

Parshas Tzav

FAITH WHEN IT'S TOUGH

Sections of the laws of sacrifices detail how to dispose of what is not eaten or burnt as part of the Korban. It opens:

צו את אהרן וְאֶת בָּנָיו לֵאמֹר זֹאת תִּזְרֹת הָעֹלָה – Command Aaron and his sons, saying, This is the law of the burnt offering. (6: 2)

It is curiously referred to as תִּזְרֹת הָעֹלָה – despite not being the burnt offering at all, which is discussed earlier in the Torah. It is the fats, leftovers and refuse! How is it תִּזְרֹת הָעֹלָה?

The Midrash tells how the students of R' Yosi bar Kisma asked him when Mashiach would come to which he cryptically responded “זאת תִּזְרֹת הָעֹלָה”.

R' Moshe Wolfson quotes the Satmar Rav in the name of his father, who explained. Disposal of the leftovers and undesirable parts at night seems mundane and inelegant; just something that has to be done. The Torah states that an attitude adjustment is called for – this work is not mundane at all, it's תִּזְרֹת הָעֹלָה – and therefore entirely holy!

By quoting this, R' Yosi was telling his students that their question was fundamentally flawed. Their underlying assumption was that exile is a waste of time, but just has to be, like taking the trash out. His answer was that it is not a waste of time at all, it is a separate but equally important component in the bigger picture, just in a different form.

The origins of formal prayer can be pegged to two sources. They either correlate to the Temple sacrifices that are lost to us; or they symbolise the three times the Patriarchs prayed. The Torah records how Avraham stood in prayer in the morning, which we call Shachris; Yitzchak stood in the afternoon, which we call Mincha; and Yakov in the evening, which we call Maariv.

The Patriarchs were prototypes of the Jewish people, each generation refining and honing what was there, discarding undesirable traits; Yakov was the final version. It seems counter-intuitive that he is credited with Maariv, which is the least required of all the prayers. Shachris and Mincha have clearly defined Halachic requirements, and Maariv does not, to anywhere near the same degree. Arguably, it could even be said to be optional! So why is the least significant prayer attributed to our most significant ancestor?

The Sfas Emes answers along a similar vein. Yakov embodies and encapsulates the Jew in exile. There is an imprint in our national identity left by our ancestors' footsteps. Forcibly displaced from his home in Israel, to a degenerate foreign soil, yet a remarkable model of quality, integrity, dignity, and class. Perfect in every way, he

set the bar as high as possible. Maariv, and Yakov, are the Jew persevering against all odds, when it may even be understandable for not pulling through. This is why he was the final prototype, and why Maariv is attributed to him.

The slumps and downside of things have their key role too, and must be recognised as part of the greater web of events that lead us onward. The laws under discussion concern fats of the animal that are burned at night. Fat represent a lack of faith – it is stored energy, hedged against the possibility that the next meal may be hard to come by. Faith in the dark, in the hard times, is critical. This is what Yakov embodied, and that is what תורת העלמה is.

It is pertinent to note that the Torah obliges us to burn the fat, this lack of faith, specifically at nighttime. להגיד לאמונתך בלילות, ובבוקר חסדיך, – at night, or when things seem unknown, cold, dark, when we feel most alone, that is precisely when we have to persevere most.

BREAKING THE CHAIN

The Shalshelas is a rare cantor's note, a tremendous literary device, that makes just four appearances in the entire Chumash – in Lech Lecha 19: 16; in Chayei Sarah 24: 12; in Vayeshev 39: 8; and in Tzav 8: 23.

In Chayei Sarah, we find that Eliezer, Avraham's most trusted servant, is charged with finding a wife for Yitzchak. He is not allowed to take a wife from Canaan. The Midrash tells us that Eliezer had a daughter and it could have been that he might 'just not have found' a suitable wife outside Canaan. This could have left the path open for his daughter. Nevertheless, Eliezer overcomes any personal attachments and prays that Hashem heed his master's request. This triumph over his own desires is signified by the Shalshelas on the word ויאמר – the opening word of his prayer.

In Vayeshev we see the tremendous personal struggle that Joseph had to overcome. Indeed, by running out and leaving his coat behind in the hands of his master's wife, he got himself into more trouble in some ways. But on a personal level, he could not afford to be in the house a moment longer, refusing his master's wife's advances. That very word – ויאמר (and he refused), has a שלשלת on it, denoting the breaking of his own potential negative desires.

As for the final appearance – in Tzav – the Midrash tells us that Moshe Rabbenu was the Kohen Gadol until the end of the Miluim, the first week of the Mishkan's use, at which point he had to hand over the position to his brother Aharon (according to various sources, because he had argued at the burning bush). It must have been hard for him. Yet he overcame any personal desires and handed over the baton wholeheartedly. His final act as High Priest was וישחט...no surprises about the musical note on this word, at the point of his breaking with his own emotion.

Looking back at Lech Lecha, we see from Rashi that the Torah tells us that the angels had to grab hold of Lot because he was tarrying... leaving behind all his possessions. The first word of the Pasuk, which means he hesitated, contains a שלשלת – he overcame his physical desire for wealth and grabbed reality with both hands... literally.

It is no accident that Shalshelas actually means a chain. Furthermore, if you listen to its sound, it is elongated (3x a פזר – Pazer, another musical note – which is long already), yet comes to an abrupt end, thus breaking the chain. The person it is used about has transcended.

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