

# THE GOAT ATONES FOR YOSEF'S SALE – BUT WHY NOW?

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

## Parshas Shemini

### The Goat Atones For Yosef's Sale - But Why Now?

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Weekly Portion Torah Tapes: Tape #764, Loig Le'rosh - Respecting the Dead. Good Shabbos!*

On the eighth day of the consecration of the Mishkan, following the 7 day period of inauguration, the Jewish people were told to bring a number of sacrifices. Included among them was a goat for a sin offering. The Toras Kohanim suggests that this was an atonement for the sin of selling Yosef. To cover up the crime of selling their sibling into slavery, Yosef's brothers slaughtered a goat and dipped Yosef's coat into the blood of the goat to make it look like Yosef was killed by a wild animal.

The Oznaim L'Torah from Rav Zalman Sorotzkin asks an obvious question: Why is this symbolism appropriate now at the dedication of the Mishkan? Maybe it would have been appropriate when they left Egypt to have the Paschal Offering be a goat rather than a lamb. After all, they wound up in Egypt because of the sale of Yosef. Now that they were leaving, it would be an appropriate time to lay the matter of their guilt permanently to rest and bring an atonement offering. This was not done at that time. Rather, the symbolic recollection of that earlier event only occurs now, many months later, when the Mishkan is being dedicated. Why?

The Oznaim L'Torah gives a very logical answer. The underlying cause of the sin of Yosef's sale was unfounded hatred (sinas Chinam). Part of the function of the Mishkan was to act as a unifying force within the Jewish people. That is why emphasis is placed on the fact that it was "in the midst of the camp." The Mishkan was the focal institution of the nation, geographically as well as spiritually. It served to unify Klal Yisrael.

This year, unfortunately, because of our sins we all spent Pessach separately. But G-d willing, the Temple will speedily be rebuilt and we will all spend Pessach together in Jerusalem -- unified as a single and cohesive nation. The Oznaim L'Torah quotes the pasuk from Parsahs Terumah "The middle bar inside the beams shall extend from end to end (min hakatzeh el hakatzeh)" [Shemos 26:28] This phrase is symbolic of the ability to unify diverse components of the people -- from the far left to the far right -- who can all come together and rally around a single national focus of attention,

i.e. -- the Mishkan.

Now, at the dedication of the Mishkan, whose purpose in part was to unify the people, was indeed the appropriate venue to achieve atonement once and for all for that unseemly incident in the nation's history which typified disunity within the family -- the sale of their own brother into slavery.

### **Know the Past, Present, and Future, Before Pronouncing "Tameh"**

This week's parsha contains the first occurrence of the laws related to identifying Kosher animals, fish, and fowl in the Torah. The pasuk says: "But this is what you shall not eat from among those that bring up their cud or that have split hooves: the camel (gamal), for it brings up its cud but its hoof is not split (parsah einenu mafri) - it is impure to you; and the hyrax (shafan), for it brings up its cud but its hoof is not split (parsah lo yafri)- it is impure to you; and the hare (arneves), for it brings up its cud, but its hoof is not split (parsah lo hifrisa) - it is impure to you." [Vayikra 11:4-6].

There is a striking inconsistency here. With the camel, the verb used to discuss the fact that the hoof is not split is conjugated in the present tense: "Parsah einenu MAFRI" [the hoof IS NOT split]. Yet with the shafan, the verb is in the present "Parsah lo YAFRI" [the hoof WILL NOT BE split]. Finally, with the arneves, the verb used is in the past tense: "Parsah lo HIFRISA" [the hoof WAS NOT split].

This is glaring. The terms should all be present, all future, or all past tense. There has to be a message here in the fact that the Torah uses a different form of the verb for each of these three animals.

I saw a beautiful homiletic thought on this matter. When someone is about to pronounce "Tameh" [Impure] on a species or on any entity, one needs to be aware of its past, its present, and its future. Unless one is aware of the situation in the past, present, and future, one does not know the whole story and should not be so quick to pronounce the words "Tameh hu" [this one is impure].

One of the teachers at Bais Yaakov told my wife the following story: There was a couple who went through the Holocaust. Before the Holocaust, they were fully observant of Torah and Mitzvos. After the Holocaust, unfortunately, the husband lost faith and said "That's it! I've had it with G-d!" The husband gave up everything in terms of religious practice and belief.

His wife did not have that reaction. She begged her husband -- "At least go to shul." The husband refused. This went on for a while. Finally the wife said to the husband, "Listen, do me a favor. Every morning you go out and buy a newspaper and you read it from cover to cover. Humor me, when you pick up the paper at the newsstand, rather than coming home to read it, go to shul and read the paper in shul -- just to make me happy!"

The husband wanted to please his wife. He spent the time reading the newspaper anyway, so he agreed to her proposal. He would go to shul every morning, sit in the back row and read the paper. This went on for years.

Now ask yourselves: If you saw a fellow come into the back row of your shul every morning, not put on Tallis or Tefillin, not take a Siddur off the shelf, but simply make himself comfortable and read the newspaper for 45 minutes, what would your reaction be?

Most likely our reaction would be very negative. "If you want to read the newspaper, go home and read the newspaper! How dare you be so disrespectful of this holy synagogue?" To their credit the people in this particular shul did not say anything critical to this individual. They did not chastise him. They began to schmooze with him, they invited him to join them for a l'chaim after davening when someone had a Yahrtzeit, they invited him to join them in social gatherings. To make a long story short, this Holocaust survivor went from reading the newspaper in the back row of the shul every day to davening in shul three times a day! Eventually, he even became president of the shul.

What does that tell us? Our inclination would have been to immediately pronounce "Tameh who lachem" -- this species is definitely not a kosher animal! But we did not know the fellow's past. We were not clear about his present situation, and we certainly could not have guessed what his future turned out to be. This is what the Torah is teaching. In order to proclaim "This one is Tameh" we must know that the hoof was not split in the past, the hoof is not currently split, and the hoof will never be split in the future. Short of that do not be so quick to say "Tameh hu lachem."

#### **Ethics of the Fathers: Chapter 1 Mishna 4**

Yosi Ben Yoezer Says: A person should cling to Talmidei Chachomim, he should make his house open to them, and he should drink with thirst the words they utter.

Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky, zt"l, notes the teaching of Chazal (coincidentally in the Toras Kohanim on Parshas Shmini) that a person should not say "I do not eat pig because I hate the taste of pork. Rather, he should say I would love to eat pig, but I must abstain because this is what Hashem commanded me to do in his Torah". Indeed, many Baalei Teshuvah say that the hardest thing for them to give up by adopting a religious life style was to not be able to eat shellfish any longer. "It was delicious", they say. That is the proper attitude to have: I wish I could have that forbidden delicacy, but by decree of the Torah I can't so I won't.

Rav Yaakov said that this attitude is appropriate when it comes to certain forbidden delicacies, but is should not apply to Torah learning. One should never say "I really wish I did not need to learn Torah. It is boring, it is this it is that, but I have no choice -- G-d tells me to learn Torah, so learn Torah I must. Heaven forbid one should have that attitude. As Yossi ben Yoezer says, one must drink the words of the Sages with thirst.

Part of the mitzvah of learning Torah is learning because we enjoy it. This is why the blessing before learning Torah has the unique language (ha'arev nah...) "Make pleasant in our mouths the words of your Torah..." There is no other bracha like that. We do not say ha'arev nah regarding matzah, we do not say ha'arev nah regarding Tefillin. Only when it comes to learning Torah do we beseech G-d that he make the words of Torah sweet in our mouths. This is because the mitzvah of learning Torah is to

enjoy learning Torah.

Rav Weinberg, zt"l used to say that Torah is compared to water. One drinks coffee for the charge one gets from it, one drinks soda because it is sweet. One drinks water only because one is thirsty. That is why Torah is compared to water. We should have a thirst for it, like we have a thirst for water. When one is not thirsty he does not drink water, when he is thirsty there is nothing better than a cold glass of water. A person has to find his niche in Torah so that when he learns it, he does so to quench a great thirst and to receive the great enjoyment akin to what one feels when he quenches his thirst with that nice tall cold glass of H<sub>2</sub>O. That is how a person should approach Torah learning.

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