

SPIRITUAL THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

She Said I Was Going To Hell, So I Set Her Straight

While enjoying an afternoon at the park with my grandchildren, I was approached by a stranger.

The middle-aged woman pointed to my knitted yarmulka and said, “the bible says, *‘there is no atonement for sin without the shedding of blood’* so, unless you accept Jesus, you are going to hell.”

This woman, and many missionaries, mistakenly believe blood sacrifices were the “only way” to

achieve forgiveness for sin. They also incorrectly claim that since the Temple was destroyed, the atoning power of sacrifices is no longer available.

Because I knew this verse was distorted, I challenged the woman to show me where it says, *“there is no atonement for sin without the shedding of blood.”*

She pointed to Leviticus 17:11. Although it says, *“I have given you blood to make atonement,”* it does not say this is the only way. She was shocked when I pointed out that the New Testament says, *“according to the law, one might **almost** say without blood there is no atonement”* (Hebrews 9:22).

The word “almost” is eye-opening because it reaffirms that there are ways to receive atonement without blood.

For example, the Torah says the Jewish people were saved from a plague when *“Aaron offered incense and made atonement for them”* (Numbers 16:47). In another instance, atonement was achieved by offering *“golden vessels and jewelry”* (Numbers 31:50).

Although our sages did say, *“there is no atonement without blood”* (Yoma 5a), in context, they were teaching that sprinkling of blood was an essential part of the multi-faceted sacrificial process. Since the sages also said, *“confession makes atonement”* (Yoma 36b), they obviously did not believe blood was the only way to achieve atonement.

continued on reverse

This week's Torah portion Ki Tisa (Exodus 30:11–34:35) contains another striking example concerning atonement without blood. The children of Israel were commanded to “*contribute half a silver shekel (silver coin) as an offering to atone for your souls*” (Exodus 30:15).

It is significant that in Exodus 30:13, the Hebrew word [מחצית - machatzit] is used to describe the “half” shekel. Our sages point out that the middle letter of this word is a [צ - Tzadik] and represents the word for charity [צדקה - tzedakah]. The letters immediately next to the [צ - Tzadik] are the letters [חי - chai] which mean life, and the letters at the far extremes spell [מת - meit] which is the Hebrew word for death.

The Hebrew letters of the word [מחצית - machatzit] allude to the teaching of King Solomon who said, “*charity saves from death*” (Proverbs 10.2), and “*charity gives life*” (Proverbs 11:19).

Our sages say Moshe found it difficult to understand how individuals could give away their hard-earned half silver shekel. In response, God showed him a half-shekel of fire to teach him that in the same way a flame is not diminished when you let someone light a candle from your flame, giving charity does not diminish what you have.

With this in mind, we should increase our acts of kindness and take to heart the words of Solomon, who said, “*Doing charity and justice is more acceptable to God than sacrifice*” (Proverbs 21:3).

Today, our prayers, repentance, and acts of charity take the place of sacrifices and provide an easily accessible way to atone for our mistakes and return to God.

Shabbat Shalom,

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