

# PARSHAS TZAV - PIGUL: DEFINING THE ESSENCE OF KORBANOS

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## **Pigul: Defining the Essence of Korbanos<sup>1</sup>**

It's a strange word. We find ourselves even more confused when we first encounter the dizzying complexity of its laws. If we persevere in our study, the details will fall into place, yielding an elegantly crafted statement about the nature of korbanos.

We could look for other appearances of the word "pigul" in Tanach, but we would not learn much. Only a handful exist, however, and all of them deal with a deficiency in an offering in the Beis ha-Mikdosh. We have no choice but to plunge into its halachic requirements. As is almost always the case, studying the details of a topic as laid down by Torah she-b'al-peh illuminates like nothing else can.

The first thing we learn is that our tradition dismisses what appears to be the simple meaning of the text. The pasuk seems to say that a korban shelamim becomes disqualified as pigul if someone eats of its flesh beyond its statutory expiration date. The Talmud tell us that this is not true. The essence of pigul is in thought, not action. Intention to eat of the korban at the wrong time disqualifies as pigul, not the actual eating! (This should not be surprising to anyone familiar with the general rules governing korbanos. Zerikah, throwing the blood on the altar, is the make-or-break activity. Zerikah occurs before any parts of the korban can be eaten. A valid zerikah fixes a korban as having done its job. Eating of its flesh may sometimes be called for, but if that eating goes wrong, the korban remains valid.)

We soon learn that the "eating" of the korban that can be disqualified in advance by an improper intention is broadly constructed. It includes eating by people, as well as the consumption of parts of the korban on the altar. We also learn that the intention to eat past the time limit must be linked to specific procedures - essentially, any of the activities that are the significant precursors to the consumption of the korban by people or by the mizbeach, e.g. slaughter of the animal, receiving its blood in a vessel, and carrying it to the mizbeach where it will be applied.

We also encounter a bit of a paradox. If the mere intention of completing the avodah of a korban improperly disqualifies it from the outset, we would expect that intention to eat it in the wrong place - i.e. outside the Beis ha-Mikdosh - would certainly invalidate the korban. Eating in the wrong

location is more visible and blatant than eating at an improper time, which cannot be discerned by the observer. If a plan to do the latter somehow ruins a korban, all the more so should a plan to eat of the korban in the wrong place. Halachically, this is indeed true. Enigmatically, it invalidates - but it does not carry with it the punishment of kareis, and is never technically referred to as pigul!

We may have to take a guess that פגול is related to פלג, to divide and separate. Pigul, then, would mean that the slaughter of the animal is separated from its proper consumption. Separating shechitah from consumption invalidates a korban, even in thought. Moreover, a separation in time is dealt with more severely than a separation in place! Detach shechitah from "eating" - whether the eating by people or by the altar - and the korban comes apart. In fact, such a separation creates a counterfeit offering, a monstrous counter-korban that is punishable by kareis.

In the bigger picture, the procedures of all korbanos revolve around two axes: shechitah and achilah. (In flour offerings, the kemitzah/ careful removing of a handful of the offering is the equivalent of the slaughter of an animal, and the haktarah on the altar is the corresponding achilah.) In animal offerings, zerikas ha-dam, the throwing of the blood on the altar, begins the transition from the former to the latter.

The first axis is negative and educative; the second is positive and uplifting. Shechitah represents the negation of the life previously lived by the one who brings the offering. He declares that he yields that life to Hashem, that he sets aside his preoccupation with the physical and material and gladly offers them to his Creator.

This might seem like a healthy statement; in fact, the lesson of pigul is that the Torah finds it repulsive. Hashem will never ask us to sacrifice the material save for the purpose of turning it into something greater. We give up the past, lesser life if and only if it can be improved upon. We do it only if it can be elevated, joined to a higher order of existence. This higher place is symbolized by the mizbeach - or by human consumption in the spiritual precincts of the Mikdash.

This idea evaded other cultures and religions, which did separate between slaughter and consumption. This separation allowed for slaughter without eating, and eating without slaughter. Each of these two motifs is despised by the Torah.

Slaughter without eating celebrates destruction for its own sake. Pagan gods delighted in blood, carnage, destruction. Victorious armies would sacrifice thousands of vanquished troops to satisfy the blood-lust of primitive gods[2].

On the other hand, consumption decoupled from slaughter plays into a different moral lie. Some pagan societies saw physical license as honoring the gods (especially the gods in charge of those pleasure-objects). Giving oneself up to unbridled sensory satisfaction pleased the gods. Dissolute behavior in their name became elevated to ritual; orgiastic release became a religious happening.

The Torah scoffs at both positions, and demands that no room be left for them to creep into the

mission of the Mikdosh. Slaughter and consumption are a matched set. The first is justified only by the second. Separating them even in mind alone - especially separating them in time! - not only invalidates an offering, but mocks its very purpose. It is punishable, therefore, by kareis. (We encounter a different kind of separation later on<sup>[3]</sup> in the prohibition of nosar. The Torah sets down an end point, by which time the flesh of a korban must be consumed, either by altar, by people, or both. If the flesh is left beyond this time, it must be burnt. Eating that which has been earmarked as holy beyond the time period assigned by the Torah, repudiates the lessons that the Mikdosh seeks to convey to us. It is a desecration of its ideals and purpose.)

We have mentioned before that there are two forms of the second axis: consumption by people, and consumption by the altar. Halachically, they are bound by the same time limit. Every korban must be slaughtered only during the daylight portion of the day. Whatever portions are designated for the mizbeach or even for human consumption may be eaten that day, as well as the night that follows.

Todah and shelamim are exceptions. Their period of allowable consumption by people extends one additional period, to the following day - but not the night that follows it.

This makes perfect sense. The "day" of the Mikdosh begins with the daylight period, and is followed by night. All eating that must be done within its precincts should follow its schedule. Shelamim, however, can be eaten outside the Mikdosh. They proclaim that at times the table of the Jewish family can become the equivalent of Hashem's Temple. Its period of allowable eating should follow Man's calendar - in which day follows night! The Torah thus allows a full Man-day (rather than Mikdosh-day) after the initial shechitah period.

The focus of shelamim and todah is on Man's individual happiness, and its dependence upon G-d. Pigul applies to many korbanos, but it is in contemplating his own well-being that Man finds himself most vulnerable to the siren call of the false ideologies that the Torah wishes to battle. What better place to anchor its lessons than our pasuk!

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1. Based on the Hirsch Chumash, Vayikra 7:18
  2. While such gods have disappeared, their teaching has not. Many people still believe - consciously or otherwise - that the essence of devotion to G-d involves "sacrificing" through suffering and self-denial. 3. Vayikra 19:8
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