

MESHECH CHOCHMAH

Parshas Vayikra

Korban Olah at the North Side

וְאִם מִן הַצֹּאן קָרְבָּנוֹ מִן הַבְּשָׂבִים אוֹ מִן הָעִזִּים לְעֹלָה... וְשָׁחַט אֹתוֹ עַל יָרֵךְ הַמִּזְבֵּחַ צָפֹנָה

If his offering is from the flock, from sheep of goats for a burnt-offering... He shall slaughter it at the northern side of the Mizbeach. (Vayikra 1:10-11)

With the opening of Chumash Vayikra, we enter the realm of *korbanos*. The first category of *korban* to be discussed is *olah* – a burnt offering, which consists of three types:

1. *Olas bakar* — An *olah* brought from cattle [i.e. a bull].
2. *Olas tzon* — An *olah* brought from flock [i.e. a ram, sheep or goat].
3. *Olas Ha'of* — An *olah* brought from birds [i.e. a dove or turtle-dove].

WHY DID THE TORAH “WAIT”?

As our pasuk states, the *korban olah* must be slaughtered in the part of the courtyard which is to the north of the mizbeyach. This is true for the first two types of *olah* – *bakar* and *tzon*. Specifically, the Torah writes this requirement in connection with *olas tzon*, and then derives it through midrash halachah as applying to *olas bakar* as well. This leads us, however, to a simple question.

- ▶ The Torah discusses *olas bakar*¹ **before** *olas tzon*.² Generally, the Torah introduces a principle at the first relevant opportunity. Why, in this case, did the Torah not mention the requirement in the earlier case (*bakar*), waiting instead to write it in the later case (*tzon*) from which we then derive the earlier case?

The Meshech Chochmah explains that in this instance, the Torah preferred to wait, for although Halachically the requirement of the north side applies to both types of *olah*, it has a closer *thematic connection* with *olas tzon*.

1 Pesukim 3-9.

2 Pesukim 10-13.

TZAFON – AND TZAFUN

Commenting on our pasuk which commands that the *olah* be slaughtered on the north side, the Midrash states:³

בשעה שישראל מקריבין תמיד על גבי המזבה וקורין את המקרא "צפונה לפני ה'", זוכר הקב"ה עקידת יצחק

When Yisrael offer the daily olah (offering on the Mizbeach and recite the pasuk" At the north side before Hashem "the Holy One, Blessed is He, remembers the Akeidah of Yitzchak.

How does the north side recall the Akeidah of Yitzchak? The Meshech Chochmah explains that the word "tzafon" (north) is associated with the word "tzafun" (hidden way). Chazal⁴ state that the ashes of the Ram slaughtered at the time of the Akeidah⁵ are constantly "hidden away" i.e. kept before Hashem, recalling the merit of Avraham's preparedness to sacrifice his son to fulfill Hashem's will. Hence, the slaughter at the "tzafon" recalls that which is "tzafun".

The Meshech Chochmah explains this matter further. The Gemara⁶ states that "רוח צפונית פתוחה – the north side is open." This "openness" refers to the faculty of free-will, whereby all options are "open" for the person to choose from. The pinnacle of the faculty of free-will is embodied by Avraham asserting his capacity to overcome every obstacle and resistance to performing Hashem's command to offer Yitzchak as a *korban*. This represents the ultimate free-will (*tzafon*) decision and that, above all, is what is cherished (*tzafun*) before Hashem!

Once we appreciate the background to the *olah* being slaughtered on the north side, namely, that it invokes the merit of the *olah* offered by Avraham at the time of the Akeidah, we will appreciate why the Torah did not mention this aspect in connection with the earlier case of *olas bakar*, but instead waited until the case of *olas tzon*. As we know, the animal offered by Avraham at the time of the Akeidah was a ram – which belongs to the category of *tzon*! Hence, the Torah chose to wait and give explicit mention to this law within the category of *olah* which is most closely associated with the Akeidah – *tzon*! – with the earlier case of *bakar* then being derived from *tzon* through midrash halachah.⁷

3 Vayikra Rabbah 2:10.

4 Vayikra Rabbah, cited in Rashi *ibid.* 26:42.

5 See Bereishis 22:13.

6 Bava Basra 25b.

7 Indeed, the Meshech Chochmah adds that the category of *bakar* is specifically not "kept" before Hashem. The Gemara (*Berachos* 32b) expounds the words (Yeshayahu 49:14) "גם אלה תש" – these, too, will be forgotten" to mean that Hashem is prepared to "forget" the Egel (which was presented to the Jewish People with the words (*Shemos* 32:4) "אלה אלהיך ישראל" – This is your god, O Israel.") A calf belongs to the category of *bakar* – cattle, and hence, although halachically, *olas bakar* requires shechitah on the north side as well, the word "tzafon" does not appear in the pasuk in connection with it, since the full meaning of this word – including "kept before Hashem (*tzafun*)" – does not apply to it.

WHAT ABOUT OLAS HA'OF? UNDERSTANDING THE DISCUSSION

Bearing in mind the special relationship that exists between the halachah of *tzafon* and *Akeidas Yitzchak*, the Meshech Chochmah proceeds to explain a discussion which takes place in the Gemara⁸ regarding the third category of *olah* – *olas ha'of* (birds).

The Gemara inquires as to whether the slaughter of an *olas ha'of* also needs to take place to the north of the *Mizbeach*. The Gemara states that it does not, i.e. this type of *olah* is not learned from *olas tzon*, the reason being “מה לעולה שכן שחיטתה טעונה כלי” — *Olah (of an animal) is different as its slaughter requires a utensil.* The background to this objection is that *shechitah* of an animal-*korban* requires a knife, while the slaughter of a bird-*korban* uses the thumbnail of the Kohen, a process known as “*melikah*”. The Gemara reasons: since they are different in this regard, they should likewise be different in terms of being slaughtered on the north side.

This objection is somewhat difficult to understand:

- ▶ Why should the question as to whether the *shechitah* requires a knife affect the question of whether it needs to be performed at the north side?
- ▶ Additionally, Tosafos⁹ point out that in other contexts, the Gemara does learn halachos from animal offerings to bird offerings, and does raise the objection that animal offering require a utensil for *shechitah* and bird-offerings do not. Why is this case different?

The Meshech Chochmah explains: The requirement of a utensil for the *shechitah* of *korbanos* is itself derived in the Gemara elsewhere¹⁰ from the *pasuk*¹¹ which states that Avraham took a knife in order to be used during the *Akeidah*. Therefore, the fact that *olas ha'of* does not require a utensil for the *shechitah* indicates that *it does not share the connection with the Akeidah* that exists with other types of *olah*. If this is so, then it should likewise not require the other halachah which connects *korban olah* to the *Akeidah*, i.e. *shechitah* at the north side of the *Mizbeach*! And indeed, the halachah is that the *melikah* does not take place at the north side of the *Mizbeach*, but rather on the *Mizbeach* itself.

This is the meaning behind the Gemara's objection in this discussion, as well as the explanation as to why the Gemara only raises this objection with regards to deriving the requirement of *tzafon*!

REVERBERATIONS: THE KORBANOS OF NACHSHON BEN AMINADAV

Taking the discussion further, *Meshech Chochmah* uses this idea to explain yet another *parsha* in the Torah. In *Parshas Naso*¹² the Torah describes the *korbanos* brought by the Nesi'im on the first twelve days of the inauguration of the *Mishkan*. The *Nasi* who offered

8 *Zevachim* 48b.

9 *Menachos* 56a s.v. *ma*.

10 *Zevachim* 97b.

11 *Bereishis* 22:6.

12 *Bamidbar* chap 7.

korbanos on the first day was Nachshon ben Aminadav, the *Nasi* of Yehudah. The Gemara¹³ derives from pesukim that Nachshon's *korbanos* offered that day were exceptional in that they did not need to be slaughtered to the north of the *Mizbeach*.

- ▶ What is behind this seemingly arbitrary exception? Why should Nachshon's *korbanos* be different, and moreover, why should they differ specifically in this regard?

Based on the above discussion, the *Meshech Chochmah* offers a stunning explanation for this exception:

Slaughtering a *korban* at the north side has the effect of invoking the merit of the *mesirus nefesh* displayed by Avraham and Yitzchak at the time of the *Akeidah*. As we know, Nachshon displayed his own *mesirus nefesh* by jumping into the *Yam Suf* even before it split and continuing into the water until it almost covered him entirely, at which point it split.¹⁴ This, says the *Meshech Chochmah*, is why Nachshon's *korbanos* did not need to be slaughtered at the *tzafon*. Nachshon did not need to slaughter his *korban* in a place which represents the *mesirus nefesh* of others, when he had the merit of his own personal *mesirus nefesh*!

The *Meshech Chochmah* adds that this exception was appropriate specifically to the *korbanos* which Nachshon offered on the occasion of the *Chanukas HaMishkan*. Since those *korbanos* were not part of an ongoing category of *korban*, but rather were offered specially on that occasion, they could be considered Nachshon's "personal" *korbanos* with the result that their halachos could reflect his particular status.

With this discussion, the *Meshech Chochmah* takes what would otherwise appear to be a technical halachah of where the *olah* is to be slaughtered, illuminating it through a blend of *parshanut*, *machshavah* and halachah until a completely new picture emerges. Above all, the *Meshech Chochmah* is reminding us of something which represents a trademark of his peirush: the importance of taking note, not only of *which* halachos apply to which cases, but also of *where* in the Torah these halachos are presented.

13 *Menachos 55b.*

14 See *Tosefta Berachos 4:26.*