

Tzav

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

We can learn something from studying the different types of sacrifices, even if they don't actually apply nowadays.

The sin offering was probably the most popular individual sacrifice. If a person had done something wrong, then he or she first of all had to confess what they had done. Unlike Christian confession, this was not directed to the priest. Each person had to confess directly to God and specify what it was that they done wrong. I think the psychology of this is brilliant. It is all about recognizing for oneself what the true situation is. You can fool others, but it is much tougher to fool yourself.

Then, if you were asking for forgiveness for something you had done to another person, you had to make restitution to that person before you could bring your offering. Only after a complete restitution and confession could you bring a sacrifice. You had to face up to your actions and their consequences instead of hiding behind a ritual.

The prophets kept on complaining about problems with the sacrificial system. What they were complaining about was hypocrisy and the abuse of the system. Isaiah asks what the point of bringing a sacrifice is, if the person is a criminal, cruel to others, and insensitive to poverty and deprivation. "There but for the grace of God go I." One has to get one's priorities right.

The sacrifice was not an easy way of getting out of trouble or a way of salving one's conscience; it was a way of getting us to appreciate life. You had to do justice and right wrongs and try to make the world a better place, and only then could you turn up on God's doorstep and ask for forgiveness.