

Dimensions in Chumash

Parshas Tzav

Korban Todah - The Thanksgiving Offering

Background

One of the fascinating korbanos in this week's parsha is the *Korban Todah* (Thanksgiving Offering), described in Chapter 7 (12-16). The Gemara¹ informs us that there are four situations which obligate a person to bring this korban:

1. One who has crossed the sea.
2. One who traversed the desert.
3. One who was sick and became healed.
4. One who was incarcerated and became free.²

Distinctive Features

It is most interesting to consider a number of unique features that pertain to the *Todah* offering:

1. Although it belongs to the category of *shelamim* (peace offerings), which are normally consumed over the course of two days, the *Todah* must be consumed within one day and the following night.³
2. In addition to the animal itself, the Torah commands that the person bring forty loaves of bread which need to be eaten along with the offering.⁴

We see that the Torah has *increased* the amount of food to be consumed, while at the same time *decreasing* the amount of time in which to do so. Add to this the fact that it is forbidden to leave sanctified food uneaten beyond its permitted time and something about this offering will emerge

¹ Berachos 54b.

² In our current experience, we express our thanksgiving for being delivered from these situations by reciting the blessing of Hago'mel. See Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim sec. 219.

³ Verse 15.

⁴ Verse 12-13.

very clearly: The Torah is presenting the person with a situation that requires him *to invite others to eat his korban with him!*

Why does the Torah want others to partake of the offering with this person?

The Seforno explains that the reason for all of this is so that he can tell others about the kindness Hashem performed for him which led him to bring the offering in the first place. In other words, the **thanksgiving offering** that is brought in the Beis Hamikdash is followed by a **thanksgiving feast** when the offering is consumed!

In the Hallel

It is fascinating to see how these two aspects of aspect of the *Todah* offering are presented and elaborated upon in the words of Hallel, where we find the following three verses:

לְךָ אֶזְבַּח זֶבַח תּוֹדָה וּבִשְׁם ה' אֶקְרָא.
נִדְרֵי לֵה' אֲשַׁלֵּם נִגְדָה נָא לְכָל עַמּוֹ.
בְּחִצְרוֹת בַּיִת ה' בְּתוֹכֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם הַלְלוּיָהּ.

To You I shall offer a Torah-offering, and I shall call out in the Name of Hashem.

My vows to Hashem I will fulfill, in the presence, now, of His entire people.

In the courtyards of the House of Hashem, in your mist, O Jerusalem, Haleluyah.⁵

There are number of basic question we may ask regarding these verses:

1. To what, exactly, does the first verse refer when it concludes “I will call out in the Name of Hashem?”
2. One’s Torah obligations are between him and Hashem and are not normally meant to be paraded before others. Why, then, does the second verse proclaim that he will fulfill those vows “in the presence of the entire people?”

⁵ Tehillim 116:17-19.

3. Having stated in the third verse that all this will take place “in the courtyards of the House of Hashem,” i.e. the Beis Hamikdash, why does it need to further state that this is “in the midst of Jerusalem?” Presumably, the reader already knows where the Beis Hamikdash is, and if he doesn’t, this is not really the appropriate place to discuss it!

The Netziv - Introducing the A-B, A-B Structure

In response to the above questions, the Netziv of Volozhin⁶ explains these verses in the following way. The basis of his explanation is a fascinating parshanut idea found in numerous commentaries,⁷ namely, that a verse will sometimes first present two things and then proceed to elaborate upon them respectively. Rav Yehuda Copperman zt”l⁸ refers to this as the “A-B, A-B structure,” since the verse starts [phrases one and two] by presenting idea A and idea B and then goes back [phrases three and four] to further develop idea A and idea B.

Our three verses from Hallel likewise each contain two parts. Here, too, the Netziv explains that these verses are not to be read “in a straight line,” i.e. as a continuum, with the two phrases in each verse relating to *each other*. Rather, the verses are to be seen as “parallel” to each other, with the first phrase in each verse aligned with the first phrases *of the other verses*, and likewise with the second phrases. The meaning of these verses is thus as follows:

First Verse:

[The Offering]: To You I will offer a Todah-offering - refers to the first aspect, i.e. the offering of the korban itself in the Beis Hamikdash.

[The Feast]: And in the Name of Hashem I will call out - refers to the second aspect, i.e. publicizing the miracle to others at the feast that evening when the offering and its bread are consumed.

Second Verse:

⁶ Harchev Davar to Vayikra 7:13.

⁷ See e.g. Haksav ve’Hakaballah Shemos 12:15 and Meshech Chochmah Devarim 17:20. As Rav Copperman points out, it is possible to see a basic presentation of this approach in Rashi’s comment to Shemos 25:7 s.v. Avnei.

⁸ Pshuto Shel Mikra, Chapter 37.

[The Offering]: My vows to Hashem I will fulfill - by bringing the offering to the Beis Hamikdash, the person fulfills his vow to Hashem.

[The Feast]: In the presence, now, of His entire people - refers to the feast, to which the person will have invited many people, before whom he will publicize the miracle.

Third Verse:

[The Offering]: In the courtyards of the House of Hashem - refers to the location where the offering is brought.

[The Feast]: In your midst O, Jerusalem - refers to the location of the feast, which the Torah allows to take place anywhere within the walls of Jerusalem.

With this approach, all the questions we raised have been answered:

1. “I will call out in the name of Hashem” refers to telling of His kindness at the thanksgiving feast.
2. “In the presence of His entire” people does not refer to the bringing of the korban, but to the publicizing of the miracle.
3. “In your midst, Jerusalem” is not informing us where the Beis Hamikdash is; it is telling us where the celebratory feast takes place.

Stunning Parshanut!

Insight into Ma Nishtana

Familiarity with the nature of *Korban Todah* and the accompanying feast may help us answer a question which has troubled the early commentators, regarding one of the centerpieces of the Haggadah - the *Ma Nishtana*. As we know, the first question reads:

שבכל הלילות אנו אוכלים חמץ ומצה, הלילה הזה כולו מצה

On all [other] nights we eat chametz and matzah, tonight only matzah.

Let us ask: Do we, in fact, eat chametz and matzah on “all other nights”? Indeed, do we eat chametz *and* matzah on *any* other night? Now, perhaps one might respond that the intent is that on all other nights we may eat *either* chametz *or* matzah, as opposed to this night when we may eat *only* matzah. However, if that is so, then that is how it should have been

phrased, as for example the question regarding leaning which reads: “on all other nights we eat either sitting or reclining.” Yet we do not say that; rather, we state that we eat *both* chametz *and* matzah. What does this mean?

A wonderful insight into this matter is offered by one of the great commentators of the eighteenth century, R’ Shaul of Amsterdam.⁹ He prefaces his explanation by noting that the questions of *Ma Nishtana* have their origins in Temple times. Indeed, the original list of questions, as found on the Mishnah in Maseches Pesachim,¹⁰ includes a question regarding the Pesach offering which would be brought in the Temple, and which may only be eaten roasted.

Any child who lived during those times could not fail to recognize that the atmosphere on Seder night has all the trappings of a *Todah* occasion. An animal has been offered earlier that day, and family and friends are together around a table for a festive meal. And indeed, as the Vilna Gaon points out,¹¹ each of the four experiences which would require one to bring a *Todah* were present in the Exodus from Egypt which is celebrated on this night:

1. We crossed the sea [to put it mildly!].
2. We traveled through the desert.
3. We were rescued from the hazardous conditions of slavery.
4. We were released from bondage.

As such, everything that one would expect to find at a *Todah* celebration is present on Seder night.

Except for one thing.

As we have seen, the *Todah* offering is accompanied by forty loaves of bread. Specifically, thirty of those loaves are matzah, while ten of them are chametz. On Pesach night, the child sees plenty of matzah, but not a

⁹ Binyan Ariel, p. 120

¹⁰ 116a

¹¹ Commentary to Haggadah. According to the Vilna Gaon, the four-fold obligation of gratitude is the basis of the mitzvah of four cups on Seder night.

crumb of chametz is to be found! This is the background to the child's question:

On all other nights - such as this - we eat chametz and matzah, together with the Todah offering. Why, then, this evening are we only eating matzah?

That, says R' Shaul, is a good question, the answer to which lies in the uniqueness of Pesach and the Exodus from Egypt, which we proceed to recount.

May we merit soon to bring the Todah offering, both in its general and its Pesach form!