YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

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**Sichot of the Roshei Yeshiva**

**Parashat TETZAVEH**

**SICHA OF HARAV YAAKOV MEDAN**

**The Seven Days of *Milu’im***

Translated by David Strauss

Chapter 29 of the book of *Shemot* deals with the commandment to Moshe concerning the seven days of *milu*'*im*, inaugurating the *Mishkan*, during which Moshe was commanded to train and consecrate Aharon and his sons to be priests to God, they and their descendants after them. During this period, the *Mishkan* was also consecrated for service. We will present various notes on the service that was performed during the seven days of *milu'im*.

The priests were to bring three sacrifices on each of the seven days of *milu'im*: a bullock as a sin-offering, a ram as a burnt-offering, and a ram as a peace-offering, which was called the ram of *milu'im.*

**I. The Bullock Sin-Offering**

The bullock sin-offering was brought to atone for the sins of Aharon and his sons up until the day of the construction of the *Mishkan*, so that they could enter the service pure and clean of sin. This bullock is fundamentally similar to the bullock sin-offering that the High Priest brings on Yom Kippur to atone for his sins and for the sins of the priests, just as the bullock here atones for the sins of Aharon and for the sins of his sons. Similarly, the bullock sin-offering of the *milu'im* was burned and not eaten, even though it was offered on the outside altar, just as the bullock sin-offering of the High Priest on Yom Kippur is burned and not eaten.

The verses in this chapter discuss the bullock sin-offering twice, and each time the bullock serves a different purpose – atonement for the priests, who lay their hands on the head of the bullock, and atonement for the altar. This difference leads to the question of whether there are actually two bullocks or only one:

And you shall bring the bullock before the tent of meeting; and Aharon and his sons shall lay their hands upon the head of the bullock… But the flesh of the bullock, and its skin, and its dung, shall you burn with fire outside the camp; it is a sin-offering. (29:10-14)

And every day shall you offer the bullock of sin-offering, beside the other offerings of atonement; and you shall do the purification upon the altar when you make atonement for it; and you shall anoint it, to sanctify it. Seven days you shall make atonement for the altar and sanctify it; thus shall the altar be most holy; whatever touches the altar shall be holy. (29:36-37)

 According to the plain meaning of the verses in our *parasha*, it seems that there are, in fact, two different bullocks here. But in the description of the actual seven days of *milu'im* in the book of *Vayikra*,only one bullock is mentioned:

And the bullock of the sin-offering was brought; and Aharon and his sons laid their hands upon the head of the bullock of the sin-offering. And when it was slain, Moshe took the blood, put it upon the horns of the altar round about with his finger, purified the altar, poured out the remaining blood at the base of the altar, and sanctified it, to make atonement for it. (*Vayikra* 8:14-15)

The bullock described here is the bullock sin-offering of the priests, and they lay their hands upon it, but this is also the bullock with whose blood the altar is consecrated. Presumably, this is the reason that all the commentators write that the two bullocks described above are in fact one bullock.

Nevertheless, the plain meaning of the verses in *Shemot* 29 supports the understanding that we are dealing here with two bullocks. Another parallel that anchors the possibility that there are two different bullocks stems from a comparison with the sacrifices brought on Yom Kippur for all generations. On Yom Kippur, a separate sacrifice – the goat sin-offering – is consecrated to atone for the Holy because of the uncleanness of Israel, in addition to the bullock sin-offering that atones for the priests.

 Why does the altar need atonement before there is any sin in it? Is appears that the atonement of the altar during the days of *milu'im* results not from a profanation of the Holy or from sacrifices that were offered improperly. We are dealing here with general atonement for the people of Israel and their sins up until the day of the erection of the *Mishkan*, in order to allow the beginning of offering sacrifices in it, for the altar is the main channel in the relations between God and Israel.[[1]](#footnote-1) The offerings of the seven days of *milu'im* initiate this atonement, whereas the offerings brought on the eighth day seal that atonement.

**II. The Ram Burnt-Offering and the *Milu’im* Ram**

 Similarly, the ram burnt-offering brought by Aharon and his sons parallels the ram burnt-offering brought by the High Priest on Yom Kippur. The bullock sin-offering atones for the priests. The ram burnt-offering expresses the priests' absolute dedication to the service of God, like a burnt-offering that is offered completely to God. The burnt-offering of the priests is specifically a ram, apparently so that it should resemble the ram of Yitzchak, which was offered as a burnt-offering in his stead on Mount Moriya. The ram peace-offering expresses the fact that after the priest has expressed his total dedication to the service of God, he is fit to eat of the holy offerings at God's table. Yitzchak too gives the impression that eating was important to him, for the delicacies that were given to him served as the substrate for bestowing God's blessing upon his son. Only after he expressed his total devotion to the service of God and a ram was offered as a burnt-offering in his place, did his eating turn into sacred eating by the force of God's blessing.

Several details relating to the *milu'im* ram should be noted:

Then shall you kill the ram, and take of its blood, and put it upon the tip of the right ear of Aharon, and upon the tip of the right ear of his sons, and upon the thumb of their right hand, and upon the great toe of their right foot. (29:20)

It is possible that the placing of blood on the tip of the ear parallels the boring of the ear of a Hebrew slave who wishes to remain a slave forever, expressing a similar principle. For the slave, who voluntarily chooses slavery to flesh and blood, there is a degrading element in the ceremony. But for the priests, it is a celebratory ceremony of consecration: The "boring" is done by placing blood on their ears, as if it were the blood of their bored ears, but in fact it is the blood of the ram that comes in their stead.

The blood is placed not only on the tip of the ear, but also on the thumb of the right hand and on the big toe of the right foot. If we compare the placing of the blood to the cruel act of severing the thumb and right toe, we see that this too is a sign of slavery:

And Adoni-Bezek said: Seventy kings, having their thumbs and their great toes cut off, gathered food under my table; as I have done, so God has requited me. (*Shofetim* 1:7)[[2]](#footnote-2)

God would never express the servitude of the priests in His Temple through the actual severance of their thumbs and big toes, an act of great cruelty and mutilation. But it is possible that the placing of the offering's blood is a reflection of such an act: The blood of the offering – which comes in place of the lives of those offering the sacrifice, as in all cases of sacrifice – is placed on their hands and feet, as if they had been cut off.

**III. The Thigh and the Breast**

 It is further stated with regard to the *milu'im* ram:

Also you shall take of the ram the fat, and the fat tail, and the fat that covers the inwards, and the lobe of the liver, and the two kidneys, and the fat that is upon them, and the right thigh; for it is a ram of consecration. (*Shemot* 29:22)

The *milu'im* ram is different from all other peace-offerings in that in addition to the fat and the fat tail and the lobe of the liver and the kidneys, the right thigh is also sacrificed to God. In the case of an ordinary peace-offering, the right thigh is given to the priest to eat:[[3]](#footnote-3)

Speak to the children of Israel, saying: He that offers his sacrifice of peace-offerings to the Lord shall bring his offering to the Lord out of his sacrifice of peace-offerings. His own hands shall bring the offerings of the Lord made by fire: the fat with the breast shall he bring, that the breast may be waved for a wave-offering before the Lord. And the priest shall make the fat smoke upon the altar; but the breast shall be Aharon's and his sons'. **And the right thigh shall you give to the priest for a heave-offering** out of your sacrifices of peace-offerings. He among the sons of Aharon, that offers the blood of the peace-offerings, and the fat, **shall have the right thigh for a portion**. (*Vayikra* 7:29-33)

In the case of an ordinary peace-offering, the right thigh is given to the priest together with the breast. However, during the *milu’im* period, the priests had not yet been consecrated, and the thigh is therefore sacrificed to God together with the other portions that are burnt to Him.

The law of the breast of the *milu'im* ram differs both from the law of the right thigh of this offering and from the law of the peace-offerings of later generations. Here the breast is not burnt on the altar, nor is it given to the priest. The breast is given to Moshe:

And you shall take the breast of Aharon's ram of consecration, and wave it for a wave-offering before the Lord; and it shall be your portion. And you shall sanctify the breast of the wave-offering, and the thigh of the heave-offering, which is waved, and which is heaved up, of the ram of consecration, even of that which is Aharon's, and of that which is his sons'. And it shall be for Aharon and his sons as a due forever from the children of Israel; for it is a heave-offering; and it shall be a heave-offering from the children of Israel of their sacrifices of peace-offerings, even their heave-offering to the Lord. (29:26-28)

In these verses, the breast from the *milu'im* ram is designated for Moshe to eat, and in future generations, for Aharon and his sons. From this it appears that Moshe served in the priesthood all seven days of *milu'im*, and that on the eighth day he handed over the priesthood to Aharon.

If so, why was the thigh different from the breast? Why was the thigh not given to Moshe to eat as well? We may understand this by reexamining the verses relating to the peace-offerings in the book of *Vayikra* that were cited above. It seems that there is an essential difference between the giving of the thigh and the giving of the breast. The thigh is given by the person offering the sacrifice to the priest as a "heave-offering," whereas the breast is waved before God, and from this waving it is given to the priest. This implies that the priest eats it from God's table. The breast is given to God, and in the wake of this God gives it to the priest.[[4]](#footnote-4) During the seven days of *milu'im*,Moshe ate the thigh from the portion of the altar that was given directly to God. But the portion given to the priests, i.e., the thigh, was only allowed to be eaten by a permanent priest, like Aharon and his sons. Since the priests had not yet been consecrated, the thigh was sacrificed to God.

**IV. The Closing Verses**

It shall be a continual burnt-offering throughout your generations at the door of the tent of meeting before the Lord, where I will meet with you, to speak there to you. And there I will meet with the children of Israel; and [the Tent] shall be sanctified by My glory. And I will sanctify the tent of meeting, and the altar; Aharon also and his sons will I sanctify, to minister to Me in the priest's office. And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them. I am the Lord their God. (29:42-46)

The closing verses of the passage dealing with the days of *milu'im* describe the climax of the relationship between God and His people. We wish to note several points about them:

1. The sacrifice is not the purpose of the *Mishkan*. It is what prepares and atones for the primary goal – meeting with God and speaking with Him. Here a clear explanation is given for the term "*ohel mo'ed*," tent of meeting: "where I will **meet** with you… and there I will **meet** with the children of Israel."

2. The sanctity of Aharon and his sons and their priesthood (as well as the sanctity of the altar and the entire *Mishkan*) comes from two opposite directions, written at the beginning and end of the command regarding the days of *milu'im*:

And this is the thing that you shalt do to them to hallow them, to minister to Me in the priest's office. (29:1)

Aharon also and his sons will I sanctify, to minister to Me in the priest's office. (29:44)

First the command is cast upon Moshe: to purify, to atone, to anoint, to clothe, and to train. The end of the dedication process is done by God by virtue of his meeting in the *Mishkan*. His glory that rests in the *Mishkan* radiates sanctity to the *Mishkan* and to those who serve in it.

Sanctity is given two meanings here. One meaning is withdrawal from the mundane world, its impurities and its sins. This is also how Rashi interprets the command "You shall be holy" (*Vayikra* 19:2) – the *mitzva* is to be set apart from sin and impurity (sexual prohibitions). According to the second meaning, sanctity is a fundamental positive concept that cannot be defined in terms of another concept. God is the source of the holy, and He radiates of His holiness upon the priests who serve in His *Mishkan* and upon the entire *Mishkan*.

3. God meets with the people of Israel by speaking to Moshe. Speech is the connection that creates the meeting. In this respect, Moshe serves as the people's agent to receive the word of God, and not as God's agent to the people. In the tent of meeting, the main mission is to hear the word of God. In the Temple, on the other hand, and especially with the altar, the main mission is to sound to God the word of the people – their prayer. As Shlomo describes at length the goal of the Temple that he built:

But will God in very truth dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You; how much less this house that I have built! Yet have You respect to the prayer of Your servant, and to his supplication, O Lord my God, to listen to the cry and to the prayer which Your servant prays before You this day; that Your eyes may be open toward this house night and day, even toward the place whereof You have said: My name shall be there; to listen to the prayer which Your servant shall pray toward this place. And listen You to the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel when they shall pray toward this place; hear You in heaven Your dwelling-place; and when You hear, forgive. (I *Melakhim* 8:27-30)

The Torah and prayer are the two pillars of the two-way dialogue that God maintains with His people Israel. The Torah is the word of God to the people, and prayer is the word of the people to God.

4. Just as God speaks to Moshe in order to meet thereby with the people, so too he sanctifies Aharon and his sons so that he may dwell among the children of Israel. His speaking with Moshe gives the place its name – "the tent of meeting." His sanctification of Aharon gives the place its other name – "*Mishkan*." It seems that the obvious parallel here between Moshe and Aharon is that the main function of Moshe is to hear the word of God in the name of the people, while the main function of Aharon by virtue of his holiness is to sound the word of the people to God in his prayer. Aharon will eventually do this in a special way on Yom Kippur.

5. The *Shekhina* resting among the children of Israel is defined here as the new objective of the exodus from Egypt, in addition to the making of the covenant, and the receiving of the *mitzvot* as a result, and the inheritance of the land of the patriarchs at the end of the process.

1. *Torat Kohanim* and Rashi bring other understandings: The bullock atones for one who might have donated for the work of the *Mishkan* or for the altar something that he had stolen, or which he brought not of his free will. It may also be suggested that the bullock atones for mistakes made during the days of *milu'im* themselves. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bar Kochva did something similar with his soldiers, when he demanded that they cut off their fingers as a sign of thir determination and dedication to his war. (It should be noted that he certainly did not require that they cut of their right thumbs, as this would have made it impossible for them to properly hold their swords.) *Chazal* objected to this: "And there was there Ben Koziba, who had two hundred thousand soldiers with severed fingers.The Sages asked him: How long will you continue to make cripples of Israel? He replied: How else shall I test them? They answered: Anyone who is incapable of uprooting a cedar of Lebanon while riding by on his horse should not be counted among your troops” (*Yerushalmi* *Ta'anit* 4:5). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In a non-consecrated animal, it is specifically the fore-leg that is given to the priest, i.e., the main part of the animal's right fore-leg. The right thigh is the lower part of the animal's right hind leg, the part below the hock (or even less, according to R. Yehuda). The leg of a bullock or ram is more complex than that of man. We will not go into the details of the part that is given to the priest or the disagreements about the matter. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Our comments relate to what the Torah says in *Shemot* 29 and in *Vayikra* 7. The description of the seven days of *milu'im* (*Vayikra* 8:27-29) expressly indicates that the thigh was also waved. Furthermore, the thigh there is waived together with the other parts and not together with the breast. The *halakha* for future generations regarding peace-offerings also established waving of the thigh in addition to waving of the breast; see *Torat Kohanim*, *Tzav* 5 and elsewhere, and *Menachot* 62a and elsewhere. In our opinion, however, there is room for the way we have understood the Torah's wording and emphasis in the two passages cited above. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)