

DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH

Parshas Shemini

Deep Healing – the Korbanos of the Yom Hashemini

Our Parsha describes the inaugural day of the Mishkan, known as the “eighth day,” on account of it following the seven preparatory days. As verse three describes, on this occasion, certain special korbanos – a goat, a calf and a lamb – were offered by the Jewish people.

THE LANGUAGE OF KORBANOS

What is the significance of these specific animals to be brought as offerings on this occasion? The Midrash elaborates:¹

Said Moshe to the people of Israel: “You have a sin in the beginning and you have a sin at the end. You have a sin at the beginning, as it says, ‘They slaughtered a goat,’² and you have a sin at the end, as it says, ‘they made a molten calf.’³ Let the goat come and atone for the episode with the goat and let the calf come and atone for the episode with the calf.”

- ▷ The “episode with the calf” refers, of course, to the sin of the Golden Calf, which has been a focal point of the parshiyos in recent weeks.
- ▷ The “episode with the goat” refers to the sale of Yosef, following which the brothers slaughtered a goat and dipped Yosef’s coat in its blood to bring back to their father, as recounted in Parshas Vayeshev of Chumash Bereishis.

This Midrash raises a number of questions:

1. It is easy to see how the sin of the *Egel* is relevant to the inaugural day of the Mishkan; after all, the Mishkan represents, in large part, atonement for that sin. What connection, however, does the sale of Yosef have to do with this occasion?
2. It is apparent from the Midrash that the sale of Yosef is not only *relevant* to this day alongside the sin of the *Egel*, but that these two sins are actually connected to each other. For the Midrash refers to these two events not as “earlier” and “later”, but rather as “the beginning” and “the end,” implying that the sale of Yosef was the beginning of a process which culminated in the making of the *Egel*. How is this so?

¹ Toras Kohanim, Parshas Shemini.

² Bereishis 37:31.

³ Shemos 32:8.

3. It is easy to understand how a calf as an offering directly represents the sin of the Golden Calf, but how does a goat represent the sale of Yosef? The slaughter of the goat by the brothers was not actually part of the sale, it took place after the sale had already been completed and the “follow-up” issue of what to tell their father arose!

THE MERIT OF (ONE OF) THE FATHERS

The above-mentioned Midrash deals with two of the three offerings mentioned in our verse. What about the third offering – the lamb? This matter is discussed in the Targum Yonasan ben Uziel, who explains that this was in order to arouse the merit of our Forefather, Yitzchak, who was bound on the altar like a lamb.

This comment, too, requires some examination. Of the three Forefathers of the Jewish people, why was it deemed relevant to arouse the merit of Yitzchak, specifically?

In truth, the particular connection between Yitzchak and the Mishkan can be seen in another respect – the timing of the inauguration itself. The Midrash⁴ informs us that the construction of the Mishkan and its vessels was actually completed on the twenty-fifth of Kislev.⁵ However, Hashem ordered that it be put in storage, as He wished for the inauguration to coincide with the month in which Yitzchak was born – Nissan. Here, too, we ask, why is Yitzchak singled out from the other Avos as being especially connected to the setting up of the Mishkan? Moreover, from this second source we see that associating the Mishkan with Yitzchak was sufficient cause to delay its inauguration for *over three months!* What is the nature of this connection?

THE MAKING OF THE EGEL

As we have mentioned, the inauguration of the Mishkan was very closely connected with our receiving atonement for the episode with the *Egel*. The fundamental problem with the *Egel* itself is discussed briefly in the Kuzari,⁶ and at length in the Beis Halevi.⁷ The idea of desiring a medium to connect them with Hashem in the absence of Moshe is not in itself objectionable. The essential problem began with the way in which they went about establishing this connection. After all, in the absence of Moshe, surely the natural choice for the one who should take his place should be his brother, Aharon, himself a prophet! As such, the correct course should have been for the people to approach Aharon and ask him what they should do. Instead, as we know, the people came and told him what he should do. This roots of this “reversal of instruction” lay in the compulsion of the people to be the ones who would dictate the nature of their connection with Hashem. This compulsion, effectively an expression of a form of self-worship, was only one step away from idol-worship, to which it ultimately and tragically descended.

YITZCHAK’S MESSAGE

With this idea in mind, we can appreciate that the recovery from the *Egel* as expressed in the inauguration of the Mishkan would not be complete unless the issue of their relationship with their elders had been addressed. The individual who embodies this relationship is Yitzchak. In the course of his discussion of the Akeyda (The Binding of Yitzchak), the Chasam Sofer⁸ notes that

4 Pesikta Rabbasi, Parsha 6 sec. 5.

5 The Midrash further states that Hashem “repaid” the twenty-fifth of Kislev with the dedication of the Beis Hamikdash that took place in the days of the Chashmonaim during the events of the Chanukah story.

6 Maamar 1, sec. 97.

7 Parshas Ki Tisa.

8 Teshuvos Chasam Sofer, Orach Chaim sec. 208, in a responsum to R’ Zvi Hirsch Chajes.

although in many respects that trial was harder for Avraham than for Yitzchak, in one key respect it was a trial for Yitzchak alone. For while Avraham received his instructions to offer up his son directly from Hashem, Yitzchak's instructions came from Avraham. As such, part of his trial was testing his commitment to Hashem's will as communicated to him by his father, Avraham. In being prepared to offer up his life in response to that communication, Yitzchak expressed the ultimate level of how one should relate to the elders of the generation.

Now we can understand why, of all the forefathers whose merit might be invoked on this occasion, it was Yitzhak specifically who was chosen, as represented by the lamb offered as korban by the people. In order for the opening day of the Mishkan to reflect a core recovery from the *Egel*, it had to be permeated by the message of Yitzchak regarding how the people should relate to the elders. Indeed, the trait represented by Yitzchak was so crucial to the inauguration of the Mishkan it warranted waiting three months after it had been constructed so that it could coincide with the month in which he was born.

HEALING FROM THE ROOT

A full recovery from any mistake needs to go to the root of that mistake. Here we ask: Is it possible to identify any earlier episode in our history as the root of the error which led to the *Egel*?

The answer will lead us back to the first of the korbanos of the day – the goat which came as an atonement for the brothers slaughtering a goat and dipping Yosef's coat in its blood. The Midrash identifies this act as the "beginning" of a process for which the *Egel* represented the "end". There are many explanations as to why the brothers judged Yosef as deserving of being removed from the family. However, one thing remains true regardless of what the reason was – *they did not consult with Yaakov* as to how to proceed. Surely, as the Elder of that generation, Yaakov could have provided words of guidance and direction. While it is true that the brothers may have thought that Yaakov might not have been impartial in this situation, that did not stop them from proceeding to act, even though they were likewise not free from impartiality.

Indeed, not only did the brothers not consult with Yaakov, they furthermore took active measures to conceal their actions from him, in the form of dipping Yosef's coat in goat's blood and making it look like he had been attacked by a wild beast. In this regard, the slaughtering of the goat represented a problem not between the brothers and Yosef – who had already been sold – but between the brothers and Yaakov! We cannot presume to fathom the thought-processes and judgment of the *shevatim*. Nevertheless, to the extent that a lack of regard for Yaakov's input was present at that time in some measure, it constituted the roots of what would later come out as the impetus for making the *Egel*. Hence, on this inaugural day which represented the recovery from the *Egel*, this root "beginning" act, too, had to be addressed.