

PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	KETUVIM
Vayikra	28 Mar 2020	3 Nisan 5780	Lev. 1:1-6:7	Isa. 43:21-44:23	Matt. 5:23-30

It is written (Lev. 1:15), “And the priest...pinch off its neck.” The offerings of animals were divided into three categories and their treatment. The livestock require ritual slaughter both in order to be offered up as sacrifices and in order to be eaten as food. The birds are killed by “nipping” when they are offered up as offerings and by ritual slaughter when they are eaten as food. Fish are not brought up as offerings and when they are eaten as food they require only to be “gathered” from the water, not ritual slaughter.

The purpose of ritual slaughter is to render the animal fit to ascend from the animal kingdom into either the human kingdom, by being eaten, or the Divine realm, by being offered up as an offering. So, the ritual slaughter serves to disconnect the animal from its animality, enabling its physical constituents and life-force to become part of a higher order of being. Without ritual slaughter, the animal retains its animalistic orientation; if it is consumed by a human being it augments his animal nature, drawing him down into its animality rather than being elevated into his humanity.

The dry land, whose inhabitants are not at all connected to it, can be seen as an allegory for our physical world, in which Divinity is so obscured that we appear to exist independently of any Divine life-force. The ocean is an allegory for the spiritual worlds, in which Divinity is revealed and whose denizens are therefore aware of the fact that they owe their existence to the Divine life-force within them, much as fish must remain in the water in order to live.

Livestock, who were created from earth, are thus archetypes of non-Divine, “earthly” consciousness. They can be lifted above the earth, but they cannot fly above it on their own. Similarly, our “animal” dimension – our physical body and its animal soul – is naturally drawn downward toward materiality, and therefore requires the complete rehabilitation effected by ritual slaughtering in order to be elevated above its natural condition.

Birds were created from mud (Gen. 1:20-21; 2:19) – earth mixed with water – indicating that their “earthly” nature is more dilute than that of earth-bound animals. Thus, they can fly, but they must rest upon the earth when tired. Similarly, our “avian” dimension – our natural intellect – can soar beyond mundane reality and catch a glimpse of sublime levels of Divinity. Nonetheless, its conceptual abilities remain limited by its human nature. Therefore, the intellect generally also needs to be “slaughtered” in order to be uplifted beyond its natural condition.

Fish were created from the water and must remain there in order to stay alive. Similarly, our “piscine” dimension – our Divine soul – retains at all times its pure and unsullied connection with its source, the Source of all life. It does not need to be “slaughtered,” for it has not lost its Divine connection. However, because it has descended into the body and become vested in the animal soul, it can thereby become diverted from its Godly mission, so it must be “gathered,” i.e., refocused on its goal.

Alternatively, these three categories of creatures can be taken to allude to the three ways people may be categorized with respect to their progress in spiritual growth. Livestock correspond to the wicked, who have succumbed to the pull of their material drives; fish correspond to the righteous, who have so refined themselves that they are no longer challenged by evil; fowl are the intermediates, who constantly struggle with their earthly desires but successfully refrain from wrongdoing.

In these contexts, we can understand why fish are not brought as offerings. The purpose of the offerings is to refine and elevate the human/animal soul; the Divine soul, therefore – or someone who has completely identified with it – has no place on the Altar.

Fowl and livestock, in contrast, are brought as offerings, and both are offered by cutting off the flow of blood and food between the head and the body. This indicates that the elevation of the animal out of its animality is accomplished by severing the intellect (the head) from the emotions (the body), so that our animalistic urges not befoul our intellect,

which must be left free to focus on Divinity. With this in mind, we can understand the difference between how fowl and livestock are offered.

Our intellect and emotions are reflected in the expressions on our faces. The front of the body therefore signifies spiritual life lived in the normal, rational manner – proper behavior inspired by emotions engendered by the intellect. the back of the head, on the other hand, is devoid of expression, and thus signifies a spiritual life imposed by coercion and discipline – proper behavior, but devoid of emotion or inspiration.

A livestock animal – a person who has succumbed to the forces of materialism – must always have recourse to his “neck” -supra-rational discipline – for he cannot rely upon his heart and mind having reached any degree of Divine consciousness. Therefore, he cannot be slaughtered from the back of the neck: this aspect of his psyche must remain intact.

A fowl – an intermediate – under normal circumstances is much the same: his animal drives are fully functional, albeit held in check. But upon being brought as a sacrifice to Hashem in the Holy Temp, i.e. at times of great spiritual awakening, the intermediate person is transformed. He no longer needs the yoke on the nape of his neck, for his complete focus on Hashem enables him to serve Him with his own intellect and emotion.

Besides the location of the scission, ritual slaughter and nipping differ with regard to who may perform them and how they are transformed. Ritual slaughter, even of offerings, may be performed by a layperson, but must be performed with a properly prepared knife. Nipping may only be performed by a priest, and is performed with the priest’s thumbnail.

In the process of ritual slaughter, the slaughterer is considered the agent of Hashem, who effects the elevation of the animal, similar to the way Divine discipline must be externally imposed on the spiritually-underdeveloped wicked person. It therefore makes no difference who slaughters the animal; both priest and layman act as Hashem’s agent.

In nipping, however, the priest is acting as his own agent; he kills the fowl directly with his own hand. In this way, he expresses how the more spiritually-developed intermediate person involves his own intellect and emotions in his relationship with Hashem. Therefore, only the priest – who performs the rest of the sacrificial ritual – may perform the nipping.

Similarly, when we are engaged in intense prayer and/or Torah study, we can reach the level signified in the Temple by fowl. At such times of heightened spiritual awareness, our relationship with Hashem rises to a higher level for we are no longer threatened by external distractions; as a result, we can concentrate fully on connecting with our Creator.

Type of Animal	Created from	Relation with Native Environment	Sacrificed	Preparation for Consumption	Correlate #1	Correlate #2
Fish	Water	Cannot leave it	No	Gathering	Divine soul	Righteous
Fowl	Earth and water	Can fly above it but must rest on it	By nipping	Slaughter	Intellectual soul	Intermediate
Livestock	Earth	Can be lifted above it	By slaughter	Slaughter	Body & animal soul	wicked