NO, To Religious Hypocrisy

נפש כי תחטא ומעלה מעל בה ’וכחש בעמיתו בפקדון או בתשומת יד או
בגזל או עשק את עמיתו
והיה כי יחטא ואשם והשיב את הגזלה אשר גזל או את העשק אשר עשק

And HaShem spoke to Moses saying: *When someone sins and commits a mistake … deceiving his neighbor … for theft, or for extortion … he will return what he took by stealing, or what he obtained by extortion, and [just] then he will bring to the priest his atonement offering … for HaShem*
Leviticus 5: 22-25

This week’s Parasha TSAV continues with the description of the qorbanot: the sacrifices that were offered at the Bet HaMiqdash, and that had various functions. Some were part of the daily service of the Jerusalem Temple. Others were offered during the festivities, and some *qorbanot* were individual offerings, to thank God. There were also sacrifices that were an atonement for some transgression. Let’s see an example of this last category.

The Tora describes *the asham guezelot*, a sacrifice that was brought when someone stole and then repented and confessed its crime. The sacrifice, in this case was *the last* step of his atonement, the way in which his fault was finally forgiven. There is a very important point about this *qorban* that teaches us about the moral height of the Jewish people and our Tora. The Tora clarifies that the *qorban* or sacrifice was to be offered only “after” having restituted what was stolen to the victim. In this way the Tora affirms that the *qorban*, a religious act, cannot replace restitution, an act of human justice. As in the case of Yom Kippur, one cannot claim that God will forgive his or her faults towards his neighbor unless he first obtain forgiveness from his neighbor. He must first settle his debt with the victim of his crime and only after that, he has the right, and duty, to seek religious atonement.

The Midrash Tanchuma says that this idea is explicitly formulated in the words of King David in Tehillim, Psalm 24. There, the greatest King and poet of Israel asks: ‘□□□ □□□□ □□ □ *Who is the individual that deserves to rise to the mount HaShem, and stand in the place of His sanctuary?* . Entering the Temple of Yerushalayim was not appropriate in all circumstances. King David’s immediate response was: □□□□□ □□□ “An individual whose hands are clean”, and the Midrash Tanchuma (Parasha 1) explains: *“Only a person whose hands are clean of robbery or theft has the right to enter the Temple of Jerusalem”.*

The God of Israel does not accept sacrifices and offerings coming from corrupt people, before these people corrected their actions. Sacrifices, as any other religious act, cannot be offered as a bribe to God. It is unacceptable bringing an offering to God to seek Divine forgiveness without first having repaired the damage he caused to another individual, and having obtained his or her forgiveness first.

Our Parasha, Tehilim and Midrash indicate the same message: “NO” to religious hypocrisy, something that was not uncommon in other peoples and religions.

SHABBAT SHALOM