

# PARSHAS TZAV

*by Dr. Nosson Chayim Leff*

## Tzav, 5634/5/6/7/40 (A Compilation)

The parsha begins (Vayikra, 6:2-3): "Zohs toras ha'olah: Hi ha'olah ahl mokda ahl hamizbei'ach kohl halaila . . . velavash hakohein . . . veheirim es hadeshen ahsher tochal ha'eish." (ArtScroll: "This is the law of the elevation-offering: It is the elevation-offering on the flame, on the Altar, all night . . . . The Kohen shall . . . separate the ash of what the fire consumed . . . and place it next to the Altar.")

The korban olah (the "elevation-offering ") is to burn on the mizbei'ach during the night until it turns into ashes. These ashes play a special role in the avoda, the daily service, of the Beis Hamikdash. As the pasuk says, the kohein lifts up some of the ashes of the burnt olah offerings, and places them near the mizbei'ach. This activity -- called "terumas hadeshen" -- has special significance inasmuch as it is the very first activity of the beginning day in the Beis Hamikdash -- the one that gets things started.. Further, terumas hadeshen was also the last activity of the (concluding) day. In fact, the Sfas Emes tells us that terumas hadeshen was the culmination of the avoda - "shekohl hakorban talui beharamas hadeshen."

So much by way of background information. To see what the Sfas Emes says on this topic , read on....

The Sfas Emes begins by referring to a statement in Medrash Raba (7:3).. In that text, R'Shim'on bar Yochai tells us that the objective of the korban olah is to help a person atone for improper thoughts ("hirhur haleiv"). How did R' Shimon bar Yochai--endorsed by the Medrash-- arrive at a seemingly unbelievable connection between the korban olah and improper thoughts? The Medrash explains by citing a comment of R' Levi. (This amora was a colleague of R'Yochanan, who, in turn, had been a talmid of of R' Shimon bar Yochai... Thus, we have here real "hands on" Mesora [tradition] -- from bar Yochai to R'Yochanan to R'Levi to us)...

R' Levi answers our question concerning a connection between the korban olah and improper thoughts by directing us to a pasuk in Yechezkel (20:32): "Veha'olah ahl ruchachem hayo lo siheyeh . . ." (ArtScroll: "As for what enters your minds -- it shall not be . . . ") The pasuk's use of the word "olah"-- even in a very different sense--- immediately brings to mind korban olah. And the fact that this choice of words occurs in a context of thoughts ("..what enters your minds") is also pertinent. The context helps us perceive that in lashon hakodesh, thoughts are viewed as "arising" in one's mind. Hence the connection between korban olah and thinking. Finally, the pasuk in Yechezkel says that

those thoughts "shall not be,"-- a clear implication that the thoughts under consideration are improper ones.. With this better understanding of how R'Shimon bar Yochai ( and the Medrash ) arrived at this conceptualization, we return to the main line of the ma'amar.

Note the Sfas Emes's approach to dealing with the problem of improper thoughts. He does not say : "ban improper thoughts". Rather, he takes as a fact of life that we all have such thoughts. But then the Sfas Emes does not give up on us as a lost cause. Instead, he tries to teach us how to handle such hirhur haleiv

The Sfas Emes proceeds by citing a passage from the Zohar, which presents the following non-pshat reading of the pesukim (quoted above) concerning the korban olah. The Zohar tells us that just as the korban olah burns on the mizbei'ach during the night, so too our machshavos ra'os (our bad thoughts) can be burnt on the altar of our heart.

The Sfas Emes suggests two sources of flame to burn our machshavos ra'os. One possibility is the mesiras nefesh (dedication) with which we do mitzvos during the day. The other source, cited in the name of the Ba'al Shem Tov, is the hislahavus (enthusiasm) burning in the heart of every Jew. Thus, the Sfas Emes is telling us that we have two weapons for handling improper thoughts : mesiras nefesh and hislahavus.

What is the analog to the ashes and the all-important terumas hadeshen? By dealing with our bad thoughts, we render them powerless. And our victory enables us to reach a higher level in our avoda. Indeed, the Sfas Emes goes so far as to say that our encounter with machshavos ra'os can be a good thing. "Ki kohl yerida hi tzorech aliya." (That is, To rise in one's avoda, it is necessary to fall initially.) The Sfas Emes notes that this is the sequence with which HaShem created the world: First came night with its darkness. Only after that phase could the light of morning appear. Thus : "Vayehi erev, vayehi boker . . ." (ArtScroll : "And there was evening and there was morning.") (Bereishis, 1:5).

The Sfas Emes continues: "sheyeish aliya lamachshava ahl yedei demitokda." (That is: "By dealing -- through fire --with our improper thoughts, we can raise our thought to a higher spiritual level.") More generally, the Sfas Emes tells us to view terumas hadeshen as a symbol of some vital features in our spiritual life. Even improper thoughts may contain positive elements. By contesting and besting our machshavos ra'os, we can recover whatever is good in those pernicious mindsets. And again, we see the possibility for spiritual gain. For be aware what is happening here. We know that the korban olah is associated with bad thoughts. By being burnt on the mizbei'ach, these are transformed into "deshen".

Note: "deshen" actually means "fat"--in a good sense--as in (Tehilim, 92 :15) "desheinim vera'ananim yiheyu". Thus, by dealing with our machshavos ra'os, we can actually change something bad into something good.

The other key feature draws on the Sfas Emes's reading of the word "teruma". He notes that the word teruma derives from the same root as the word "romamus" -- lifted high. Thus, he sees our

victory over the hirhur haleiv as an occasion to draw chizuk (encouragement) concerning our spiritual capacity. The picture of the kohein triumphantly lifting the ashes up high calls to my mind a scene in Sefer Shemuel Aleph (17:51-54). Dovid has just killed Golyas (Goliath). Dovid then proceeds to cut off Golyas's head and lift it up in triumph. So too when the kohein lifts up the burnt korban olah, we can see this as an act of victory lifting all spirits.

---

Text Copyright &copy 2007 by Rabbi Dr. Nosson Chayim Leff and **Torah.org**.