The Law of Worship
and the Law of Sacrifice

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In holy temples, we enter into covenants with God that are essential for our progress towards exaltation. One such covenant centers on the law of sacrifice. It is important to understand the intent of the law of sacrifice in order to honor the covenant associated with it. A study of the scriptures will greatly aid our coming to understand the spirit of the law of sacrifice while at the same time increasing our motivation and determination to live the law.

According to the scriptural account, after Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden of Eden, they “called upon the name of the Lord.” What they prayed for is not stated. But it must be certain that at least one of the things they wanted to know was how to do to regain God’s presence for as the account reads, “they were shut out from his presence” (Moses 5:4). In response to their prayers, the Lord said “that they should worship the Lord their God, and should offer the firstlings of their flocks, for an offering unto the Lord” (Moses 5:5).

The law of worship has been given to man in every age. In our dispensation, the Lord told the Church, “all men must repent and believe on the name of Jesus Christ, and worship the Father in his name. . . . or they cannot be saved in the Kingdom of God” (D&C 20:29). Dallin H. Oaks described true worship in these terms: “Worship often includes actions, but true worship always involves a particular attitude of mind. The attitude of worship evokes the deepest feelings of allegiance, adoration, and awe. Worship combines love and reverence in a state of devotion that draws our spirits closer to God.” The attitude of true worship of God means to emulate God by placing him at the very center of our lives. When God is placed at the center of our lives then his work and glory, which is to “bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39), becomes our work and glory. In this condition all our actions are ultimately aimed at bringing to pass the immortality and eternal life of God’s children.

The law of worship and the law of sacrifice are inherently connected. The ritual associated with the law of sacrifice is a visual representation of the law of worship. We are not told specifically how Adam performed the ritual of the law of sacrifice. We do know, however, that the law of sacrifice was passed on to Adam’s posterity. It continued to the time of Moses and was incorporated in the law of Moses. In Leviticus chapter one, a detailed description of the ritual associated with the law of sacrifice is given. This description is very revealing. Since the “law of sacrifice is required of all disciples,” the description of the sacrificial procedure will help in understanding what is meant by the law of sacrifice and the law of worship.

According to Leviticus 1, the offering was first killed (vs. 5). After it was killed, the animal was flayed, or skinned (vs. 6). The skin was not to be burnt for that would produce an
offensive smell; the sacrifice was to be a “sweet savour unto the Lord” (vs. 9), meaning that this sacrifice was acceptable to God. The animal was then cut into pieces and laid in a specified order on the altar (vss. 6-9). First, the head was removed and placed on the altar. Second, the fat was cut off and laid next to the head. Then the inwards were taken out and laid next to the fat. After that, the legs were cut off the carcass and laid next to the inwards. Finally, the carcass was placed on the altar. After all this was done, the entire animal was consumed in flames. It seems that the sacrificial offerings performed at the time of Adam were similar to the procedure described in Leviticus 1 for we are told that Abel “brought of the firstlings of his flock, and the fat thereof” (Genesis 4:4; Moses 5:20; emphasis added).

The Hebrew name of the burnt offering is olah (“that which goes up”), meaning the offering that goes up or is given up to God. The translation of olah in the King James Version is the “burnt offering” because the entire animal was consumed in the flames of the fire, and, unlike other sacrifices, no part was eaten by the offerer or priest. The symbolism of this is clear: the burnt offering was a consecration offering. In other words, the entire offering was consecrated to God. It can be seen from this that the law of sacrifice is not only inherently connected with the law of worship but also with another covenant made in the temple, the law of consecration. Of this, Elder Bruce R. McConkie taught: “Sacrifice and consecration are inseparably intertwined”

But what was being sacrificed or consecrated to God? The answer was given to Adam and Eve. After “many days” of performing the ritual associated with the law of sacrifice, “an angel of the Lord appeared unto Adam, saying: Why dost thou offer sacrifices unto the Lord?” Adam responded by saying, “I know not, save the Lord commanded me.” Then the angel explained the meaning of the sacrifice in these words: “This thing is a similitude of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten of the Father” (Moses 5:6-7). That is, the lamb symbolized the sacrifice of Jesus Christ in behalf of Adam and Eve and their posterity.

The cutting of the lamb into pieces and placing the pieces on the altar to be entirely consumed by the flames was a representation of the worship, sacrifice, and consecration of Jesus Christ to God’s work and glory. His worship and sacrifice was evidenced by his consecrating all he had to the building of the Kingdom of God. Each piece of the sacrificial lamb symbolized specific aspects of Christ’s consecration to the salvation of man through the atonement. The severed head symbolized that the Savior would devote all his thoughts, intellect, and study to the salvation of man. Likewise, the fat represented that all the Savior’s energy would be consecrated to the atoning work. The inwards, typifying the Savior’s emotions, best exemplified by his love, mercy, and compassion, would be aimed at saving mankind from a world of darkness and doom while leading them into the path that leads to exaltation. The legs symbolized that the direction and course of the Savior’s life would be dedicated to one end alone: to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of God’s children. In other words, the sacrifice, flaying, and burning of the sacrificial lamb symbolized that Christ would sacrifice and devote all his heart, might, mind, and strength to God’s work and glory. *This is the ultimate form of worship!*

Just as Jesus Christ would sacrifice and consecrate all he had to God’s work and glory so must Adam and Eve (and their posterity) sacrifice all they have for the same purpose. Therefore, the angel told Adam and Eve that from that day forward, everything they did was
to be done “in the name of the Son” (Moses 5:7-8). Paul stated it this way: “present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1). It is in this way that many in the past “who had been faithful in the testimony of Jesus while they lived in mortality” had “offered sacrifice in the similitude of the great sacrifice of the Son of God” (D&C 138:12-13).

The scriptures also reveal many other insights relative to the law of sacrifice that are helpful. For instance, as already noted, the ritual associated with the law of sacrifice became an important part of the law of Moses. In fact, the burnt offering was to be offered “day by day” in both the morning and the evening (Numbers 28:3-4). This was to continually remind Israel that not only were they dependent upon the future sacrifice of the Messiah for their salvation but that all their activities, every day, all day, should be devoted to God.

The Old Testament is clear that performing the ritual of sacrifice was not as important as the intent of the rite. When Saul was commanded by the prophet Samuel to lead the Israelites in battle against their age old enemy, the Amalekites, he was told to “utterly destroy all that they [the Amalekites] have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass” (1 Samuel 15:3). However, Saul was disobedient to the command of the Lord through Samuel. After defeating the Amalekites, and killing all the people, he spared “the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs” that he might offer “sacrifice unto the Lord” (1 Samuel 15:9-21). Saul’s disobedience violated the very intent of the law of sacrifice. Therefore, Samuel rebuked Saul saying, “Hath the L ORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the L ORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (1 Samuel 15:22). Likewise, a later prophet chided Israel for ritualistic living of the law of sacrifice without considering its intent: “For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings” (Hosea 6:6).

The relationship between the intent of the law of sacrifice and the ritual is well illustrated in the story of Lehi. When Lehi was commanded to leave Jerusalem “and depart into the wilderness,” we are told that he “he left his house, and the land of his inheritance, and his gold, and his silver, and his precious things, and took nothing with him, save it were his family, and provisions, and tents, and departed into the wilderness” (1 Nephi 2:4). Some days later, when he and his family stopped their journey and pitched their tents near a river, Lehi “built an altar of stones, and made an offering unto the Lord, and gave thanks unto the Lord our God” (1 Nephi 2:7). The relationship is clear. After sacrificing all his worldly possessions, Lehi offered a sacrifice to demonstrate his willingness to worship God with all his heart, might, mind, and strength by placing him at the center of his life and actions.

Note the similarity in the life of Abraham. After the Lord had told him to “Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee,” Abraham obediently left his land and people and came into the land of Canaan, the promised land. Upon his arrival, he built an altar and offered sacrifice (Gen. 12:7).

In fact, the whole life of Abraham is a paradigm of how the law of sacrifice should be lived. At various times, he was asked to give up mortal things for higher ideals. In all cases, Abraham was obedient to the law of sacrifice (see Genesis 12-22) and therefore, he achieved his exaltation (see D&C 132:29-37). Abraham epitomizes what Joseph Smith said about the
law of sacrifice. He explained that the law of sacrifice requires a “man to lay down his all, his character and reputation, his honor, and applause, his good name among men, his houses, his lands, his brothers and sisters, his wife and children, and even his own life -- counting all things but filth and dross for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ.”

The example of Abraham and Lehi is found in other places in the scriptures. For instance, the law of sacrifice permeates the entire gospel of Matthew. Note the following examples. Upon seeing the star that signaled the birth of the Messiah, the wise men demonstrated their willingness to make a sacrifice for a higher cause by leaving their homeland and making an extended journey to find the Christ child and pay homage to him. The giving of their treasure, which included the expensive gifts of “gold, and frankincense, and myrrh,” was a further demonstration of their willingness to sacrifice what they had to the child who would bring salvation to all men (see Matt. 2:1-12). In stark contrast, Herod, the king of the Savior’s own people, was not willing to sacrifice anything to worship the Savior but instead attempted to assassinate his would be rival (Matt. 2:1-18). Matthew also records the sacrifice made by some of the Savior’s disciples. When Peter, Andrew, James, and John were asked to follow the Savior, “they straightway left their nets [occupation], and followed him.” Interestingly enough, the account reveals that James and John not only left their nets, but their father also (Matt. 4:18-22). Speaking of this kind of sacrifice, Matthew records the Savior saying, “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37). Again, on another occasion, the Savior said: “And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life” (Matt. 19:29). Matthew also records that the ultimate sacrifice made by any man was made by the Savior himself when he retired to Gethsemane to begin the atoning sacrifice. That this was truly a sacrifice is revealed in the Savior’s own words, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39). Submitting our will to the will of the Father is the essence of the law of sacrifice.

The scriptures inform us that with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ the ritual associated with the law of sacrifice, the killing of an animal, was done away with. After the great destruction had come upon the land associated with the death of Christ, the Lord said to the people: “ye shall offer up unto me no more the shedding of blood; yea, your sacrifices and your burnt offerings shall be done away, for I will accept none of your sacrifices and your burnt offerings.” Instead of offering blood sacrifices, the Lord required a new sacrifice: “And ye shall offer for a sacrifice unto me a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (3 Nephi 9:19-20). In the Doctrine and Covenants, the latter-day Church was given the same commandment: “Thou shalt offer a sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in righteousness, even that of a broken heart and a contrite spirit” (D&C 59:8).

For one to offer a sacrifice of a broken heart and a contrite spirit, he must recognize his spiritual poorness, mourn his sins, and come unto Christ for forgiveness. When that happens, the sacrifice of Christ will come into his heart and comfort him through the miracle of forgiveness (see 3 Nephi 12:3-4). Elder Neal A. Maxwell spoke of this in these terms:
So it is that real, personal sacrifice never was placing an animal on the altar. Instead, it is a willingness to put the animal in us upon the altar and letting it be consumed! Such is the “sacrifice unto the Lord . . . of a broken heart and a contrite spirit,” (D&C 59:8), a prerequisite to taking up the cross, while giving “away all [our] sins” in order to know God (Alma 22:18); for the denial of self precedes the full acceptance of Him.  

But this is only the beginning of honoring the intent of the law of sacrifice. President Spencer W. Kimball taught:

. . .we must lay on the altar and sacrifice whatever is required by the Lord. We begin by offering a “broken heart and a contrite spirit.” We follow this by giving our best effort in our assigned fields of labor and callings. We learn our duty and execute it fully. Finally we consecrate our time, talents and means as called upon by our file leaders and as prompted by the whisperings of the Spirit. In the Church, as in the Welfare system also, we can give expression to every ability, every righteous desire, every thoughtful impulse. Whether a volunteer, father, home teacher, bishop, or neighbor, whether a visiting teacher, mother, homemaker, or friend—there is ample opportunity to give our all.

In conclusion, the law of worship and the law of sacrifice are interrelated laws that are designed to put God at the center of our lives. Those who enter into these laws by covenant, place all they have on the altar. Their minds, energy, heart, and course of life will be devoted to God’s work and glory which is to bring to pass “the immortality and eternal life of man.” In other words, they will “love and serve God with all their mights, minds, and strength” (D&C 20:31). In so doing, they will lose their life in the service of others. By losing their life in the building of the kingdom of God, they shall find it saved in the celestial kingdom (see Matt. 10:39). President Harold B. Lee taught:

If in this day the Church rises to the call of the First Presidency, and if Church members sacrifice of their means, their time, their talents for the upbuilding of the kingdom of God, not withholding their own lives, if that were necessary, then there will come to this people, and to that individual who thus is willing to consecrate himself, the greatest joy that can come to the human soul.  

References

1. President Harold B. Lee taught, “We have in sacred places what we call the law of sacrifice” (The Teachings of Harold B. Lee, Ed. Clyde J. Williams, [Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1996] p.318). Likewise, President Ezra Taft Benson stated, “In the course of our visits to the temple, we are given insights into the meaning of the eternal journey of man. We see beautiful and impressive symbolisms of the most important events -- past, present, and future -- symbolizing man’s mission.
in relationship to God. We are reminded of our obligations as we make solemn covenants pertaining
to obedience, consecration, sacrifice, and dedicated service to our Heavenly Father” (Ezra Taft


5. Elder McConkie taught,

“The law of consecration is that we consecrate our time, our talents, and
our money and property to the cause of the Church: such are to be available to the
extent they are needed to further the Lord’s interests on earth.

“The law of sacrifice is that we are willing to sacrifice all that we have for
the truth’s sake—our character and reputation; our honor and applause; our good
name among men; our houses, lands, and families: all things, even our very lives
if need be” (Conference Report, Apr. 1975, p. 74; or *Ensign*, May 1975, p. 50).


p.318.