

Mysterious Beings

PARSHA INSIGHTS - ACHARAI MOS (5757)

WHAT ARE SHAIMDIM AND WHY WOULD ANYONE FEED THEM?

INTRODUCTION: In *Perek Yud Zayin* [chapter 17], the Torah forbids us to slaughter sacrifices outside the *Azara* [courtyard] of the *Mishkan* [Tabernacle] or *Bais Hamikdosh* [Temple]. *Pasuk Dalid* [verse 4] tells the gravity of this transgression: "...it will be considered blood for that man, he has spilled blood; and that man will be cut off (will suffer *karais* [spiritual excision]) from the midst of his nation." In addition, *Pasuk Zayin* [verse 7] remarks that G-d wants us to bring our offerings only to the *Azara* so people "won't offer their sacrifices anymore to the *s'irim* - *shaidim* (*Rashi*) - after which they go astray."

What is the meaning of the "blood" that will be attributed to the one who slaughters an animal for a *korbon* [sacrifice] outside the *Azara*? Also, what is the connection between this sin and *shaidim*? What exactly are *shaidim*?

To understand this, says Rav Zalman Sorotzkin, we must explore the nature of these mysterious beings - *shaidim*. *Shaidim*, also known as *mazikim*, are spirits that resemble humans in some ways, but they are also similar to angels. Although *Chazal* [our Sages] in many places have a great deal to say about these obscure entities, we will only look at one *Gemara* now.

Rav Sorotzkin cites *Chagiga* 16A for our purposes, so we'll study this *Gemara* inside until we reach the main part relevant to our discussion. Six things were said about *shaidim*. Three are like angels, but three are like humans. They have wings like angels. They fly from one end of the world to the other like angels. Finally, they hear the future from behind the divine curtain like angels. Regarding flying, the *Maharsha* comments that there should be no need to state this, since the *Gemara* already said they have wings. However, it means that *shaidim* can reside in all parts of the world like angels can, as opposed to people, who are unable to live in locations of extreme heat and cold. That is the meaning of "flying from one end of the earth to the other like angels". In addition, the *Maharsha* points out, since not even angels really know the future, the *Gemara* is forced to conclude that *shaidim* and angels simply hear from Hashem what will be happening, but they don't know it on their own.

The next part of the *Gemara* is needed to understand the sin of slaughtering offerings outside the *Azara*. The three ways that *shaidim* resemble people are: they **eat and drink**, reproduce, and are mortal like humans. The *Maharsha* concludes that the following is *pschat* [plain meaning] in these words of *Chazal*. *Shaidim* eat foods that are worthy for human, not animal consumption; they have conjugal relations and produce offspring in the same manner as humans, not like animals; and they die the way humans do. In other words, a *shaid* [demon], like a person, has the potential for a blissful afterlife. His spirit might ascend to heaven, unlike the spirit of an animal, which only descends. The *Aitz Yosef* adds his own interesting comment as well. Why didn't the *Gemara* mention a fourth human quality which *shaidim* possess? They certainly sleep the way humans do! In reality, *Tosfos* originally mentioned this. The *Aitz Yosef* answers that sleeping is included in dying. Since it said that *shaidim* die like people, we know they sleep as well, since sleep is 1/60 of death. And the *Gemara* didn't mention a fifth characteristic, that *shaidim* eliminate waste like humans, because perhaps their food is totally absorbed, the way the *mon* [manna] was for our fathers in the *midbar* [wilderness].

The *Oznaim L'Torah* informs us that we must pay special attention to the fact that *shaidim* **eat**. If we keep this in mind, we'll be able to solve our original mystery - what is the "blood" attributed to the one who slaughters outside the *Azara*. We know that there are four basic elements of creation - earth, water, fire, and wind. While humans are composed of all four, *Chazal* tell us that *shaidim* are made of the two spiritual elements only - fire and wind. If so, what is *pschat* in the above-mentioned *Gemara* that *shaidim* **eat**? Since their bodies are not normal human bodies, we must assume that they don't consume what humans do. Our attitude now will be unlike the *Maharsha* brought above, who feels they do eat the same foods as humans. Rav Sorotzkin cites a popular

commentator, the *Abarbanel*, who explains that *shaidim* are nourished from the mists and vapors that emanate from blood. Blood from sacred offerings are especially delectable for *shaidim*, because impure, destructive entities such as *shaidim* have an unusually strong craving to be nourished from *kedusha* [holy] substances. As mentioned above, *shaidim* eat and drink like humans, and THEY ALSO DIE LIKE HUMANS. In other words, when they lack their food - mists and gases from blood - they perish from starvation.

We are finally ready to answer our original question. Why is “blood” attributed to the one who slaughters *korbonos* [sacrifices] in the fields - outside the Temple courtyard? Why does the Torah say he has “spilled blood”? The solution: he has provided sustenance for the *shaidim*, who thrive on blood, as per the *Abarbanel*, especially the blood of holy sacrifices! This sinful individual has lengthened the lives of *shaidim*. He has become a partner to destructive forces who can eventually harm people and spill THEIR blood! This is the meaning of the *pasuk*. “It will be considered as blood for that man” - this blood, which the *mazikim* - the *shaidim* - will spill when they harm people, will be blamed on the person who brought sacrifices in the field. He helped feed *shaidim*, who occupy remote areas like fields and wildernesses, and they feast on blood of holy offerings.

To back this up, the Torah warns in *Pasuk Zayin*, cited in the beginning of our discussion, that *Bnai Yisroel* [Children of Israel] had better not offer up their *korbonos* to the *shaidim* in the fields. It all fits perfectly now.

But what does all this mean for us? Are *shaidim* a cause for concern in our times? In truth, *Chazal* say that anyone who trusts in Hashem and observes Torah and *mitzvos* [commandments] is protected from all evil forces in the world. We are not allowed to be intimidated by such destructive entities. This holds true for all generations. In addition, it is questionable whether *shaidim* still roam the earth at all today.

We are not doing the topic full justice now, since this is not the time or place. Perhaps we’ll elaborate on the matter of *shaidim* some other time, because an enormous amount is left which we haven’t covered. However, it is appropriate to quote the Kotzker Rebbe, found on page 104 of *Emes V’emunah*. The *Rambam* writes that there are no *shaidim* found in the world. But the *Gemara* talks extensively about *shaidim*! We must say that in truth, there used to be *shaidim*. But once the *Rambam poskined* [rendered a legal decision] that there are none, the Court on High followed suit, and they *poskined* likewise. Matters of *halacha* [Jewish law] are decided on earth, and this determines what is reality in the universe. Consequently, there are no *shaidim* left today.

May this remark of the *Kotzker* hold us over until we possibly explore this fascinating topic once again.

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