

PSHUTO SHEL MIKRA

From the Teachings of Rav Yehuda Copperman zt"l

PARSHAT VAYIKRA

The Location of a Mitzvah in the Torah

וַשַּׁחֵט אֹתוֹ עַל יָרֵךְ הַמִּזְבֵּחַ צָפֹנָה

He shall slaughter it at the northern side of the Mizbeach. (Vayikra 1:11)

Our parsha is devoted to the subject of *korbanot*. The first *korban* discussed is the *korban olah*, which consists of three types:

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

The Torah Chose to “Wait” Before Stating a Halachah

Since the *olah* belongs to the category of *kodashei kodashim*, the Torah requires that the *shechitah* be performed in the area of the Courtyard that is north of the *Mizbeach*, as mentioned in our *pasuk*. The problem is, the *pasuk* states this requirement with reference to *olat tzon*, which is the **second** type of *olah* discussed in the parsha, and not with reference to *olat bakar* — the first type discussed. Practically, the requirement of *shechitah* at the north side for *olat bakar* is derived from *olat tzon* through *midrash halachah*.

This is certainly something which demands an explanation: Why did *Torah SheBichtav*

choose not to write this halachah in the first case where it is relevant (*olat bakar*), rather, writing it only in the second case (*olat tzon*) and then leaving us to derive the halachah for the first case from the second through a *drashah*?

This question is dealt with by the **Meshech Chochmah**, who explains:

The Torah wrote (the requirement of) tzafon regarding olat tzon, not olat bakar, even though every olah is slaughtered north of the Mizbeach, as indeed the north side is referred to in a later pasuk (4:24) as “בְּמִקוֹם אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁחַט הָעֹלָה” — in the place where the olah is slaughtered.” Nonetheless, the Torah took care to mention “tzafon” specifically regarding olat tzon ... for “tzafon” is associated with Akeidat Yitzchak, whose ashes are kept (tzafun) before Hashem¹ ... Therefore, it is written only in connection with olat tzon, in remembrance of the ram that was offered instead of Yitzchak at the time of the Akeidah.²

And it is also for this reason it was (specifically) not mentioned in connection with olat bakar, for Chazal (Berachot 32b) explain the pasuk (Yeshayahu 49:14) “גַּם אֱלֹהֵי תִשְׁכַּחֲנָה — These, too, will be forgotten,” as referring to the Egel,³ which they made as a “שׂוֹר אֹכֵל עֵשְׂבִי” — an ox that grazes in the pasture,⁴ which is therefore something that is not “kept” before Hashem.

In this instance, we see *pshuto shel mikra* identifying a special element within a mitzvah, not in contrast to other mitzvot of taryag, but as distinct from other categories within the same mitzvah!

- ▷ On the one hand we see that the halachah of *tzafon* is especially connected to the korban *olah*, to the extent that when the Torah requires the *chatat* to be slaughtered at the north side it refers to it as “the place of the *olah*.” This tells us that although the halachah of *tzafon* **applies** to a *chatat* as well as to an *olah*, nonetheless it **belongs** to *korban olah*, i.e., it has a greater association with that category of korban.
- ▷ Additionally, within the “family” of *korban olah* itself, the halachah of *tzafon* is connected more to *olat tzon* than to *olat bakar*, so that the Torah “waited” until its presentation of *olat tzon* before writing this halachah.

Olat Ha’ of North of the Mizbeach? Understanding the Discussion

Having seen how *pshuto shel mikra* indicates the special relationship that exists between the halachah of *tzafon* and *Akeidat Yitzchak*, **Meshech Chochmah** proceeds to explain a

1 See *Vayikra Rabbah* 2:10: ה' זוכר הקב"ה — *For when Yisrael offer the daily (olah) offering on the Mizbeach and recite the pasuk 'At the north side before Hashem.' Hashem remembers the Akeidah of Yitzchak.* [The word “*tzafon*” (north) is expounded by the *Meshech Chochmah* as relating to the word “*tzafun*” (hidden).].

2 [See *Bereishit* 22:13].

3 The Gemara there explains that the word “אלה” alludes to the *Egel*, which was presented to B’nei Yisrael with the words (*Shemot* 32:4) “אלה אלהיך ישראל” — *This is your God, O Yisrael.*

4 [Referring to the way the *Egel* is described in *Tehillim* 106:20.].

discussion in the Gemara (*Zevachim* 48b) as to whether the *melikah*⁵ of an *olat 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 *olat tzon*, the reason being “מה לעולה שכן שחיטתה טעונה כלי — *Olah* (of an animal) is different (from *olat ha'of*) as its slaughter requires a utensil.”

What is the meaning of this argument? Why should the question as to whether the *shechitah* requires a utensil — i.e. a knife — affect the question of whether the *shechitah* needs to be performed at the north side, so that in the absence of one, the other will also not apply?

Meshech Chochmah explains: The requirement of a utensil for the *shechitah* of *korbanot* is itself derived in the Gemara (*Zevachim* 97b) from the *pasuk*⁶ which states that Avraham took a knife in order to be used during the *Akeidah*. Therefore, since *olat ha'of* does not require a utensil for the *shechitah*, this 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 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.⁷

The Korbanot of Nachshon ben Aminadav

Taking the discussion further, *Meshech Chochmah* uses this idea to explain yet another *parsha* in the Torah. In *Parshat Naso* the Torah describes the *korbanot* brought by the *Nesi'im* during the first twelve days of the inauguration of the *Mishkan*. The *Nasi* who offered *korbanot* on the first day was Nachshon ben Aminadav, the *Nasi* of Yehudah. The Gemara (*Menachot* 55b) states that the *kodashei kodashim* which were offered by Nachshon on that day were exceptions to the rule and did not need to be slaughtered to the north of the *Mizbeach*.

Based on his approach to this *halachah*, *Meshech Chochmah* explains the background to this exception: Slaughtering a *korban* at the north side has the effect of invoking the *zechut* of the *mesirut nefesh* displayed by Yitzchak at the time of the *Akeidah*. As we know, Nachshon displayed his own *mesirut 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.⁸ This is why Nachshon's *korbanot* did not need to be slaughtered at the *tzafon*. Nachshon did not need to slaughter his *korban* in a place which represented the *mesirut nefesh* of others, when he had the *zechut* of his own personal *mesirut nefesh*!

5 [Melikah is the slaughter of a bird brought as a *korban*, which is performed, not with a knife, but with the fingernail of the Kohen.]

6 [See *Bereishit* 22:6.]

7 It is worthwhile noting the explanation of the *Chizkuni* (*Vayikra* 1:15, s.v. *u'malak*) as to why the slaughter of a bird does not involve a utensil; namely, since it takes place on the actual *Mizbeach*, a knife cannot be used, in the same way the Torah forbids using a metal implement to form the stones from which the *Mizbeach* is made (see *Shemot* 20:22). In other words, whereas the Gemara explains that the location of the bird's slaughter is derived from the fact that it doesn't require a utensil, the *Chizkuni* rather explains that non-requirement of a utensil is a function of location of the *shechitah*, i.e. on the *Mizbeach*.

8 [See *Sotah* 36b.]

In Summary

We note that our discussion so far reflects three important principles with regards to learning Torah:

1. There is no happenstance when it comes to the writing of the Torah. This means we need to pay attention not only to **what** is said, but **where** it is said.
2. A halachah which applies to a number of cases will be written in the Torah in the case to which it is most closely associated, even if that is not the first instance where that halachah applies.
3. Mitzvot are composite entities, with the specific make-up of the various elements varying between different categories within that mitzvah. In our case, the halachah of *shechitah* on the north side is especially prominent in *olat tzon*,⁹ somewhat less so in *olat bakar*,¹⁰ and not at all in *olat ha'of*.¹¹

Further Examples: Distancing the Metzora

A similar expression of this phenomenon of the Torah “waiting” before presenting a halachah may be observed in the Torah’s presentation of the *halachot* of *tzoraat*. The *Parsha* of *Tazria* enumerates the various types of *tzoraat* that can affect a person, beginning with *tzoraat* of the (skin of) the body¹² and proceeding from there to *tzoraat* of the head.¹³ Within that *parsha*, there is a halachah which applies to all of the above types of *tzoraat*, but which is mentioned in the later section dealing with *tzoraat* of the head, namely, the requirement that the *metzora* must be sent out of the Camp.¹⁴ Here, too, we ask: Why did the Torah wait until it describes a later type of *tzoraat* before telling us a halachah which applies to all types?

This question is dealt with by the **Netziv** in the **Haamek Davar** (*Vayikra* 13: 44, s.v. *b’rosho*). He prefaces his comments by noting that the different types of *tzoraat* reflect different deficiencies within the person:

It is known that tzoraat comes as a result of sin, however, the type of sin which would cause tzoraat of the body is not the same as that which would cause tzoraat of the head. For tzoraat of the body comes about through sins of physical desire which cause the body to sin, whereas tzoraat of the head is brought about through corrupt ideas. Therefore, the Torah states that even though the physical signs of tzoraat of the head are similar to that of the body, nonetheless, if they appear in the head it is an indication

9 [Where the Torah wrote it].

10 [Where it nonetheless applies, as derived from *Olat tzon*].

11 [Where it does not apply at all.]

12 [*Vayikra* 13:11–28].

13 [*Ibid.* 13:29–44].

14 [*Ibid. pasuk* 46].

that there are corrupt ideas in that person's head. The practical message is that one needs to take greater care to distance oneself from this type of metzora; for one who has corrupt ideas is more likely to cause others to sin than one who is involved in physical desires.

Thus we see that although the *halachot* of distancing the metzora from the Camp are identical with regards to all types of *tzoraat*, nonetheless, the Torah chose to defer writing these *halachot* until it discusses the type of *metzora* where this distancing is of the utmost significance. As the **Netziv** (*pasuk* 45, s.v. *vehatzarua*) concludes:

Even though (all the above types of tzoraat) are identical in terms of the halachot mentioned in this pasuk,¹⁵ nonetheless, in the place where the mitzvah is more explicit¹⁶ it is of greater stringency than a place where it is derived from a drashah.¹⁷

Thus we have seen through the words of two Lithuanian Gedolim how *pshuto shel mikra* indicates both the prominence of a certain element within a mitzvah, as well as the severity of that element in the location where it is written.

15 [E.g. sending the *metzora* out of the *Machaneh* etc.].

16 [In our case, *tzora'at* of the head].

17 [*Tzoraat* of the body.] See further regarding the stringency of something mentioned explicitly in the *pasuk* in Parshat *Emor*, Chapter 69. See also *Haamek Davar* to *Vayikra* 1:11 for an alternative explanation with regards to our opening question, namely, why the Torah “waited” and wrote the halachah of *shechitah* at the north side specifically regarding *Olat tzon*.