

MESHECH CHOCHMAH

Parshas Vayikra

The Gemara, the Ibn Ezra and the Ohr Sameach

וְאִם לֹא תִגֵּיעַ יָדוֹ דֵּי שֶׁהָ וְהֵבִיא... שְׁתֵּי תְרִים אוֹ שְׁנֵי בְּנֵי יוֹנָה לֵה' אֶחָד לְחִטָּאת וְאֶחָד לְעֹלָה.

If his means are insufficient to obtain a sheep he shall bring ... two turtledoves or two young doves to Hashem, one as a sin-offering and one as an olah-offering. (Vayikra 5:7)

This week's discussion comes, not from R' Meir Simcha Hakohen's Meshech Chochmah on the Torah, but from his commentary Ohr Saemach on the Rambam's Mishneh Torah.¹ As we have seen on numerous occasions, it is impossible to restrict R' Meir Simcha's discussions to any single category, such as halachah, machshavah or parshanut, since he moves seamlessly between these worlds, blending them together in a harmonized whole.

Perek 5 of our parsha discusses a type of *chatas* (sin offering) known as "korban oleh veyored." Literally, this means "a *korban* that goes up or down," since the way in which one fulfills his obligation is dependent on the financial status of the person, as follows:

- ▶ A person of sufficient means must bring a sheep or goat as a *chatas* (pasuk 6).
- ▶ Someone who cannot afford an animal brings a *korban* which consists of two birds, one as a *chatas* and one as an *olah* (pasuk 7)
- ▶ Someone who cannot even afford to bring birds brings a minchah (flour) offering as a *chatas* (pasuk 11).

OFFERING AN OLAH-BIRD BY DAY — A REDUNDANT TEACHING?

In discussing the middle category (two birds — one as a *chatas* and one as an *olah*), the Torah states:²

וְאֵת הַשֵּׁנִי יַעֲשֶׂה עֹלָה כַּמִּשְׁפָּט

And he shall make the second [bird] as an *olah*, according to the law.

¹ Hilchos Maaser Sheni 7:3.

² Pasuk 10.

The Gemara³ discusses the meaning of the seemingly redundant word “בְּמִשְׁפֶּט” in this pasuk – for is not every *korban* brought “according to the law”? In response, the Gemara quotes a braisa which explains that the word “בְּמִשְׁפֶּט” means that it should be “כַּמִּשְׁפֶּט” — In accordance with the law of a *chatas* animal.” The braisa enumerates three ways in which this similarity expresses itself:

- ▶ It must be purchased from the individual’s own funds, i.e. not with money that he is otherwise obligated to expend.⁴
- ▶ It may only be offered during the day.
- ▶ All stages of the Avodah must be performed specifically with the Kohen’s right hand.

The Gemara,⁵ however, questions the necessity to learn the second law (“during the day”) from the animal-*chatas* to the bird-*olah*, seeing as we already have a general drashah, based on the words “בְּיוֹם צִוְתוֹ” — On **the day** he commanded”,⁶ which teaches that *korbanos* may only be offered during the day. This drashah applies to all *korbanos* — to birds and animals alike. This being the case, why would we need to learn the halachah regarding the *olah* bird from a special equation with the animal *chatas*? We should know it independently from the very same source from which we know it regarding the *chatas* itself!

The Gemara responds to this question by saying that indeed we do not need the equation of *olah* to *chatas* to teach us that the Avodah must take place during the day. In truth, the equation is only necessary for the first and third laws listed above,⁷ while the requirement of “during the day” was mentioned “כִּדִּי נִסְבָּה” — for no reason,” i.e. together with the other laws, even though it itself was not actually necessary.

A DIFFERENT NUSACH AND THE RASHBA’S RESPONSE

Thus far, we have presented and explained the words of the Gemara as they appear in most versions of the Gemara. In one of his Responsa,⁸ the Rashba addresses an alternative reading of the Gemara that was brought to his attention. In this version, the Gemara responds to the question that the middle ruling (“only by day”) is redundant, by saying:

You may have thought to say that this applies (only) to a chatas bird, but not to an olah bird, thus it comes to teach us [that it also applies to an olah bird].

The Rashba was asked: In what way is the halachah of a *chatas* bird more stringent than an *olah* bird to the extent that I would have thought that requirement of “during the day” would apply only to it?

3 Chullin 21a.

4 Such as with *maaser sheni* funds.

5 Ibid. 22a.

6 Vayikra 7:38.

7 i.e. from personal funds and the avodah with the kohen’s right hand

8 1:276

To this the Rashba replies:

The question does not begin, for a corrupted text of the Gemara found its way to you. Our (correct) text reads as follows:

“During the day,” this (requirement) is derived from the words “ביום צוותר”! [The Gemara responds]: Indeed, it was mentioned for no reason.

In other words, the Rashba categorically rejects any notion that an *olah* bird would even have been thought to be different than a *chatas* bird with respect to offering it at night. Therefore, any version of the Gemara which seemed to validate such a notion was, in his opinion, corrupted; for in truth, the law regarding both is learned from the general drashah of “ביום צוותר.”

TWO BIRDS FOR ONE ANIMAL – IBN EZRA’S APPROACH

In the *Ohr Sameach*, Rav Meir Simcha suggests a way of explaining the version of the Gemara that was rejected by the Rashba. By way of introduction, he brings to our attention a comment of the Ibn Ezra explaining why the person of limited means brings two birds, and not one! After all, the more expensive *korban* consists of one animal as a *chatas*; why, then, would the less expensive one not merely consist of one bird for a *chatas*?

Ibn Ezra (Vayikra 5:7, s.v. echad) explains:

What appears to me to be correct is that the one (bird, i.e. the olah) corresponds to the eimurim (sacrificial parts), while the second one is the chatas itself.

The background to the Ibn Ezra’s explanation is that when an animal is brought as a *chatas*, certain parts, known as “*eimurim*” are offered on the *Mizbeach*, while other parts are consumed by the Kohanim. In contrast, when a bird is brought as a *chatas*, no parts of the bird are offered on the *Mizbeach*; rather, it is entirely consumed by the Kohanim. Therefore, says Ibn Ezra, an additional bird is brought as an *olah*, which is offered entirely on the *Mizbeach*, and which thereby assumes the role of *eimurim* for the *chatas* bird.

In other words, between the two birds, both aspects of an animal *chatas* are represented. It is, in effect, a composite *korban*!

Based on this explanation of the Ibn Ezra, Rav Meir Simcha explains as follows. Once we appreciate the role of the *olah* bird, i.e. that it fulfills the element of *eimurim* for the *chatas* bird, we can then understand why a special drashah was needed to tell us that this bird cannot be brought at night. For the halachah states that if a *korban* has been brought during the day, its *eimurim* may be offered on the *Mizbeach* throughout the night that follows. If so, then perhaps the *olah* bird may likewise be brought at night, as is appropriate for *eimurim*! It is for this reason we need the word “בַּיּוֹם” to teach us that this *korban*, too, may only be brought during the day.

POSTSCRIPT: A HASKAMAH FROM THE RASHBA

In the *Ohr Sameach*, R' Meir Simcha concludes his explanation with the words, “שמחתי מאד שהנחני ה' בדרך אמת — And I rejoiced greatly that Hashem guided me on a path of truth.” A further window into the joy that R' Meir Simcha experienced upon suggesting this idea can be gleaned from the records of someone who visited him on that very occasion. In the Introduction to the sefer *Mekor Baruch*, by Rav Nachum Baruch Ginzberg,⁹ we find the following:

Here is the appropriate place to mention something that I heard from his (Rav Ginzberg's) holy mouth. On one occasion he visited the Gaon Rav Meir Simcha in Dvinsk and found that the Gaon was in extremely high spirits. Rav Meir Simcha told him that he had just now propounded a wonderful chiddush that was in absolute accord with the truth of Torah, and as he fell into a doze, he saw in a dream that in the Assembly of Heaven all the Gedolim of the generations were sitting and bemoaning the fact that there was no longer anyone in the Torah world who was capable of discerning the truth of Torah. At that point, the Rashba stood up and said “In Dvinsk there is a Rav who sits and learns, who discerned the truth to a greater degree than I!”

9 Written by R' Chaim Stein zt"l, Rosh Yeshiva of Telz.