

Kindly take a moment to study MISHNAS CHAYIM in the merit of
Shlomoh *ben Zev HaLevi a”h*
a fellow Jew who passed away with no relatives to arrange Torah study on behalf of his *neshamah*

“*Tzav*”: A Word of Encouragement

PARSHAS TZAV 5776

Like many *parshiyos*, this week’s *parshah* opens with a focus on a particular mitzvah or body of Torah Law – in this case, dealing with the topic of the *olah* (burnt offering) brought on the altar. Unlike many *parshiyos*, however, this one comes with a form of “introductory note” appended to its beginning. It is a somewhat unique and curious introduction, which seems to lend an air of urgency to the subject at hand.

Race to the Top

In fact, the “introduction” is the *parshah*’s namesake – “*Tzav*” (command), which headlines this opening section: **צו** – “**Command** Aharon and his sons, saying: This is the Torah law concerning the *olah*...” (*Vayikra* 6:2). Quoting Chazal, Rashi elucidates the meaning of this seemingly innocuous word: **אין צו אלא לשון זרוז**: “‘*Tzav*’ is none other than an exhortation to alacrity.” As we shall see, there is actually a two-part exhortation contained herein; for the moment, we suffice by taking note of the element of “rushing” in connection with these laws.

Indeed, the Chasam Sofer understands the reference quite literally. One of the matters dealt with in this section is the *avodah* (service) known as the “*terumas hadeshen*” – “separation of the ashes.” This daily procedure of removing ashes from the altar was conducted on a “first-come, first-serve” basis. That is, the method for determining who would perform this duty – apparently, a much sought-after task – was to run an actual race. And, in fact, the competition was quite intense. As the Mishnah relates (*Yoma* 2:1,2):

בְּרֵאשׁוֹנָה, כָּל מִי שְׂרוּצָה לְתַרֵם אֶת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ, תּוֹרֵם. וּבְזִמְנוֹ שֶׁהוּא מְרַבֵּי, רָצִין וְעוֹלִין בְּכַפָּשׁ, וְכָל הַקּוֹדֵם אֶת חֲבֵרוֹ בְּאַרְבַּע אַמּוֹת זָכָה... מַעֲשֵׂה שֶׁהָיוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם שׁוֹיִן וְרָצִין וְעוֹלִין בְּכַפָּשׁ, וְדַחַף אֶחָד מֵהֶן אֶת חֲבֵרוֹ, וְנִשְׁבְּרָה רִגְלוֹ. וְכִיִּן שָׂרְאוּ בֵּית דִּין שֶׁבְּאֵין לִידֵי סַכָּנָה, הִתְקִינוּ שֶׁלֹא יְהוּ תוֹרְמִין אֶת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ אֶלָּא בְּפִיס.

“Whoever desires to (perform the service of) removing (the ashes) from the altar may perform the removal. But at a time when there are many (volunteers), they run (a race), ascending the (altar’s) ramp. Whoever precedes his fellow, becoming the first to reach the area of the (upper) four cubits (of the ramp) – has (prevailed and thus) merits (to perform the service)... It once happened that there were two (*kohanim*) running ‘neck and neck’ as they ascended the ramp; one ended up pushing into his fellow, who (consequently) broke his leg. Once *beis din* (authoritative Rabbinic body) saw that they were capable of incurring harm, they decreed that the removal of ash from the altar would only be determined (from here on in) through the drawing of lots.”

It is apparent from the Mishnah’s account that the *kohanim* were quite exuberant about performing this service. From where did they derive such eagerness and enthusiasm? According to the Chasam Sofer (cited in *Talelei Oros*), the impetus was the “introduction” to this passage. As Rashi stated: “‘*Tzav*’ is none other than an exhortation to alacrity.”

Conflict of Interest

There is an additional facet contained within the introduction to this opening passage, as Rashi continues to relate: *בְּיִתְרָא צָרִיךְ הַכְּתוּב לְזַרְז בְּמַקּוּם שֶׁיֵּשׁ בּוֹ חֲסָרוֹן כִּיס* – “It was especially necessary for the Torah to prod in an instance involving monetary loss.” Apparently, since the issue at hand entailed a loss of money, there was a real concern that the *parshah*’s directive would go unheeded. Hence the need for additional encouragement.

The question is to what monetary loss Rashi was referring. Many commentators point to the fact that the primary subject of the beginning section of the *parshah* is the *olah* sacrifice. As opposed to other offerings where the owners and/or the officiators can partake of the meat, the entirety of the *olah* – the burnt offering – is consumed on the altar. In this respect it is considered a monetary loss, as no physical benefit is accrued from this particular sacrifice. But there is a problem with this approach, as the Ramban and Levush point out. The party addressed in this *parshah* were the *kohanim*, not B’nei Yisrael; as the *passuk* states: *צַו אֶת־אַהֲרֹן וְאֶת־בָּנָיו לֵאמֹר זֹאת תּוֹרַת הָעֹלָה* – “Command **Aharon and his sons**, saying: This is the Torah law concerning the *olah*...” They did not incur any loss when an *olah* was brought; on the contrary, they were awarded the animal’s hide, which was not burnt on the altar (*Vayikra* 7:8). What, then, was the “*chisaron kis*” mentioned by Rashi?

A prime disciple of the Chasam Sofer, in the *sefer Likutei Chever ben Chayim*, elucidates the matter based on another exposition of Chazal. While we tend to view these sacrificial passages as pertaining only to the Temple period, the truth is that they are just as relevant today. How can a person bring an *olah* (or other sacrifice) in the absence of the Sanctuary? The answer is derived from the aforementioned *passuk*: “*Zos Toras ha’olah*.” Chazal explain that by merely learning the “Torah” – that is, the body of law – involving a particular sacrifice, it is accounted to that individual *as if he actually offered the sacrifice* (cf. *Menachos* 110a; *sefer Torah Ohr [from the Chafetz Chaim] ch. 1*). Thus, every person has an opportunity to “bring” an *olah*, whether the Beis Hamikdash stands or not, by simply studying this *parshah*.

This is the reason the *kohanim* may be hesitant to relay this particular teaching. Someone may have been contemplating bringing a sacrifice to the Temple. Upon discovering the option of “sacrificing through learning,” he may decide to remain at home, keep his animals, and just study about the sacrifice instead. In the instance of a (potential) *olah*, that would mean the *kohein* would lose out on a windfall of leather! And yet, the *kohanim* are the ones charged with disseminating this very information: *צַו אֶת־אַהֲרֹן וְאֶת־בָּנָיו לֵאמֹר זֹאת תּוֹרַת הָעֹלָה* – “Command **Aharon and his sons, saying:** This is the Torah law concerning the *olah*...” The term “*leimor*” – literally, “to say” – conveys a need to relay the directive; that is, they should tell B’nei Yisrael of the learning option: “*Zos Toras ha’olah*.”

This is what accounts for the added “encouragement” contained in this directive. As Rashi stated, there is more of a need to implore when the matter involves potential financial loss. Indeed, it was the *kohanim* who stood to lose; for if word got out that people could learn instead of bringing actual sacrifices, they might in fact bring fewer animals – thus diminishing the *kohanim*’s income. As such, it was necessary to prod the *kohanim* to “swallow the loss” and relay the teaching – regardless of the consequences.