

# PARSHAS PEKUDEI

*by Rabbi Dr. Meir Tamari*

The last chapters of Shmot told us of the spiritual elevation of Israel at Har Sinai, the commandments for the Mishkan and its vessels, the Chet Heigel and the Divine love and Israel's teshuvah that led to forgiveness and atonement, and the subsequent making of the Mishkan. Now the Divine Wisdom set the Sefer Vayikrah, that is Torat Kohanim to follow as the third sefer in the Chumash. The first five and a half parshiot of Vayikrah [till the end of chapter 17- mid Acharei Mot], deal with the kedushah of the Kohanim and Leviim. Then, till the end of Vayikrah, they deal with the kedusha of the Jews, which is derived from the kedusha of the Mishkan. Therefore, Chazal named the Seder of the mishnayot dealing with the Avodah, Seder Kodshim. The kedushah of the Mishkan was centered [as was the Mikdash] on the Avodah of the Korbanot, so I will devote this introduction to the types of korbanot and to their purpose, even though they are scattered throughout the Torah. I have seen fit to divide this into 4 sections: the subject matter of the korbanot, the types of korbanot, the types of people offering them and their overall purpose. Actually, the knowledge and ideas behind the korbanot as they are expressed in the verses of the Torah have been hidden and withheld from us since the destruction of the Bet Hamikdash and the cessation of the Avodah, as Maimonides explains in his Introduction to that Seder of the Mishnah. So I can only bring here the clear expression of the Torah, the true traditions and the words of our Sages, all according to the teachings of the great Rambam.

**The Subject Matter of the Korbanot:** The names korban and zevach used to describe them are not identical. Zevach refers only to those korbanot that are shacut on the altar whereas korban includes the offerings of birds and the meal offering that do not have shechitah. The name korban comes to denote that they are offered nikrav, on the mizbeach but also because through them the owners are drawn closer to Hashem.

There are 3 types of animals offered as korbanot: First there are the domesticated animals - the cattle, the sheep and the goats. Of the birds offered there are only 2 types; the dove and the pigeon. The minchah that is offered of that which grows from the ground, comes from 3 types; meal, wine and oil. There is no doubt that the most important and the most elevated of all are the korbanot drawn from the 3 types of domesticated animals. We see that only they were included in the communal offerings. "Cattle, sheep and goats were chosen to be slaughtered and offered on the altar of Hashem for 2 reasons. Firstly because these in their feeding habits, their docile characteristics and their peaceful natures are the most select and refined of all the animals. Then, in addition, they are found close to human habitation and so easily obtainable; Hashem did not desire

to impose difficulties and excessive bother on us in His service" (Rambam). Ralbag in his commentary on the Torah, extends the Rambam's reasoning to explain the selection of doves and pigeons as the offerings from the birds.

Whilst accepting the words of both these scholars, I see it fit to add another 2 reasons for the choice of these 3 types of domesticated animals:

The first explanation is that they represent the 3 Avot. Since the cattle are the largest of these animals, it is fitting that they represent Avraham who is the most important and powerful of the Avot. In addition we read "And Avraham ran to the cattle and chose a calf" (Ber. 15:7). Yitschak is represented by the sheep since like them he offered himself on the altar, and his father said, "The Lord Himself will provide a lamb for the burnt offering" (Ber.22:7-8). Avraham offered the ram that was caught by his horns instead of Yitschak, after Hashem told him not to sacrifice his son. Rivkah told Yaakov: " Go to the flocks and bring me from there 2 kids of the goats"(Ber. 27:8); later she took their skins and put them on his arms and on his neck. Goats are the lesser of the 3 types, so it is fitting that Yaakov the last of the Avot should be represented by them. Indeed we see from the Brit Bein Habetarim that these 3 types represent the Avot: "And He said to Avraham, ' Take for Me a heifer and a ram and a goat'" (Ber.13:9); the dove and the pigeon there refer to Moshe and Aharon and that is why these 2 are also brought as a korban.

Moreover, the 3 types that are the elevated and pure of the korbanot, are also symbolical of the Nation of Israel, the elevated and pure of the nations. The whole of the Tanach is full of references in which the Jewish People are compared to these 3 animals. For instance, "Hear this word, cows of Bashan"(Amos 4:1), or "Ephraim is like a rebellious cow"; the korban for communal errors is a one year old bullock. Yechezkiel said, "I will judge between sheep and sheep", so the Tamid is a sheep in the morning and a sheep in the evening. The connection with Am Yisrael extends to the bird offerings as well. The Ramban sees this in that Israel remains faithful to Hashem always, and the dove and the pigeon, being monogamous, remain faithful to their partners; only occasionally when one partner dies, then the males may find another mate.

The mincha offerings, from flour, wine and oil, are like the gifts that people bring to their kings, lords or benefactors. So Hashem commanded us to bring them as thanksgivings to the Master of the World and the Source of all wealth.

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