

Parshas Tzav

Sacrificing Pleasure

נדפס לעילוי נשמת הרה"ת יהושע בן שמחה בונים בראנשטיין

This week’s Torah portion discusses the laws of the burnt offering and the obligation that the sacrificial parts be totally consumed on top of the altar within a certain time frame. In discussing the specific parameters of this law, we gain insight into the “burning” of our own pleasures, physical and spiritual.

This week’s *parsha* continues the discussion of the laws of sacrifices. The opening verses deal with the laws that concern the burnt offering:

Text 1

And the Lord spoke to Moshe, saying, command Aharon and his sons, saying, this is the law of the burnt offering: That is the burnt offering which burns on the altar all night until morning, and the fire of the altar shall burn with it.

Vayikra 6:1-2

Rashi makes the following comment on the verse and explains that the above wording indicates that the offering may be burnt throughout the night.

Text 2

This passage comes to teach us that the burning of [sacrificial] fats and parts [of an animal] is valid throughout the entire night [following the day it is offered up].

Rashi, ibid

While the Talmud states¹ that the *kohanim* would indeed attempt to burn the fats and the limbs during the daytime—being that this was the actual time for the burning—in truth, they had all night for it to be consumed.

This is the law as it is biblically—that one may burn offering until the following day.

In practice though, there are two opinions regarding the time limit of this offering. The argument is based on the following Mishna:

Text 3

From what time may one recite the *Shema* in the evening? From the time that the priests enter [their house] in order to eat their *terumah* until the end of the first watch. These are the words of R. Eliezer. The Sages say until midnight. R. Gamliel says until the dawn. Wherever the Sages say until midnight, the precept may be performed until dawn comes up. The precept of burning the fat and the [sacrificial] pieces too, may be performed until dawn comes up. Similarly, all [the offerings] that are to be eaten within one day may be lawfully consumed until the coming up of dawn. Why then, did the Sages say “until midnight?” In order to keep a man far from transgression.

Mishna, Berachos 2a

¹ Menachos 72a.

Rashi there, is of the opinion that although the Mishna discusses the burning of the fats in the above text, it only mentions this *mitzvah* (commandment) in passing—in regards to those things whose time limit is until dawn.

The Sages' decree though, of “until midnight,” stated at the end of the Mishna, is only regarding the recitation of the *Shema*, and not in regard to the burning of the fats and limbs.

Rambam (Maimonides) though, is of the opinion that the Sages indeed enacted an edict that one should not burn these fats as well, past midnight.

This can be seen in the following statement of Rambam:

Text 4

The limbs of the burnt-offerings may be offered on the fire of the altar until dawn. In order to distance [a person] from inadvertent transgression, our Sages declared that the fats and the limbs of the burnt-offerings should only be offered on the fire of the altar until midnight.

Rambam, Masei HaKorbanos 4:2

Rambam is of the opinion that the injunction of the Sages to prevent transgression applies to the burning of the limbs and fats as well, while Rashi is of the opinion that this restriction was only said regarding the recitation of the *Shema* but not enacted concerning burning the fats and limbs.

Rashi's reasoning

The reason why Rashi differs from the Rambam is because the Torah explicitly stated that the sacrifice “burns on the altar all night until

morning.” Being that the Torah explicitly permitted that the sacrifice may burn on the altar the entire night, the Sages had no right to limit that time until midnight.

Text 5

The Sages do not have the ability to prohibit something that the Torah explicitly said was permitted. The Sages only have the ability to be stringent in a situation where there is no prohibition or permission explicit in the Torah. However, when there is explicit permission in the Torah, they may not.

Turei Zahav, Yora Deah 117:1

Since Rashi observed that the Torah explicitly permits the burning of the fats until dawn, he understood that the Sages' prohibition “until midnight,” could not have possibly been said concerning the burning of the fats.

According to this rule though, the opinion of Rambam is not understood:

Why is Rambam of the opinion that one may only burn the fats and the limbs until midnight to prevent transgression, if the Sages were, in fact, unable to prohibit that which the Torah explicitly permitted²?

Two forms of consumption

This can be understood through prefacing the comparison that the Talmud makes between the eating of the *korban* (sacrifice) by man and the consumption of the sacrifice atop the altar.

When the Torah discusses the prohibition regarding not leaving any of the sacrifice uneaten after a prescribed time, the Torah says³:

² See Sdei Chemed, Ma'arachos 10:17 concerning the opinion of Rambam regarding this rule.

³ Vayikra, 7:18.

“And if any of the flesh of his peace offering is to be eaten on the third day, it shall not be accepted; it shall not count for the one who offers it; [rather,] it shall be rejected, and the person who eats of it shall bear his sin.”

The Hebrew words that the Torah uses for the expression “is to be eaten,” are “*ha’achol yei’achol*,” employing a double expression of the root word meaning “eat.” The Talmud understands this double language in the following way:

Text 6

If [any of the flesh...] is it to be eaten [on the third day . . . it shall be an abhorred thing]: Scripture refers to two eatings—eating [of the sacrifice] by man and eating [of the sacrifice] by the altar.

Talmud, Zevachim 13b

From the comparison of the eating of man and the consumption of the altar, it is understood that the laws of one apply to the other.

Concerning the offerings eaten by the *kohanim* (priests), there is a commandment for them to eat the portion of certain offerings on the day that it was brought, and not to leave these over for the next day.

Text 7

And the flesh of his thanksgiving peace offering shall be eaten on the day it is offered up; he shall not leave any of it over until morning.

Vayikra 7:15

The *kohanim* were instructed to eat the sacrifice on the day that it was offered and not leave it over any of it until the following morning.

Through partaking of the sacrifice during the night, there are then two things that are accomplished:

- A) The *positive commandment* to eat from the sacrifice is fulfilled.
- B) Eating the sacrifice during the day on which it was brought *prevents* the prohibition of leaving it over until morning.

The difference between these two ideas is as follows:

Concerning the positive commandment to eat from the sacrifice, just like any other *mitzvah*, it must be fulfilled in a specific manner. The *mitzvah* of eating the *korban* has various parameters, in which case, if one is lacking in any of these, they are not fulfilling the *mitzvah*.

However, regarding the second aspect of eating the sacrifice during the daytime, i.e., in order to *prevent* that there be anything that is leftover, it makes no difference in what manner the *korban* was eaten, as long as there is nothing that remained of it.

In a similar way to there being two aspects regarding the human consumption of a *korban*, so too, there are two elements concerning the altar’s consumption of the sacrifice:

- A) The *service* of burning the fats and limbs atop the altar.
- B) The aspect that burning these parts prevents that there be anything leftover from the sacrifice.

Accordingly, it can be said that this is the reason why one should preferably burn these fats during the daytime and not at night.

The Talmud states:

Text 8

R. Shimon said, “Come and see how precious a precept is in its proper time! For the burning of the fat and limbs is valid the whole night, yet they did not wait until nightfall.”

Talmud, Menachos 72a

The reason why it is preferable to burn the fats and the limbs during the daytime, although the burning throughout the night is valid is as follows:

Because there are two specific aspects regarding the burning of the fats—the service and the prevention of leftovers—there are specific laws concerning each.

The *service* of burning the fats and limbs should to be done specifically during the *day*. This is similar to the rest of the *services* performed in the Temple, which were all done during the daytime.

However, there is as well the second aspect of burning the fats and limbs of the sacrifice, in that it prevents any leftovers. This aspect which is only *preventive* and is not an actual service does not need to be done during the daytime and can be done throughout the night.

Answering Rambam

The question was posed above regarding Rambam’s opinion of this prescribed time. He believed that the Sages mandated the burning of the fats and limbs by midnight (in order to prevent transgression). However, being that the Torah explicitly stated that one may burn these portions of the animal until dawn, how can Rambam hold this view? Is there not a rule that

the Sages may not prohibit something that was explicitly permitted in the Torah?

In light of the above explanation concerning the dual purpose of burning the fats however, the question on Rambam’s view can now be understood.

The principle that the Sages cannot prohibit something that the Torah explicitly permitted is only applicable when the topic in discussion concerns an actual *mitzvah*. Meaning to say, that if the Torah said that something *should* be done, the Rabbis cannot say that one mustn’t do it.

However, if the Torah is merely *permitting* that one may do something during the night, and there is no *mitzvah* to actually perform it at that time, then the Sages can stipulate an earlier time, and instruct that one must complete it before midnight.

Concerning the burning of the fats and limbs there are two aspects: 1) burning the fats as a *mitzvah*, i.e. the service of the burning, which must be done preferably during the daytime, and 2) burning the fats to prevent that there be nothing left over from the sacrifice the following day.

It is regarding the second purpose of burning the fats—to prevent any leftovers—that the Sages stated that it should be burned by midnight.

Because this aspect is *preventative* and not a *mitzvah*, the Sages were able to add to the prohibition and limit the time of burning to midnight, although the Torah explicitly stated that one is permitted to burn these portions until dawn.

A personal sacrifice

All aspects of the Torah have a lesson to be learned in one’s service of G-d. So too, the concept of burning the fats of the sacrifice atop

the altar has a lesson in one's service of G-d as well.

Ramban (Nachmanides) explains that the idea that an animal sacrifice atones for an individual is, since, as the person is bringing his offering he is to think, that in truth, all that is being done with the animal should be done to him. G-d, however, through his kindness, exchanged his life for the life of the animal.

Text 9

It is because man's deeds (of the sin) are fulfilled through the vehicle of thought, speech and action, that G-d commanded that when a person sins, he should: lean his hands on the animal correlating to action, verbally repent, paralleling speech and he should sacrifice atop the altar the innards and the kidneys, which are the tool of thought and lust... so that man should think when he does all these things, that he sinned towards his G-d with his body and his soul and that it is fitting that his blood be spilled, and his body burnt—were it not for the kindness of the Creator, Who took a substitute [for him].

Ramban, Vayikra 1:9

From his commentary it is understood, that when one burns the fat of the sacrifice on top of the altar, it is representative of the person sacrificing his own pleasures to the Almighty.

Text 10

And the priest shall cause it to [go up in] smoke on the altar, consumed as a fire offering, [with] a pleasing fragrance. All fat belongs to the Lord.

Vayikra 3:16

When the verse states that all fat is for G-d, it does not only mean that the fat of the sacrifice should be brought on top of the altar, but it also is an instruction that one must sacrifice their own fats and pleasure for the Almighty.

Which pleasure?

Nonetheless, a person may think that while true that he must sacrifice his *personal*, selfish pleasures to G-d, he mustn't sacrifice the pleasure which he derives from the experience of doing a *mitzvah*.

A person can rationalize, that that only regarding his *personal* matters must he completely sanctify them to G-d and not partake of these pleasures for himself; however, concerning things that are holy, he may think that not only is there nothing reprehensible about doing them with pleasure, but on the contrary, it is a constructive to personally enjoy these *mitzvos*.

This is then the message that is derived from burning the fats of the sacrifice:

We see that although eating from the sacrifice is a *mitzvah*, one is prohibited from partaking of the meat before the fats were placed on the altar to be burnt. Thus, even when one is doing a *mitzvah*, one must see to it that the *pleasure* of the *mitzvah*, i.e., the fat, is sanctified to G-d.

This is the litmus test for a person to be sure that they are doing the *mitzvah* properly, without ulterior motives.

If the individual has yet to sacrifice the fats—the pleasure—it is possible that he is not doing the *mitzvah* solely because that is what G-d said to do, but because of the personal gratification that he derives from the *mitzvah*. However, after the person has sanctified his pleasure, and burned it for the Almighty, he can be sure that he is fulfilling the *mitzvah* with proper intent.

For, while true that the person must do the *mitzvah* with energy and excitement, and that he should not do the *mitzvah* dryly, it should not contain a *personal* sense of pleasure, but rather a satisfaction that he is able to fulfill the *Almighty's* will.

During the day

According to the above—that the burning of the fats is expressive of sacrificing one's pleasure to G-d—the reason that the burning of the fats should be done during the daytime, and that only if one has not done so, may he burn them at night, can be understood as it relates to man's service of G-d.

Day is the time of light, and in a spiritual sense, is expressive of revelation. Daytime is associated with the study of Torah and doing *Mitzvos*, as King Shlomo writes:

Text 11

For a *mitzvah* is a candle, and the Torah is light, and disciplining rebukes are the way of life.

Mishlei 6:23

Daytime represents the period that an individual is involved in learning Torah and doing *mitzvos*, while nighttime is expressive of when the person is involved in their own pursuits.

The burning of fats—the pleasure—should be fulfilled preferably during the daytime:

This teaches, that concerning one's own pursuits (represented by the nighttime), it is obvious that he should not be involved in them for his own pleasure and that they should rather be done for the sake of Heaven.

However, concerning Torah and *mitzvos*, a person is likely to convince himself that since he

is involved with holy things, his actions are inherently good, no matter how he goes about performing them, as long as he is involved with learning Torah and doing *mitzvos*.

His rationale will be predicated on the following statement of the Sages:

Text 12

A man should always occupy himself with Torah and good deeds, though it is not for their own sake, for through [doing good] with an ulterior motive, there comes [doing good] for its own sake.

Talmud, Pesachim 50b

A person is likely to think, that because the Torah tells him to continue doing Torah and *mitzvos* though he has ulterior motives, he can be satisfied with remaining at such a level.

However, this mentality is not correct, and such is the lesson of burn the fats during the daytime.

It is specifically in one's Torah learning and fulfillment of *mitzvos* that one must make sure he is doing them in the proper way, and sanctifying his pleasure to G-d.

This guarantees that he will indeed learn Torah properly. For, if he is learning Torah for his own pleasure, he will not be bothered if his ideas are not in line with the ultimate truth of Torah; he is satisfied that he is enjoying the intellectual study of its wisdom.

This though, is not the case with a person who sanctifies their personal pleasure of learning to the Almighty. If such a person would develop a novel insight in Torah, which is not in line with the commentators (and therefore, not expressive of the truth of Torah), he will “burn” his pleasure. His intent is to understand the *truth*

of Torah and not merely to enjoy the intellectual stimulation.

Day vs. Night

As was enumerated above, there are two aspects of burning the fats: 1) as an active service of G-d, and 2) to prevent the prohibition that anything be left over.

This can be appreciated through an additional explanation as to the meaning of day and night.

Day and night are not only expressive of a person's *actions* (G-dly activities vs. personal ones), but represent as well, the different situations that a person can find himself in.

Daytime: This is indicative of when the person feels inspired in his service of G-d. He consciously senses that the Torah is from G-d and that the physicality as well, has a G-dly purpose. He is not involved in the physical for himself, but instead feels G-dliness in all that he does.

Night: This is expressive of when the person does not feel G-dliness. When a person is in a situation of spiritual darkness, he experiences a constant internal struggle toward serving G-d. This conflict is not only relegated to the physical domain, in his efforts to ensure that all these activities are done for the sake of Heaven, and not for his own pleasure, but his challenge is (understandably) also in regards to his fulfillment of Torah and *mitzvos*.

When a person is experiencing spiritual darkness and less spiritual inspiration, he must exert tremendous energy to ensure that he is learning Torah and doing *mitzvos*, not for his own pleasure, but because it is G-d's will.

While this effort of burning his personal pleasure applies both during the "day" and the "night," the manner in which they are each accomplished is entirely different.

During the "day," the times of his spiritual high, his entire pleasure transforms into the G-dly. When a person feels G-dliness in a revealed way, he is able to affect within himself that everything he does is infused with G-dliness.

However, during the "night," although he cannot affect within himself to feel G-dliness in all that he does, he must at least sanctify himself to the extent that he does not do Torah, *mitzvos* and his own pursuits for his own gratification, but that he does them for the sake of Heaven.

This is the difference between burning the fats as an active service of G-d (the first aspect of the *mitzvah*), which is performed during the daytime, and the preventative aspect of burning the fats (the second aspect), which is done during the nighttime.

These two aspects parallel one's two spiritual states as follows: when he is spiritually inspired, he is *actively* able to transform his pleasure into a G-dly one. When he is not, he must at least ensure that there is no *negativity* in his service of G-d, and that he does not perform them for his personal pleasure.

An advantage

Although the manner of serving G-d at night is indeed lower, there is however an advantage, in that ultimately, it is through breaking one's negativity that one brings the era of Moshiach.

This is expressed in the following verse:

Text 13

You shall not sacrifice the blood of My sacrifice with leaven, and the fat of My festive sacrifice shall not stay overnight until morning.

Shemos 23:18

Not leaving over the negativity and fats brings to the time of morning. When we ensure that there is no ulterior motives we herald in the time that “you shall no longer have the sun for light by day, and for brightness, the moon shall not give you light, but the Lord shall be to you for an everlasting light, and your God for your glory.” When we transform darkness we come to

everlasting day with the coming of Moshiach. May it be speedily in our time!

(Based on Likutei Sichos 3, Tzav, reworked by Rabbi Dovid Markel. To see other projects and to partner in our work, see: www.Neirot.com.)