

MESHECH CHOCHMAH

Shabbos HaGadol

From the Haftarah

וְעִרְבָה לָהּ מִנְחַת יְהוּדָה וִירוּשָׁלַם כִּימֵי עוֹלָם וּכְשָׁנִים קְדָמֶינִי

The minchah-offering of Yehudah and Yerushalayim will be pleasing to Hashem as in the days of old and in previous years (Malachi 3:4)

This *pasuk* which opens the Haftarah of Shabbos HaGadol, and which is well known to us from the conclusion of the Shemoneh Esrei, describes how, in the future, the *korbanos* of Am Yisrael will once again be pleasing to Hashem as in days of old.

Some Questions

There are a number of basic questions regarding this *pasuk* which are worthwhile considering:

1. What is the specific connotation of the word “וערבה” as opposed to other similar terms?
2. Why does the *pasuk* specify the *minchah* offering? Will not all offerings be pleasing to Hashem in the future?
3. Are the phrases “days of old” and “early years” referring to any specific time when *korbanos* were pleasing to Hashem?

With regards to the third question, the Midrash¹ identifies the time to which the *pasuk* is referring as the time of Kayin and Hevel, which was a time when *avodah zarah* did not yet

¹ *Eichah Rabasi* 5:21.

exist in the world. The Meshech Chochmah discusses how this identification may help us answer the first two questions as well.

Matok and Arev

The term “*arev* – pleasant” is often used synonymously with the term “*matok* – sweet”. However, there is a significant difference in connotation between them.

- ▷ “*Matok*” refers to a single entity which is sweet.
- ▷ “*Arev*” relates to the term “*eiruv*,” a mixture or combination. It refers to something whose pleasant effect is specifically the result of combining different components, each of which contributes to – and brings out the best from – the other ingredients.

A classic example of the concept of “*arev*” is the Ketores, which consists of eleven different spices. In fact, as Chazal point out,² one of these spices, the *chelbenah*, actually has a foul odor. Nevertheless, when combined with the other spices, not only is the smell of the *chelbenah* itself tempered, it further serves to enhance the smell of the other ten spices! The composite effect of this “*eiruv*” of different spices is called “*arev*”.

“When a soul brings a Mincha-offering”

The Halachah states that most of the *korbanos* which are offered by an individual can also be jointly offered by two people. A notable exception is the *minchah*, which can only be offered by a single individual.³ The source for this rule is the *pasuk* which introduces the korban *minchah*:⁴

וּנְפֹשׁ כִּי תִקְרִיב קִרְבַּן מִנְחָה לַיהוָה

When a person offers a minchah offering to Hashem

The term used by the *pasuk* to describe the person bringing the *minchah* is “נפש,” from which the Gemara derives that a *minchah* must be brought specifically by a single soul and not by two or more people.

Having said this, we do encounter *minchah* offerings which are brought by the entire Jewish People! For example, the *Omer* offering on Pesach and the *Shtei Halechem* on Shavuos are both communal *minchah* offerings. How does this fit in with the stipulation that a *minchah* cannot be brought by more than one person?

2 *Kerisos* 6b.

3 See *Menachos* 104b.

4 *Vayikra* 2:1.

Nefesh and Nefashos

The answer to this question lies in a comment of Chazal,⁵ regarding the way the Torah describes the families of Yaakov and Esav:

Concerning Esav, the Torah only mentions six members of his family, yet still refers to them as “souls” in the plural, as it says⁶ “וַיִּקַּח עֵשָׂו אֶת נָשָׁיו וְאֶת בָּנָיו וְאֶת בְּנֹתָיו – Esav took his wives, sons and daughters and all the souls of his household.” With regards to Yaakov, however, the pasuk mentions seventy people and yet still refers to them as “one soul,” as it says⁷ “וַיְהִי כָּל נַפְשׁ יִצְחָאֵי יִרְדָּה יַעֲקֹב שִׁבְעִים נַפְשׁ – All the souls (lit. soul) who emerged from Yaakov were seventy souls (lit. soul)!” Rather, since Esav’s family worshiped many deities, the Torah refers to them as “many souls.” Yaakov’s family, however, worships One God, therefore, it is referred to as “one soul.”

We see that the entire Jewish people are themselves considered “one soul” and, as such, are able to bring a korban *minchah*. Moreover, such a *minchah* is especially “*arev* – pleasing” to Hashem, since it is the product of the composite “soul” that is comprised of the unification and integration (“*eiruv*”) of the Jewish People!

However, it is important to take note of this statement of the Midrash, as well as its implications; for the Midrash states that the reason Yaakov’s family are referred to as “a soul”, while Esav’s family are called “souls” is specifically because Yaakov’s family worships the One God while Esav’s family serve multiple deities.

We may tend to consider the concept of “Jewish unity” purely in terms of the Jewish People’s relationship with each other, and perhaps as not so connected to the question of their relationship with Hashem. The Midrash is informing us that the ultimate unity of the Jewish People to each other is based on the fact that they serve One God. Should the unity of their connection with Hashem ever be compromised, then their unified status as “one soul” would likewise be diminished. Among the many expressions of such a decline, this would express itself in the korban *minchah*. If Bnei Yisrael should cease being a single “nefesh,” they could no longer bring a *minchah*; as soon as they are no longer a unified and integrated entity (“*eiruv*”) their *minchah* would no longer be pleasing (“*arev*”) before Hashem.

Korban minchah and the Sword of Gideon

Indeed, the Jewish People experienced just such an un-unified state in the days of Gideon, when they were subject to oppression from Midian. The *pasuk* relates:⁸

5 *Vayikra Rabbah* 4:6.

6 *Bereishis* 36:6.

7 *Shemos* 1:5.

8 *Shoftim* 6:6.

Yisrael became exceedingly impoverished before Midian

Commenting on these words, the Midrash⁹ states that “they were so impoverished they did not even have the means with which to offer a korban *minchah*.” On a simple level the Midrash is describing the dire poverty which the Jewish people endured as a result of the oppression from Midian. However, the Meshech Chochmah explains that, on a deeper level, this Midrash is expressing the “poverty” which made them susceptible to that oppression!

As the *pesukim* in *Sefer Shoftim* there describe, the Jewish People at that time were involved in different forms of *avodah zarah*, including Ba’al and Asheirahs. In this state, having lost their unified connection with Hashem, they were no longer fully connected to each other and lost their status as “one soul”. This fragmented state is what the Midrash is referring to when it says they were so poor that, as a people, they could no longer bring a korban *minchah*!

This understanding of the Jewish People’s “impoverished” state will shed new light on Gideon’s first step in the war against Midian, destroying the statue of Ba’al and cutting down an *Asheirah* tree. This represented the beginning of the recovery of the People, not only in terms of their connection with Hashem, but also their unification with each other.

Indeed, this will give us a completely new insight into a part of that chapter where Hashem instructs Gideon to descend towards the Midianite camp on the eve of battle, telling him that he will hear something which will be the source of much encouragement regarding the battle to come. The *pasuk* relates that when Gideon approached the camp, he overheard one of the Midianite soldiers telling his fellow about a dream that he had had the preceding night:¹⁰

וַהֲגִהָ צָלִיל לֶחֶם שְׁעָרִים מִתְהַפֵּף בְּמַחֲנֵה מִדְיָן וַיָּבֵא עַד הָאֵקֶל וַיִּכְהוּ וַיִּפֹּל... וַיַּעַן רֵעֵהוּ
וַיֹּאמֶר אֵין זֹאת בְּלִתִּי אִם חֶרֶב גִּדְעוֹן

Behold, a roasted barley bread was rolling in the Midianite camp. It came to the tent and struck it and it fell... His fellow answered and said, “This is none other than the sword of Gideon”

What was the significance of this “roasted barley bread” rolling into the Midianite camp?

The Midrash¹¹ informs us that this was a reference to the korban *omer*, which is an offering of barley. Indeed, the night Gideon attacked the Midianite camp was the sixteenth of

9 *Yalkut Shimoni Shoftim* sec. 60.

10 *Shoftim* 7:13-14.

11 *Vayikra Rabbah* 28:6.

Nisan, the date on which the *omer* is offered. Based on our discussion, we can appreciate the significance of this allusion in an entirely new light. Once Bnei Yisrael had abandoned the *avodah zarah* which had disconnected them from Hashem, they were once again able to connect with each other, which thereby enabled them to offer – as “one soul” – the communal *minchah* offering of the *omer*. In this reunited state, their victory was ensured!

Future Times

Coming back to our Haftarah, the Navi prophesizes concerning a time when all barriers between us and Hashem – and hence with each other – will be removed. The result of this unified and integrated state will be that our *minchah*, which can only be offered by “one soul,” will once again be “*arev*” before Hashem. The paradigm for this absolute connection, referred to in the *pasuk* as “the early years,” is the time of Hevel, whose *minchah* was offered at a time when there was no *avodah zarah* in the world that could disrupt his connection with Hashem. In the future, with Bnei Yisrael in a full state of “*eiruv*,” our *mincha* will likewise be “*arev*.”¹² 

May it happen speedily in our days!

Wishing us all a safe and happy Pesach, and as Hashem showed us wonders when we left Mitzrayim, may He do likewise as He leads us toward the final redemption *bi'meheirah be'yameinu*, Amen.

12 Perhaps this idea can give us further insight as to the connection between this Haftarah and the festival of Pesach which it ushers in. Moshe's introductory words to Bnei Yisrael regarding the korban Pesach were (Shemos 12:21) “*מִשְׁכְּרֵי וְקַחוּ לָכֶם* – Draw and take for yourselves.” Chazal (*Midrash Rabbah* *ibid.*) interpret the word “*מִשְׁכְּרֵי*” as saying “withdraw your hands from *avodah zarah*.” Pesach is the time when we became a nation. As such, Moshe is informing the people that withdrawing from *avodah zarah* is critical not only in order to connect them to Hashem, but also to fully connect them with each other and leave Mitzrayim as a unified nation.