

A Life for a Life (Tzav)

“Behold, I do not give lectures or a little charity. When I give I give myself.” – Walt Whitman

How does a person show thanks? How does one repay an enormous debt of gratitude? How can “thank you” truly carry weight?

In earlier times, the answer was through sacrifice.

By offering and burning an animal upon the altar, one could express gratitude to God for deliverance from danger. Abraham ibn Ezra (on Leviticus 7:12) explains that a sacrifice was the appropriate way of giving serious thanks. Anything less risked falling short of adequately conveying appreciation to God.

On Leviticus 8:23, he deepens the idea further. At its core, a person should be prepared to give his life in service of God, when called upon. A sacrifice was a tangible expression of that readiness, going far beyond words. The offering of an animal represented a life given for a life. The animal stood in our place on the altar. One was meant to imagine, to internalize, that it was one’s own body being offered. By identifying with the animal and recognizing that it dies in our stead, both its death and our lives are elevated.

This is a profound form of gratitude. Yet in our time, we are called to find less destructive ways to express it. We must seek other means of giving of ourselves.

Shabbat Shalom and Chag Kasher Ve’sameach,

Ben-Tzion

Dedication

To Britain’s King Charles on becoming the patron of The Community Security Trust