

WHY ARE THE LAWS OF KORBAN TODAH FOUND IN PARSHAS TZAV?

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Tzav

Why are the Laws of Korban Todah Found in Parshas Tzav?

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Weekly Portion Torah Tapes: Tape # 631, Bleeding Gums- More Than a Periodontal Problem. Good Shabbos!

Parshas Tzav introduces the laws of the Korban Todah [Thanksgiving offering] [Vayikra 7:12]. Rashi explains that a Todah offering is brought by "someone who experienced a personal miracle". Rashi gives as examples of such - one who traveled on the High Seas or one who traveled through the desert and safely reached his destination, one who was thrown in jail and then released, and one who was sick and recovered.

Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld makes an interesting observation. Parshas Vayikra enumerates all the sacrifices that an individual might ever bring with one exception. For some strange reason, the law of Korban Todah does not appear in Parshas Vayikra, but rather first appears in Parshas Tzav.

Parshas Tzav begins with the words: "Command Aaron and his sons, saying: This is the law of the Olah offering." This entire parsha is addressed to the Kohanim. They have to know how to execute the laws of sacrifices - how do you bring a Korban, where do you bring a Korban, when do you bring a korban, etc. In a sense, Parshas Tzav serves as a manual for Kohanim. Israelites do not need to be as familiar with the contents of the parsha because they do not offer the actual sacrifices. This strengthens the question. Not only is it problematic why the laws of the Thanksgiving offering do NOT appear in Parshas Vayikra, it is also problematic why DO they appear in Parshas Tzav?

Rav Sonnenfeld further asks about Rashi's use of the word "miracle" (nes) to describe the four events that trigger the requirement to bring a Korban Todah. True, each of these situations might involve risk or danger to some extent, but can they truly be categorized as "miracles"? What does this mean?

The truth of the matter is that while these situations may not be in the same category as the splitting the Red Sea or other "Open miracles" (nes galui), they certainly reflect Divine Providence, the Hand of G-d watching over us and do at least fall into the category of "hidden miracles" (nes nistar).

Today, because of advances in medicine, we take for granted that a person can have heart bypass surgery and be back on the job a short time later. For several hours, this person was not breathing on his own, yet we take his recovery for granted! Despite our growing accustomed to the "miraculous", it nevertheless remains miraculous.

The obligation to offer thanksgiving to the Almighty is even to offer it upon experiencing a so-called "natural miracle". The Talmud tells us [Brachos 7b] that when Leah had her fourth child and called him Yehuda saying, "This time I will thank the Almighty" (hapa'am ODEH es Hashem) [Bereishis 29:35], it was the first time in the history of the world that someone expressed gratitude to the Almighty.

This statement puzzles many commentaries - do we not find other places where people expressed gratitude prior to Leah? Was Noach's offering of sacrifices to G-d upon exiting the Ark not a form of thanksgiving to Him? The answer is that until Leah, the people who brought sacrifices or expressed thanks to the Almighty were expressing thanks for OPEN miracles. Leah was the first to express thanks to Him for even a HIDDEN miracle.

When Noach and his family were the only people saved while the whole planet was destroyed, the obvious miracle demanded thanksgiving to the Almighty. However, when one has a baby, it is all too easy to take the attitude "I did it myself". What is more natural than having a baby?

Leah said, "No. It is a big deal!" The fact that a woman becomes pregnant and has a normal pregnancy and a normal delivery is a very big deal. It requires an expression of thanksgiving to the One who made it all possible.

A young man who had been married one year had a baby girl. The man asked Rav Eliezer Schach, his Rosh Yeshiva, whether he should make a Kiddush to celebrate the occasion. Rav Schach said, "Suppose you were married for 8 years and your wife was unable to conceive all that time, and then she became pregnant and you had a baby girl. Would you make a Kiddush then? Of course you would. Now that Hashem saved you from 7 years of anguish and frustration, should you not certainly make a Kiddush expressing your gratitude?" It is not just a miracle when a woman has a child after many years of childlessness. It is a miracle even when she has a baby after just one year of marriage.

This is what Leah taught us. A natural miracle is a miracle nevertheless. This is the idea expressed by Rashi when he calls the four types of people who bring a Todah offering, people who have experienced miracles. It is the Nes of seeing the Hand of G-d in every act of nature.

This, Rav Sonnenfeld says, explains why the Korban Todah is located in Parshas Tzav and not in Parshas Vayikra. If there is a group of people who need a special exhortation regarding "natural miracles" it is the Kohanim. The Mishna in Avos [5:5] says that there were miracles every single day in the Beis HaMikdash. Flies never came to the slaughtered animals. The wind never deflected the smoke arising from the Altar. They lived with miracles. When someone lives with miracles on a daily basis, then the occurrence of a nes is just another day at the office. People get used to the miracles.

That is life. We can become so accustomed to miracles that we no longer appreciate them.

There is a Yiddish expression that conveys the concept that "In a place where there is a printing press, people step on shaimos [Torah texts, etc.]". Outside the printing press, when someone sees shaimos on the floor, he rushes to pick it up and kiss it. However, if the printer would stop to pick up shaimos from the floor every time he saw it, he would not get anything done.

The same thing is true with "common place miracles" - having a baby, recovering from an illness, passing through the desert, and so on. We can become jaded and forget that we are experiencing "miracles".

This is why the laws of Korban Todah are located in Parshas Tzav. We all need to be reminded of the truth that G-d's Providence must be recognized as Divine intervention - i.e. a miracle - even when it occurs frequently. However, the Kohanim who witness miracles on a daily basis, have a special need for this reminder. Therefore, Korban Todah is located in Parshas Tzav, which is directed specifically to the Kohanim.

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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