**

If Klal Yisroel were to keep two Shabbosos according to halacha, they would be immediately redeemed.

Sadly, nowadays we have no Beis Hamikdash. The best we can do is learn about the korbonos and the avoda.

The Gemoro at the end of Megillah (31b) says:

**אמר לפניו: רבונו של עולם, תינח בזמן שבית המקדש קיים, בזמן שאין בית המקדש קיים מה תהא עליהם?**

Avrohom Ovinu said to HKBH: Master of the Universe, this works out well when the Beis Hamikdash is standing and offerings can be brought to achieve atonement, but when the Beis Hamikdash will no longer be standing, what will become of them?

**אמר לו: כבר תקנתי להם סדר קרבנות, כל זמן שקוראין בהן מעלה אני עליהן כאילו מקריבין לפני קרבן, ומוחל אני על כל עונותיהם.**

Hashem said to him: I have already established for them the order of offerings, (i.e.,pesukim and halachos pertaining to the *korbonos)*. Whenever they read those portions, I will deem it as if they sacrificed an offering before Me, and I will pardon them for all of their sins.

Another way to achieve atonement and merit the geula is keeping Shabbos properly.

The Chofetz Chaim writes something very powerful in his introduction to chelek gimmel of the Mishna Berura (which covers hilchos Shabbos):

העצה היעוצה לזה שיראה לזרז את עצמו ללמוד הלכות שבת ולחזור עליה תמיד כדי שידע האסור והמותר

The tried and tested way to succeed (in keeping Shabbos properly) is to encourage oneself to learn hilchos Shabbos and regularly review it, to know what is prohibited and what it is permitted.

דאי לאו הכי אפילו אם ילמוד כל ענינים המוסרים המזרזים לשמירת שבת כראוי לא יועיל לו

Because, if not so, even if a person learns much mussar that motivates him to keep Shabbos properly, it will not be of benefit.

ואם אין בידו של אדם חכמה ... הוא טועה בעיקר הענין

And if he does not have the knowledge of hilchos Shabbos, he will make mistakes in major parts of it.

So, we again come to sefer Vayikra. For many of us, these are difficult areas of Torah and not always so popular. There are some exceptions. I remember one time walking home from shul with Rabbi Pinchos Roberts ztl, as I often had the privilege to do, and him describing learning maseches Zevochim in Gateshead Kollel. “When you learn Kodshim, it’s like a drug! Addictive!”

But we at least take comfort in knowing that reading and learning about korbonos can affect a major kappora. So too hilchos Shabbos. Learning about and keeping Shabbos properly achieves atonement and also brings the geula.

That, says the Me’or Vashemesh, is the background to the minhag of some kehillos calling out **לָקֵל אֲשֶׁר שָׁבַת מִכָּל הַמַּעֲשִֹים בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי**, after the last two words - לְאַשְׁמָה בָהּ – are leined on parshas Vayikra.

Not only does it ensure that the leining ends on a more positive note, it reminds of the power of korbonos and of what we are missing, and of our ultimate destination.

The geulah will only be achieved through teshuva. Just as korbonos effect atonement and achieve kapporah, so too, shemiras Shabbos.

May we merit to keep Shabbos properly and merit to once again see the avoda in the Beis Hamikdash.

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