

# AT LEAST THE FIRST TIME

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 183, Candle Lighting on Friday Night. Good Shabbos!*

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## Let's Get It Right The First Time -- At Least

The last two parshiyos (pl. of parsha) detailed the construction of the Mishkan [Tabernacle], its vessels, and the garments of the Kohanim. After everything was in place, they were ready to begin the Service which was to be performed in the Mishkan (and eventually in the Beis HaMikdash, the Holy Temple). At the end of this week's parsha, the Torah describes the concept of "Chanukas HaBayis", the process of "Anointing the House". There is a halacha called "Avodasam M'Chanchasam" -- that the first use of the objects in the Mishkan consecrated them and made them holy.

The Torah explains this ceremony: "And this is what you shall do upon the altar: Two lambs, one year-old, consistently (Tamid)". [Shemos 29:35] Every single day (including Shabbos and Yom Kippur) the service in the Temple included a lamb which was brought in the morning and a lamb which was brought in the evening.

In Parshas Pinchas [Bamidbar 28: 1-8], the Torah repeats this portion of the Continual Offering (Korban Tamid), reiterating the command to bringing a lamb in the morning and a lamb in the evening. However, there is one distinction between the texts of the two otherwise-identical commands:

In Tetzaveh it says: "Es haKeves HA-echad ta'aseh ba'boker" THE one lamb you shall offer in the morning...

And in Pinchas it merely says: "Es haKeves echad ta'aseh ba'boker" One lamb you shall offer in the morning...

The text in Pinchas does not contain the Hebrew "Hay ha-Yediah," the definite article, the equivalent of "the" in English.

In other words, here in Tetzaveh, the first time that the altar was consecrated, the Torah refers to the lamb as "THE" lamb, whereas in Pinchas when we were commanded for all future generations, it is only referred to as "a" lamb.

The Brisker Rav, zt"l, says that the Torah is hinting at something. Normally, the two lambs -- the one brought in the morning and the one brought in the evening -- were fundamentally independent. The inability or failure to bring one of them would in no way reduce the obligation or the ability to bring the other one. In this sense they were like the Tephillin (phylacteries) of the head and the Tephillin of the hand. If for some reason a person cannot put on Tephillin on his arm, that does not stop him from putting on Tephillin on his head (or vice versa).

However, the Brisker Rav says, there was one exception -- the first time the Korban Tamid was brought. On that first day, when the altar was being dedicated, it was necessary to bring both offerings. If the Kohen had failed to bring the morning offering, he would not have been allowed to bring the afternoon offering either. That is why the verse uses the definite article to single out "THIS" lamb, which is different from all others.

The Shemen HaTov draws an ethical lesson from the distinction between the day of the altar's consecration, and all succeeding days. Beginnings are extremely important. When we start something new, it is critical to "get off on the right foot," to do it right. When we hope to set the proper tone for something that is destined to last for years and years, there is no room for any deviation from the ideal. If it can not be done right at the outset, it is better that it not be done at all.

Even though in future generations, the two lambs could be offered one without the other -- in a less than optimum fashion -- the initial day of offerings must be done in exactly the right manner. This, he says, is the meaning of the Hebrew expression "Kol Hascholos Kashos" (all beginnings are difficult). The reason for this is because beginnings are so important. They have to set the tone. Anything less than just right will not do.

It is said in the name of the Gaon of Vilna, that if a congregation is so particular in procuring material for a new Shul building that even the handles on the axes used to chop down the wood are made by G-d fearing people, then they are guaranteed that the prayers uttered in that congregation will always be said with proper intention (kavanah). This is the same idea. If it is built "right" from the beginning, it will be an entirely different Shul.

I remember when the present Beis Medrash [House of Study] of Ner Israel Yeshiva was built. When we first moved into the new Beis Medrash, the Rosh Yeshiva zt"l [the Dean, of blessed memory] urged the students to make a special effort not to utter any idle words in that Beis Medrash -- at least for the first week. The way the original students acted the first week in the Beis Medrash would set the tone for years and decades of future students.

Beginnings are crucial. The way in which a parent starts out teaching a child, or a couple starts out a marriage, or the way that any endeavor is started -- should be good and right and correct.

## Abraham's Prayer Was An Antidote for Achan's Sin

Joshua placed a ban (cherem) on private use of the spoils from the city of Jericho -- the first city conquered by the Jews upon entering Eretz Yisroel. Achan, however, stole something from that booty. As a result of Achan's sin, Jews fell in battle during the next military encounter -- against the people of Ai. G-d was angry with the Jewish people and it was necessary to identify the culprit and to administer the proper punishment. Ultimately Achan was stoned and the verse relates that "G-d's Anger subsided" (vaYashav Hashem m'charon apo). But there is an unbelievable Gemara [Talmudic passage] concerning this incident.

The Gemara comments on this incident, "A person should always pray before calamity strikes, for had Abraham not prayed between Beis El and ha-Ai, not a remnant of the Jews would have remained (after that battle)" [Sanhedrin 44b]. This means that, technically, as a punishment for Achan's sin of taking something from the Cherem of Jericho, the Jewish people should have been destroyed. If not for the fact that Abraham had built an altar and prayed there when he entered Israel for the first time hundreds of years earlier, that is indeed what would have happened!

But what did Achan do that was so terrible? True, he was not supposed to touch those spoils. But is theft a capital offense? And for the entire Jewish nation, yet?

The answer is because this was the FIRST. This was the beginning of the conquest. Beginnings have to be done correctly. Joshua wanted to make that first entry into the Land perfect. The city was to be conquered and everything in it was to be holy. But one man ruined it and thus should have ruined the entire venture. The nation itself should have been destroyed.

The only thing that saved Klal Yisroel, the Congregation of Israel, was the fact that there was a "beginning before the beginning". When Avraham Avinu came into Eretz Yisrael hundreds of years before, he made the beginning properly. Avraham davened [prayed] between Beis El and ha-Ai. That acted as an antidote.

So many of our beginnings are done inadvertently. We do not remember the first time we read Aleph-Beis. We do not remember the first verse we learned from Chumash or the first page of Talmud. We do not remember our first experiences of marriage. For some of us, these beginnings are history and there is nothing we can do about them. But there are still beginnings that remain. If they do not remain in our lives, they remain in the lives of our children. And if not in our children's lives then in our grandchildren's lives. Let us not forget the importance of a beginning and how we can set the tone for generations by doing it right.

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## Glossary

**Korban Tamid** -- Constant Offering (offered twice daily in the Temple)

**Tephillin** -- Phylacteries worn on the arm and head

**Beis HaMedrash** -- Torah Study Hall

**Eretz Yisroel** -- the Land of Israel

**Cherem** -- ban or excommunication

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## Sources and Personalities

**Brisker Rav** -- Rav Yitzchak Ze'ev (Velvel) Soloveitchik (1887-1959); took over from his father (Rav Chaim Soloveitchik) in Brisk; escaped during World War II to Eretz Yisroel.

**Shemen HaTov**-- Rabbi Dov Weinberger - contemporary author, Rav in Brooklyn, NY

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