

Limited Facts Are Dangerous

PARSHA INSIGHTS - TZAV (5760)

BE CAREFUL WITH YOUR BODY LANGUAGE

The beginning of our *parsha* [Torah portion] focuses on some laws of the daily burnt offering known as the *korbon tamid* [perpetual daily sacrifice]. The Torah expands on these *dinim* [laws] in *Sefer Bamidbar* [the Book of Numbers], *Parshas Pinchas* 28:1-8. There we are told that the *korbon* [sacrifice] consists of “two first year LAMBS without blemish, day by day, for a continual burnt offering. One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer in the evening...” (*Pinchas* 28:3-4). Notice that the prescribed animals are LAMBS; this will play a major role in today’s discussion.

The last *Mishna* in Tractate *Krisos* explores the following issue. Are lambs always more chosen than goats for offerings, or is the opposite true? The *Mishna* states that one might think lambs are superior to goats, since they are generally mentioned before goats in the Torah. One such example is in today’s *parsha* (which is discussing “forbidden fat”, or “*chailev*”— a technical, *halachic* [legal] term for certain fats in the animal’s body), “You shall eat no forbidden fat of an ox, a sheep, or a goat” (*Vayikra* [Leviticus] 7:23). We see that sheep are listed before goats. Since this happens so many other times as well, one would be led to think that the animals are listed in order of significance. Is it true? If one vows to bring a *korbon olah* [elevation offering] should he be particular to select a lamb over a goat? The *Mishna* concludes that this is a false assumption. There is evidence in last week’s *parsha* that sheep and goats are of equal importance. The laws of sin-offerings are under discussion there, and the Torah first declares that an individual is permitted to bring a GOAT if he wishes (4:28). Only four verses later, in 4:32, allowance is given to offer a LAMB if the sinner wants this instead. **Since goats are written BEFORE sheep in this case, our *Mishna* in *Krisos* proclaims that the two types of animals are equal in status.** One may bring either one as a sacrifice in cases that provide for this option.

A fascinating piece of *Agada* exists at the end of Tractate *Krisos* (28A-28B), relevant to what we have talked about thus far. The *Azara* [courtyard] of the *Bais Hamikdosh* [Temple] is personified as having “screamed out” about certain matters. One fervent plea of the Holy Temple itself was that a sinful *Kohen Gadol* [High Priest], be expelled from serving in that most sacred place. You might be aware that during the second *Bais Hamikdosh*, some *kohanim gedolim* [High Priests] were unworthy of their positions. One such individual was Yissachar of Kfar Barkai, who honored himself while degrading Hashem’s holy *korbonos*. What was his irreverent deed? He used to wrap silk over his hands while performing the service in the Holy Temple. *Rashi* explains that he wished to “protect” his hands from becoming “soiled” with the flesh and blood of the sacrifices. This *Gemara* is also found in *Pesachim* 57A, and there *Rashi* adds some insight. Yissachar’s act was against *halacha* [law] because the protective material he wrapped over his hands constituted a *chatzitzta* [separation] between his skin and the *korbonos* he offered. Furthermore, it was disrespectful to Hashem’s *avoda* [divine service], for a *kohen* [priest] to care so much about “getting his hands dirty” with the blood of *korbonos* [sacrifices]. It was a great privilege to do the *avoda* [service], and “donning work gloves” reflected a major attitude problem on his part.

Now you will see the connection this has with today’s subject. The *Gemara* wonders: what ever happened to Yissachar the *Kohen Gadol*? Yanai the king was sitting at a meal with his wife, the queen. They were having a debate about today’s topic! The king maintained that goats are preferable to sheep for offerings. The queen asserted that the opposite is true; sheep are better. (As proven earlier, they were both incorrect - the animals are equal in status.) They decided to consult Yissachar of Kfar Barkai, since he was a *Kohen Gadol* and supposedly an expert in such matters, being busy with sacrifices every day. They inquired of him, and this was his response: “If goats are superior, why are they not used for the *korbon tamid*?” In other words, Yissachar felt that sheep are obviously preferred for offerings in general, since it says in *Parshas Pinchas* that they are prescribed for the daily *korbon*. The queen is correct! Note that Yissachar was making a major error, as explained above. Neither sheep nor goats are considered more choice animals, based on the *Mishna* in *Krisos*. The fact that they are utilized for the *korbon tamid* does not mean that they are always superior.

The words he said were not considered blasphemous, although they were mistaken. It was the MANNER in which he communicated to the king and queen. The *Gemara* records that as he spoke, he pointed or gestured with his hands to bring across his point. *Rashi* clarifies that his tone and manner were considered arrogant and

disrespectful before the king. This was viewed as rebelliousness. (Also notice that Yissachar favored the queen's opinion over that of her royal husband, since he "*poskined*" [rendered a legal decision] that sheep win over goats. Perhaps this helped incur the king's wrath.) The king decreed that Yissachar's right hand be cut off as a punishment for his insolence. The clever *Kohen Gadol* bribed the law enforcers to amputate his left hand instead of his right. When the king heard about this, he insisted that his right hand be severed as well, and the edict was fulfilled. Upon hearing this incident, Rav Yosef proclaimed, "Blessed be Hashem, Who brought Yissachar of Kfar Barkai to his just payment!" Rabainu Gershom elucidates the statement: those same hands which had denigrated Hashem's holy sacrifices (with silk coverings to protect them from animal blood) were now cut off. Rav Ashi made an observation about Yissachar: he was not even familiar with the *Mishna* cited above, that sheep and goats are considered equal in importance. Just because the daily sacrifice is of lambs, that does not prove that they are superior.

We have learned much about *korbonos* today. One message from this *Gemara* is that before issuing *halachic* [legal] decisions, a *posek* [authority on Jewish law] must be well versed in ALL the relevant sources. A cursory glance at limited information does not yield accurate results. We are also reminded to communicate respectfully with other people, especially our superiors.

By Rabbi Moshe Heigh

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