

THE APPROPRIATE TIME TO OFFER ATONEMENT FOR THE SALE OF YOSEF

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Shemini

The Appropriate Time To Offer Atonement For The Sale of Yosef

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Weekly Portion Torah Tapes: Tape #676, Buffalo, Giraffe, & other Exotic Animals -- Are they Kosher? Good Shabbos!

As part of the ritual associated with the dedication of the Mishkan, G-d told Aharon to tell the Children of Israel to bring a he-goat (seir izim) for a sin offering [Vayikra 9:3]. Our Sages say that this he-goat was intended as an atonement for the sin of the sale of Yosef (during which the brothers dipped Yosef's coat into the blood of a he-goat, to make it look like Yosef was killed by a wild animal). Similarly, a calf was brought as a burnt offering (korban olah). The calf was intended to be atonement for the sin of worshipping the Golden calf.

Rav Zalman Sorotzkin discusses why this particular juncture in history was seen to be the appropriate time to bring an atonement for Yosef's sale. After all, the Jewish people went down to Egypt because of that sale. Logically a case could be made that the appropriate time to offer an atonement for the sale was when the Jews first left Egypt. It could be suggested that a seir izim be offered together with the Paschal lamb for this purpose. Why was the atonement only offered now, at the time of the final erection of the Mishkan?

Rav Sorotzkin explains that the sin of the sale of Yosef came about as a result of hatred between brothers which stemmed from jealousy and sibling rivalry. In order for there to be atonement for a sin rooted in jealousy, more than a mere sacrifice was necessary. It was necessary to be able to correct the underlying bad character traits which caused them to sin in the first place.

The building of the Mishkan was something that mended the rift between the various factions within the Jewish nation. The nation now had a central address and a central motif which they could all rally around. The Mishkan served as a unifying force which brought an unprecedented sense of oneness and identity to the nation and its component tribes. Yes, each tribe may have their own interests and their own inclinations, but they now all had one supreme interest which overruled all

their parochial and petty personal interests.

This is the reason why when they traveled in the Wilderness, the Mishkan was always in the center of the camp. This was more than a convenient way of travelling. This was symbolic of the role that the Mishkan played in the nation. As long as the Mishkan was in the middle, all the Tribes could rally around one central idea and focal point.

To give a far-fetched example of what we are speaking about - in the military there is fierce competition between the various branches of the armed services - the army, the navy, the marines, the air force, etc. They compete for dollars, for prestige, for influence, and so forth. There is competition, back-stabbing, and intense rivalry between the branches. However, in war, the different parts of the military all cooperate with each other. When there is a central purpose or a central idea or theme, the factions can put away their differences and rally behind that central purpose.

Another far-fetched example of this same concept is team sports. Professional athletes for the most part did not spend years of their life refining their character traits. There is tremendous competition for fame, salary, statistical achievement, and so forth. All the elements are present on these teams for constant internal strife. However, a good coach can motivate his players to put aside their squabbles and fights and rally around the goal of achieving a championship. Players do prove to be willing and able to sublimate their strong egos and their desires for the personal headlines in order to win that title or that team crown or ring or whatever. When team members feel that it is not worth it to sublimate those egos in order to win the title, then, in fact, they do not win the title.

These are mundane parables, but perhaps they give us an appreciation for the value of a unifying symbol such as the Mishkan and the Divine Service represented therein. There had been jealousy and hatred between the brothers and between the various components of the Jewish people. Now at last there was a central rallying point and it was time to put away the old rivalries and jealousies. This therefore was the appropriate moment in history to offer atonement for the sale of Yosef, caused by a personal rivalry that was now hopefully behind them.

This write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah Portion. The halachic topics covered for the current week's portion in this series are:

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