

DON'T CALL THEM "SACRIFICES"

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

This is the Torah of the olah. It is the olah on the flame on the altar all night until the morning. The fire of the altar should be kept burning on it. The kohen shall put on his fitted linen tunic...He shall separate the ash of what the fire consumed of the olah ...and place it next to the altar.

Be'er Yosef: Something unusual is happening in these *pesukim*. We will see the formula "this is the Torah of X" a number of times in other places. Each time it delivers what you would expect: description of the laws of X, whether, for example, *minchah* or *chatas*. That doesn't happen here. The laws of the olah were all conveyed in *parshas Vayikra*. The "Torah" of the olah in our *pesukim* deals exclusively with what we would consider peripheral items: the burning of the residue of the olah upon the altar the entire night, and the completely unrelated *avodah* of the daily *terumas hadeshen* - the placing of a small quantity of yesterday's ashes at the side of the altar's ramp. What is behind this anomaly?

Let us suggest that the *olah*, in the minds of many, is the paradigmatic *korban*. Because it is burnt entirely on the altar, it is consistent with the popular conception of a *korban* as a gift to G-d that is received in its entirety by Hashem. The *olah* fits the conception perfectly, and thus is a perfect model of the concept.

This idea, however, is totally without basis or merit. And that may be the point of our *pesukim*. The "Torah" of the olah in our case is not the list of laws about how to perform this *avodah*. Rather, it tells us why we perform it.

Barely skipping a beat, our *pesukim* launch into a treatment of the *terumas hadeshen*. It is clear that this is an important service, and not an ancillary detail of Temple maintenance. It is not a take-out-the-holy-garbage ritual. The Torah specifies (according to Chazal's understanding of these *pesukim*) that the kohen perform it while suited up in the *bigdei kehunah*/ priestly vestments. The garments must fit the individual *kohen*. The order in which he dons them is important and specified; no garment precedes the pants. (Now, these *halachos* apply to other parts of the *avodah* as well. But it remains significant that these laws are all attached by the Torah to this unusual ceremony of the scoop of day-old ashes. Clearly the Torah wanted these details to speak to the *terumas hadeshen* in particular.)

Terumas hadeshen flies in the face of the popular - erroneous - notion of "sacrifice." Nothing of value is presented at all! The complexity of the service instead points to a different purpose of *korbanos* -

Man's readiness to simply perform according to G-d's instructions.

Our *pesukim* can thus be read as follows. If you would know the Torah of the *olah*, i.e., the real reason why it is important for the *mizbeach* to remain kindled throughout the night, consuming the remnants of the *olah* offerings slaughtered the day before, then look no further than *terumas hadesh*. There, it will become obvious to you that despite your initial supposition, neither the *olah* nor any other *korban* present something of value as a gift to the altar. Rather, the common thread of all *korbanos* is our willingness to dutifully obey the instructions of Hashem, including all their minutiae. The merit of our *korbanos* comes from our careful attention to every aspect of the Divine commandments that accompany the offerings.

We can demonstrate the same in regard to the first theme of our *pesukim* - the commandment to keep a fire burning on the altar. It is easy to determine that the fire is not important just for the purpose of consuming the piles of *korbanos* that must have accumulated on a typical day. One day each week would not be so typical. Each and every *motza'ei Shabbos* very little needed to be burned. In the course of a Shabbos, only two *tamid* animals, two *musaf* sheep, and two measures of the kohen's *levonah* needed to be consumed by the altar's fire. No other offerings were permitted on Shabbos! Keeping the fire burning all night, well past the time the offerings of Shabbos were consumed, served no obvious purpose. The Torah's insistence that the fire go through the night every night without exception shows that the Torah was not interested in burning the offerings alone.

Details of the *avodah* have value simply to give us an opportunity to involve ourselves with Divine commandments. We achieve merit by acting out the role of devoted and faithful servants.

[1] Based on Be'er Yosef, Vayikra 6:2-5
