

Practical issues

1. Taz, Yoreh Deah 116:6

ואמרין התם דרב חסדא חזי לדקל דקאי ביני גופני א"ל לשמעיה זיל עקרינהו פ"י שעושיין היזיקא ביניקת הארץ לגפנים והם חשובים יותר
We see in the incident of Rav Chisda that his date palms damaged the ability of the grapevines to drink from the earth, and they [the grapevines] were considered more important.

2. Talmud, Shabbat 140b

ואמר רב פפא האי מאן דאפשר למישתי שיכרא ושתי חמרא עובר משום בל תשחית ולא מילתא היא בל תשחית דגופא עדיף
Rav Pappa said: One who can drink beer, and instead drinks wine, is liable for wasting [money].
However, this is not so: Liability for wasting one's body is greater.

3. Rambam, Commentary to Mishnah, Berachot 5:3

הוא שיאמר כשם שחסת על קן צפור ואמרת לא תקח האם על הבנים כך חוס עלינו, שהאומר כן משתקין אותו, לפי שהוא אומר שטעם מצוה זו בגלל רחמי הקדוש ברוך הוא על העוף, ואינו כן, לפי שאלו היה דרך רחמים לא היה מתיר השחיטה כלל, אלא היא מצוה שמעית שאין לה טעם.

This refers to saying: "Just as You had mercy upon a bird's nest, saying, 'Do not take the mother upon the young,' so have mercy upon us." We silence one who says this, because he is saying that the reason for this mitzvah is Gd's mercy upon the bird, and this is not so. If it were a merciful approach, Gd would not have permitted any schechitah. Rather, this is a revealed mitzvah, without a reason.

A need for funding

4. Rabbi Moshe Isserles, Torat haOlah 2:1, Reason 6

שימשך תועלת מהם להחיות הכהנים, מורה התורה שראוי ליקח דרך להחיותם... למען יוכלו הכהנים להניח עסקים עולמיים ויהיה להם פנאי לעסוק בתורה ובמצוה.

This will produce a benefit of supporting the kohanim. The Torah teaches that it would be appropriate to find a way to support them... so that the kohanim would be able to leave material affairs, and would be available to engage in Torah and mitzvot.

A need to prevent sin

5. Rambam, Moreh haNevuchim 3:46, Friedlander translation

The above-mentioned sin-offerings further show us that when we commit a sin, we, our children, and the children of our children, require atonement for that sin by some kind of service analogous to the sin committed... When this theory has been well established in the minds of the people, they must certainly be led by it to consider disobedience to Gd as a disgraceful thing. Every one will then be careful that he should not sin, and require a protracted and burdensome atonement; he will be afraid he might not be able to complete it, and will therefore altogether abstain from sinning, and avoid it.

6. Rabbi Moshe Isserles, Torat haOlah 2:1, Reason 5

שיתן האדם אל לבו שחומר הוא כשאר חומרי בעלי חיים יאבד, ויכלה ככלות העולה על המזבח, והוא הדבר שבו נשתתף האדם עם הבעלי חיים. ובוזה יתעורר שיזבח יצרו ויכניע תאותו...

So that one will take to heart that he is material, and like other living things he will die and be destroyed, as the *olah* is destroyed on the altar. In this, humans are like other creatures. This will awaken him to slaughter his *yetzer* and humble his desires.

A need to avoid punishment (not teshuvah)

7. Rabbi Moshe Isserles, Torat haOlah 2:1, Reason 6b

בעוד הכהנים אוכלים בשר הזבח חטאת החוטא נגד פניו, ומחבייש על חטאתו בין הכהני האוכלי הזבח ומזכירי חמיד שם הבעלים על זבחו ועל ידי הבושה מתכפר לו...

8. Rabbi Moshe Isserles, Torat haOlah 2:1, Reason 11

הקרבן הוא תמורת נפשו וע"י זה ינצל מן הגזירה שגזרו עליו מן השמים, כי דבר המערכה לא יסור אם נגזר עליו דבר רע, רק ד' יתברך מחדש סבות לקיי' הגזירה באחר כדי להציל את זה, והיא כופר נפשו של אדם...

9. Rabbeinu Bechayye to Vayikra 1:9

ומפני שכל פעולות האדם נכללות בשלשה דברים והם: המעשה והדבור והמחשבה, שהם שלשה חלקי החטא, על כן תחייב התורה את האדם להביא קרבן על חטאו ושיסמוך את ידיו עליו כנגד המעשה, ושיתודה בפיו כנגד הדבור, ושישרוף כלי העצה והמחשבה שהסכימו בחטא והם הקרב והכליות כנגד המחשבה, כדי שיתכפר בשלשה דברים אלו על שלשת חלקי החטא...

And because all of a person's deeds may be fit into three categories – deed, speech and action – which are the three components of sin, therefore, the Torah requires a person to bring a korban for his sin. One leans his hands on the korban, parallel to deeds. One admits verbally, parallel to speech. And one burns the tools of counsel and thought which decided to sin, and these are the innards and kidneys, parallel to thought. Thus one atones with these three aspects for the three components of sin...

10. Ramban to Vayikra 1:9

A person's deeds are brought to fruition via thought, speech and deed, and so Gd commanded that one who sins should bring an offering, leaning his hands on it to represent deed, verbally confessing to represent speech, and burning the innards on the fire to represent the organs of thought and desire...

A need for teshuvah

11. Ralbag to Parshat Vayikra

התועלת הראשון הוא להישיר האנשים, כאשר חטאו, שישובו אל ד' יתעלה והוא יכפר להם עוונותיהם. ובזה תועלת נפלא להגיע האנשים אל השלמות האנושי. וזה כי אין צדיק בארץ אשר לא חטא. ואם יאמינו האנשים שחטאו חטא מה, שיהיה נכתם עונם תמיד לפני ד' יתעלה, יוסיפו לחטוא, לחושבם שכבר אבדו בסיבת מה שחטאו ולא יועילם הישמרם מחטא במה שעתיד. ואמנם כאשר ידעו שבשובם מדרכם הרעה וישובו לדרכי ד' יתעלה, יכופרו להם עוונותם, אז יהיו נזהרים מחטוא עוד וישובו אל ד' יתעלה כדי שירחמם ויכפר עליהם מה שחטאו בו. The primary benefit [of korbanot] is to guide people, when they sin, to return to exalted Gd, and He will wipe away their sins. In this lies a wondrous benefit, bringing people to human perfection. For there is no righteous person in the land who has not sinned. If people who have sinned in some way will believe that their sin will be an eternal stain before exalted Gd, then they will continue to sin, thinking that they are already lost due to their sin, and that abstaining from sin in the future will not help them. But when they will know that when they return from their wicked path and return to the paths of exalted Gd then their sins will be wiped away for them, then they will be careful not to sin further, and they will return to exalted Gd, so that He will have mercy upon them and wipe away the sins they had committed.

A need for education

12. Rambam, Moreh haNevuchim 3:46

The Torah has told us... that the Egyptians worshipped the constellation of the lamb, which was why they prohibited slaughtering sheep, and they abhorred herders of sheep... And groups of the Sabeans [Yemenites] worshipped demons and thought they took the form of goats... and slaughtering cattle was abhorred by most idolaters, and they raised this species in great numbers, and so you find that people from India will not slaughter cattle even today... And to eradicate these false views, He commanded us to bring only these three species... so that the deed that they considered the ultimate rebellion would be used to draw closer to Gd, and would be used to atone for sins...

13. Rabbi Moshe Isserles, Torat haOlah 1:1

לזה אמרו כי הר הבית היה ת"ק על ת"ק נגד העולם בכללו שהוא מהלך ת"ק שנה לרחבו ולארכו דהיינו ת"ק על ת"ק. וידוע שהעולם כלו אינו עומד על שום סמיכה רק תלוי במאמר ד' יתברך, וכמו (איוב כז) "תולה ארץ על בלימה". כן אמרו שהיה תחת הר הבית כיפין על כיפין חלול מתחתיו, כדמות העולם עומד על בלימה.

For this reason they said that the Temple Mount was 500 by 500 [cubits], parallel to the world as a whole, which is 500 years' walk in width and length, 500 by 500. And it is known that the world stands without support, suspended by the declaration of Gd, like Job 27, "He suspends the world on nothing." So they said that under the Temple Mount were domes upon domes, with hollow spaces below, like the world standing upon nothing.

A need for mystical benefits

14. Rabbi Moshe Isserless, Torat haOlah 2:1, Reason 9

שיכוין המכוין המקריב להקריב את עצמו לפני ד', והראות ממעשים אלו כי כל אלו הבעלי חיים שהם במדריגת הנושא אל כה הדברי המיוחד באדם ראוי להקריב אל האלקים ולהתיישר לפניו בכל מיני עבודות עד שישאר השכל זך ונקי ...

One who brings a korban should intend to bring himself before Gd, demonstrating with these deeds that all living creatures are as supporters for the power of speech which is unique to man. He is suited to come before Gd and be straightened before Him with all manner of service, until his intellect remains, pure and clean...

15. Rabbi Moshe Isserless, Torat haOlah 2:1, Reason 1

אמר שכבר ימצא דבוק השכינה האלקית עם האומה הישראלית באמצעות הקרבנות הנקרבים בבית המקדש כעניין שתמצא הנפש השכלית עם הגוף על ידי המזונות שנזון בו, וכמו שלא נודע טעם הזנת זאת הנפש העליונה באלו המזונות הגשמיים שאינן מטבעה, אבל מצאנו ראינו תועלתם, ככה לא נדע טעם צורך השכינה אל אלו הקרבנות אבל נמצא דבקות השכינה עמנו באמצעותם...

It said that the Divine Shechinah adheres to the Jewish nation via the korbanot brought in the Beit haMikdash, as one finds that the intellectual spirit adheres to the body via the food that feeds it. And just as the reason why this higher spirit is nourished by this material food, which is not of its nature, is unknown, but we have seen its benefit, so we do not know why the Shechinah needs these korbanot, but it is found that the Shechinah adheres to us through them...

16. Rabbi Moshe Isserless, Torat haOlah 2:1, Reason 10

וזהו סוד הקרבנות כי כשהקרבת נקרב כתקונו ועולה לרצון על מזבח העליון מקרב הכחות העליונים ביחד כי על ידי פעולת הצדיקים מתדבקים העליונים והשפע והרצון יורד מלמעלה...

And this is the secret of the korbanot, for when the korban is brought properly and it ascends desirably upon the upper altar, it draws the upper forces together, for via the deeds of the tzaddikim the upper elements adhere, and the influence and desire descend from above...

My own attempt: It's about drawing close to Gd

17. Bereishit 4:2-5

And Hevel was a herder of sheep, and Kayin was a worker of the land. And at the end of days, Kayin brought from the fruit of the land, a gift for Gd. And Hevel also brought from the first of his sheep and their fat. And Gd turned to Hevel and to his gift. And Gd did not turn to Kayin and to his gift, and Kayin was greatly enraged, and his face fell.

18. Ramban to Bereishit 4:3

הבינו האנשים האלה סוד גדול מהקרבנות והמנחות, וכן נח.

These people understood a great secret in korbanot and gifts, as did Noach.

19. Bereishit 8:21

And Gd said to Himself: I will not continue to curse the land for humanity, for the nature of the heart of man is wicked from his immaturity, and no longer will I strike all life as I did.

20. Midrash, Bereishit Rabbah 31:5b

איזהו חמס ואיזהו גזל?

א"ר חנינא: חמס אינו שוה פרוטה, וגזל ששוה פרוטה.

וכך היו אנשי המבול עושים: היה אחד מהם מוציא קופתו מליאה תורמוסים, והיה זה בא ונוטל פחות משוה פרוטה וזה בא ונוטל פחות משוה פרוטה, עד מקום שאינו יכול להוציאו ממנו בדין.

What is *chamas* and what is *gezel*?

Rabbi Chanina said: *Chamas* is taking something that is not worth a *perutah*, *gezel* is taking something that is worth a *perutah*.

And so the generation of the Flood did: One of them would put out his box filled with beans, and another would come take less than a *perutah*'s worth, and another would come and take less than a *perutah*'s worth, to the point that the owner could not claim it from him in court.

21. Bereishit 8:20-21

And Noach built an altar for Gd, and he took from every pure animal and from every pure bird, and he brought burnt offerings on the altar. And Gd smelled the pleasing smell, and Gd said to Himself: I will not continue to curse the land for humanity, for the nature of the heart of man is wicked from his immaturity, and no longer will I strike all life as I did.

22. Bereishit 18:19

For I have loved him, for he instructs his children and his household after him, and they guard the path of Gd to perform righteousness and justice...

23. Rambam, Moreh haNevuchim 3:32

Many prophetic books contain rebukes of people for their great efforts and attachment to bringing offerings... Samuel said, "Does Gd want offerings as He wants people to listen to the Divine Voice?" Isaiah said, "Why would I want your masses of offerings?" Jeremiah said, "I did not speak to your ancestors and I did not command them, on the day I took them out of Egypt, regarding offerings. I instructed them this: Listen to My voice and I will be your Gd and you will be My nation."... The primary intent is for you to perceive Me and not serve others, and I will be your Gd and you will be My nation. This was the goal of the command to bring offerings and focus upon the House... and you came and cancelled the ends and attached yourselves to the means.

24. Malachi 1:8

Bring it now to your [human] ruler! Would he be satisfied, would he show favor to you?