

Parshas Pinchas 5771

THE SACRED SHOFAR

LAST BUT NOT LEAST

עֲשָׂה דְבָרִים נְבָרָאוּ בְעָרְב שַׁבָּת בֵּין הַשְּׁמֶשׁוֹת, וְאֵלוּ הֵן, פִּי הָאָרֶץ, וּפִי הַבְּאֵר, וּפִי הָאֵתוֹן, וְהַקֶּשֶׁת, וְהַמָּן, וְהַמָּטָה, וְהַשְּׁמִיר, וְהַקֶּתֶב, וְהַמְּקַתֵּב, וְהַלְוִיחֹת. וַיֵּשׂ אֲוֹמְרִים, אַף הַמְזִיקִין, וְקַבּוּרְתוֹ שֶׁל מֹשֶׁה, וְאֵילוּ שֶׁל אֲבְרָהָם אָבִינוּ.

“Ten things were created on the eve of Sabbath during the twilight period (i.e., right before the onset of the Sabbath), and they are: The mouth of the ground, the mouth of the well, the mouth of the donkey, the rainbow, the manna, the staff, the *Shamir*, the writing, the writing implement, and the tablets. Some also include the demons, Moshe’s grave, and **the ram sacrificed by our forefather Avraham** (in place of his son, Yitzchak)” (*Avos 5:6*).

We have seen last week that this ram was quite extraordinary. At least in the opinion of R’ Ya’akov Emden, the ram sacrificed by Avraham was created during the first week of Creation and existed up until his time.

The Medrash further elaborates on its uniqueness. Apparently, this ram was extremely utilitarian, as evidenced by the listing of the numerous functions for which its various parts were designated: its ashes (following its consumption on Avraham’s altar) formed the base of the incense alter of the Sanctuary; its ten

sinews were used for the strings of David’s harp; its hide was fashioned into Eliyahu Hanavi’s belt; its left horn became the *shofar* that Hashem blew at Har Sinai; and its (larger) right horn will be used in the future to sound the blast signifying the ingathering of the exiles (*Pirkei D’Rebbi Eliezer, ch. 31*).

Speaking of rams’ horns, the familiar mitzvah of blowing the *shofar* on Rosh Hashanah is contained in this week’s *parshah* (“It shall be for you a day of blasts” [*Bamidbar 29:1*]). As we shall soon see, there seems to be a clash between some of the laws associated with this mitzvah and the Medrash’s statement about the usage of the horn of this special ram.

ELEMENTARY ME’ILAH AND A NEW LEASE ON LIFE

Appropriately, most of the particulars of this subject are discussed in *Maseches* (Tractate) Rosh Hashanah. The Gemara there (*28a*) tells us in the name of R’ Yehudah that for *shofar* purposes, one should not use the horn of an animal that is designated for an *olah* (burnt-offering). Since such an animal has been imbued with sanctity, employing its parts for personal use would constitute *me’ilah* (profaning a sanctified object). This *halachah* would seem to present a problem for the aforementioned Medrash. Avraham’s ram itself was an *olah*, as the verse attests: “And he sacrificed it (the ram) as a burnt-offering in place of his son” (*Bereishis 22:13*). If so – asks the *Yom Teru’ah* (*Rosh Hashanah*,

לזכר נשמת ברוך בן משה ע"ה

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of רחל לאה בת אברהם ע"ה, a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of her neshamah.

ibid.) – how could its horn be used as a *shofar* at Har Sinai? Such a practice is forbidden according to R' Yehudah!

Perhaps this dilemma can be resolved by addressing yet another problem, for according to the Ramban (*Shemos 19:3*), the *shofar* used at Har Sinai seems to have faced even bigger issues. As stated, the horn was taken from the ram sacrificed by Avraham as an *olah*. As its name implies (“burnt-offering”), such a sacrifice – including all of its composite parts – is completely consumed by the altar’s fire. This would mean, then, that the horn of this particular ram (as well as the rest of it) was nothing more than a pile of ashes! How does one blow a *shofar* from that?

The Ramban deduces that it must be that subsequent

to Avraham’s sacrifice, Hashem gathered the ashes together and reconstituted them to form a *shofar*, a “resurrection” of sorts.

This same idea can be applied to resolve the “*me’ilah*” issue, as well. The Gemara in Yoma (59b) recounts a principle relating to the status of sanctified objects: Once the mitzvah for which the object was designated has been performed and completed, the prohibition of *me’ilah* is no longer in effect. In other words, if something was set aside for a certain mitzvah purpose – and acquired holiness as a result – once that mitzvah has been completed, the associated sanctity is terminated. An animal that incurred sanctified status on account of being designated for sacrifice will lose this sanctity once it has been sacrificed. Most often, this law has little bearing, since an animal that has been burnt to a crisp is generally useless. But in this case, where – as the Ramban contends – the horns of the animal were reconstituted, these newly renovated horns are free of sanctity and can be used for other purposes without reservation (*Avodah B’rurah*, p. 154).

The truth is that the answers advanced by the commentators to this question run the gamut, many involving the intricacies of the laws governing *me’ilah*. There is one other solution proposed by the *Chasam Sofer*, however, that is both simple and brilliant at the same time. In essence, *me’ilah* can be characterized as a form of stealing; by co-opting a sacred object for personal use, one is making unauthorized use of Heaven’s “belongings.” As such, the usage of the *shofar* of an *olah* at Har Sinai was completely sanctioned; since Hashem Himself blew the *shofar*, He was, in effect, using His own possession.

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