

## Contrast – Tsav/Shabbat HaGadol 5786

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In this week's parasha, Tsav, as in last week's parasha, discusses the sacrifices. The perspective, however, is significantly different. In Vayikra the sacrifices were discussed from the point of view of the ordinary members of the Jewish people (who might be responsible for bringing an offering but could not actually offer it himself). That parasha opened with the words: ויקרא אל משה וידבר ה' אליו מאהל מועד לאמר: "Gd called Moshe and spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying: **'Speak to the children of Israel...'**" (Vayikra 1:1–2). Tsav, by contrast, concerns the manner in which the kohanim must handle the sacrifices, as is evident from its opening words: וידבר ה' אל משה לאמר **צו את** "Gd spoke to Moshe, saying: **Command Aharon and his sons...**" (Vayikra 6:1–2). Together, the two parshiot reveal the dual function of the sacrifices: on the one hand they are the shared rituals of the entire Jewish people; on the other hand they serve as a bridgehead for the divine presence in the world.

Remarkably, in this week's parasha – that focuses on the kohanim - we encounter an offering that appears to be strongly *individual* in character: the thanksgiving offering (in Hebrew: the *Toda*). The *Toda* has a number of distinctive features.

First, our sages tell us that it was a very large offering. Unlike an ordinary peace offering, where only an animal was brought, the *Toda* also included a substantial quantity of bread. The pasuk states: אם על תודה יקריבנו והקריב על זבח התודה חלות מצות בלולת בשמן ורקיקי מצות משחים בשמן וסלת מרבכת חלת בלולת בשמן. "If he brings it as a thanksgiving offering, he shall bring alongside the thanksgiving offering: (i) unleavened loaves mixed with oil, (ii) unleavened wafers smeared with oil, and (iii) loaves of fine flour soaked and mixed with oil. He shall bring his offering - his thanksgiving peace offering – together with (iv) loaves of leavened bread." (Vayikra 7:12). Although the pasuk does not specify how many loaves and wafers are to be brought, the Mishna in Masechet Menachot explains that this amounts to ten leavened loaves and thirty unleavened ones.

It is important to understand that these loaves and wafers, though part of the offering, were not burned on the altar. The same applied to the greater part of the meat of the offering. More strikingly still, the second distinctive feature of the *Toda* is that its meat – and, as tradition understands it, the accompanying breads – had to be eaten that very same day: ובשר זבח תודת שלמיו ביום קרבנו יאכל לא יניח "The meat of the thanksgiving offering shall be eaten on the day it is brought; none of it may be left over until morning." (Vayikra 7:15).

This last requirement posed a practical challenge for whoever brought the *Toda* - the sheer scale of the offering made it difficult to fulfill this obligation alone. But perhaps that was precisely the point. The thanksgiving offering was not something intended solely for the one who brought it; the intention was to share the offering - and with it the gratitude - with others. In the words of R' Tzvi Yehuda Berlin (the *Netziv*): בשביל שבא להודות על שלומו משום הכי "ביום קרבנו יאכל וגו'", כדי שלא יהיה אלא סעודה אחת ויהיו האנשים *"Because he comes to give thanks for his deliverance, he must therefore 'eat it on the day it is brought' - so that there should be but one meal, and many people present."* (Netziv on Vayikra 7:15). The thanksgiving offering was thus not an entirely private affair - the individual offering had to be shared with the community.

This brings to mind another offering we know that occupies the same liminal space between the private and the public. An offering, moreover, that shares a number of features with the *Toda* - likewise brought by private individuals, likewise accompanied by unleavened bread (*matzot*), and likewise to be eaten before daybreak in the company of others: the *Pesach* offering. This is unlikely to be coincidental – there is a deep connection between the two sacrifices. The *Pesach* offering can in a certain sense be understood as the national counterpart of the *Toda*. With the *Pesach* offering, we give thanks to Gd for our national deliverance.

And yet there is one conspicuous difference between the two sacrifices.

Anyone who has ever observed *Pesach* knows that one of its central features is the scrupulous avoidance of anything leavened. And this applies in particular to the *Pesach* offering itself. The Torah states: וזבחת פסח ליהוה אלקיך .... לא תאכל עליו חמץ "You shall slaughter the *Pesach* offering for Gd your Lord... you may not eat *chametz* alongside it." (Devarim 16:3). This stands in sharp contrast to the *Toda*,

where we read (as noted above): על חלת לחם חמץ יקריב קרבנו על זבח תודת שלמיו: *"He shall bring his offering - his thanksgiving peace offering – together with loaves of leavened bread."* (Vayikra 7:12). What is forbidden in the Pesach offering is, in the Toda, an obligation.

To understand why this is so, we must look again at the essence of the Toda.

In the Midrash Rabbah we find a cryptic teaching by the Talmudic sage R' Huna: זבח תודה יכבדני רבי: [Tehillim 50:23 states:] *'Whoever brings a thanksgiving offering honors Me.'* R' Huna said in the name of R' Acha: *it does not say yechabdeni [honors Me] but yechabdaneni [with a doubled nun] - honor upon honor.* R' Huna appears to be saying that one who thanks Gd for escaping danger honors Gd in two distinct ways: first, by expressing gratitude for the deliverance itself; and second, by acknowledging that we live in a world full of danger. In doing so, we make this world itself part of our thanksgiving. And that seems entirely fitting. For it is in this world that we struggle, strive, achieve things - and sometimes fail. We inhabit a world of many colors, but we can perceive light only in contrast to darkness.

This idea is given expression by the seventeenth-century Prague rabbi R' Yehuda Löw - the *Maharal* - in his commentary on the Haggadah: כי השבח שקודם לו גנות יותר שבח, כמו שתראה כי היום קודם לו הלילה, וזה *"Praise that is preceded by disgrace is greater praise - as you will see that the day is preceded by the night. This is because perfection is not to be found at the outset in this world."* (Gevurot Hashem 52). Only in an imperfect world is elevation possible. It is for this reason that the Toda contains a reminder of the ordinary world - leavened bread, the staple of human sustenance. Whoever brings a Toda is part of this world, and brings his offering within the conditions of this world.

For the Pesach offering, matters stand differently. It too is a thanksgiving offering, but it gives thanks for an altogether exceptional occasion - an experience that was not grounded in the ordinary world as we know it. The purpose of the Pesach offering is to recall the singular, wondrous moment in which Gd revealed Himself, insofar as that is possible, to the Jewish people and redeemed them. That was indeed a moment in which perfection became visible - but precisely because of that, it played itself out beyond the bounds of ordinary history. In reliving such an occasion it is fitting that we celebrate with an offering that, as we will say in Ma Nishtana, כלו מצה - *"entirely matzah."* It is a moment of purity and simplicity.

Yet we should not be tempted to conclude that this annual, pure offering is somehow superior to the Toda. The Pesach offering concerns a *memory*, not our everyday lives. The Midrash Rabbah tells us: *"...at the end of time all sacrifices will be abolished - except the Toda offering."* (Vayikra Rabbah 9:7). The Toda belongs to what it means to be a human being, and therefore, precisely because it points to the complex world, it holds an enduring place for all time. It is in this turbulent world that we live. It is this place that we endeavor to improve, in which we seek to draw closer to our Creator, and in which we search for light in contrast to the darkness. It is that striving that makes us human, and it will never disappear.

The imperfection of the world presses itself upon us in these times more than ever. It is not easy, amid the sound and the fury, to keep sight of what makes our lives worthwhile. But it is there - despite everything, there is much to be grateful for. Let us celebrate those things. And let us meanwhile continue to look out for the time described by the prophet Yirmiyahu: *"Thus says Gd: in this place of which you say it is laid waste, with no one left... the sound of joy and gladness shall yet be heard... they shall bring a Toda to the House of Gd, for I will restore the fortunes of the land as they were at first."* (Yirmiyahu 33:10–11).

May that time come soon. And may we soon hear good news soon.

*Shabbat shalom, chag sameach, and bau gut!*