

Parshat Tzav 5776

Our sedra is named after the first word of the second passuk where Hashem tells Moshe to command Ahron and his sons about the korban olah – the burnt offering.

Although this was almost totally burnt through, the Medrash tells us that this was the most important of all the korbanot. The medrash gives us a moshol of a king who throws a party, and all his workers bring him gifts. But his favourite presents are the ones which come from his subjects who have no direct connection to him but just want to give something to the king.

Similarly, most korbanot have significant proportions retained by the owners and/or the kohanim. But Hashem's most treasured gifts are the ones which are given without expectation of something back. The olah represents such gifts which are given with no self interest.

Rashi on the possuk, quoting the Gemorra in Kiddushin says "Ein Tzav Eloah Lashon Ziruz" that when the torah uses the word Tzav it means this is a commandment needs extra care and attention. This is because there was a financial loss (Chisaron Kis) of offering the Korban Olah and therefore when there is money at stake, you need to take extra care.

The commentaries discuss what exactly this Gemorra means. What is the financial loss incurred in the Korban Olah and how does this give rise to the extra care that is required.

The simple explanation is that the Kohanim had to give up their regular work in order to carry out their turn for service in the Beit Hamikdash. Therefore, although it was a great honour to be a part of the Avodah, it would incur financial loss as the Kohen could not earn a living in those weeks that he was on duty. To compensate, the kohanim were able to keep part of the korbanot. However with an Olah, they could only keep the animal's hide and so their reward was minimal.

The Torah therefore tells us that when the financial reward for something is small, and even more when it is actually costing us to do a mitzvah, we might need an extra push to do it carefully and correctly.

The Chasam Sofer offers an alternative approach. He says that the most common korban olah is the Korban Tomid, which was brought twice every day, first thing in the morning, and last thing in the afternoon. Something which is brought so

regularly risks becoming habitual, and therefore it needs an extra shemira to ensure that the beauty of the mitzvah is preserved. This explains why the olah needed extra care but not why there was chisaron kis, financial loss.

His son the Ksav Sofer therefore adds a further dimension that another of the Korban Olah's purposes was to atone for arrogance. So he says that the chisaron kis refers to someone who has "nothing in his pockets" i.e. nothing to shout about because however abhorrent Hashem finds arrogance, there is nothing worse than showing off when you have nothing to be arrogant about!

The Chidusahi Harim, the first Gerer Rebbe offers an explanation for this Gemora which is "drash" but beautiful. He says that every day, people take in information, food and sounds from the world around us into our bodies. Food is ingested through our mouths, sounds through our ears and information through our eyes.

When He created the human bodies, Hashem gave these parts covers; the mouth has the teeth and the lips, the ears have the ear lobes and the eyes have the eyelids. This is a natural protection that Hashem gave us so that we can control what items we allow to enter from the outside world into our bodies. However we also process things in the world through our thoughts. But when we think something, it just comes into our heads, and even if it is an unwanted or unpleasant thought, once it is there it can't be reversed. Hashem didn't create any natural cover for our thoughts so that we can control or restrain what comes into our minds.

One of the things which the korban olah is brought for is inappropriate thoughts, and thinking about doing an aveiroh. So, says the Chidushei Harim, that the thoughts need extra care because they are "Chisaron Kis" not as we translated it as causing loss of money, but he translates it as missing a cover. As you have no in built control over your thoughts you need to take extra care that we try, as far as we are able to only think about things which are positive and appropriate. In fact the Vayikra Rabba says that the word Olah does not mean burnt but comes from the expression "Aliya al Ruchamchem", something which comes into your thoughts. This fits in well with the idea of the Chidushei Harim, that the whole word Olah is about having the right thoughts which, because they are so hard to control, they need an extra protection.

Although we do not have korbanot today, may the many lessons that they teach us continue to be with us.