

Vaykira, 5780 – Rabbi Dr. Zev Wiener

Even in the Beit HaMikdash, location was everything.

In order for a Korban (sacrifice) to be valid, the procedure had to be performed not only with the appropriate actions and intentions, but also in the correct location. This week, the Torah instructs (Vayikra 1:11) that the slaughter of the holiest type of Korbanot (known as "Kodshei Kodshim," which include Chatat, Olah, Asham, etc) had to be performed specifically in the northern part of the Temple Courtyard. What is so special about the north?

Additionally, although this northern requirement applies equally to Kodshei Kodshim that come from "Tzon" (a broad term which refers to sheep, rams, and goats) or "Bakar" (cattle), the law is specifically taught by the Torah in reference to "Tzon," and extended to cattle by means of analogy. Why is the requirement of slaughtering Kodshei Kodshim in the northern Courtyard taught specifically about "Tzon," as opposed to cattle?

The Meshech Chochma (Vayikra 1:10) explains that slaughtering Kodshei Kodshim in the northern part of the Courtyard serve to invoke the merit of Akeidat Yitzchak, the ultimate test of Avraham Avinu. Linguistically, the Hebrew term "Tzafon" (north) relates to the word "Tzafun" (hidden), an adjective the Medrash uses to describe the ashes of the ram that was offered at the Akeidah. The Medrash teaches that these special ashes are 'צפון לזכרון לפני ה' -- "constantly hidden before Hashem as a remembrance." This connection to Akeidat Yitzchak also explains why the Halacha of slaughtering Kodshei Kodshim in the northern courtyard is taught specifically about Tzon, as opposed to cattle, since the offering of Akeidat Yitzchak was a ram (Tzon), not an ox.

Thus, as we offer the holiest type of Korbanot, we connect them to the merit of Avraham Avinu, who overcame immense challenges and endured the ultimate self-sacrifice to fulfill the will of Hashem. Perhaps the message is that there is nothing holier than when we fulfill the will of the Almighty with "Mesirut Nefesh" -- in the face of great challenge.

While one could very appropriately apply a variety of adjectives to describe the times we face -- "sad," "painful," "worrisome" -- the adjective that most commonly comes to my mind is "challenging." These are intensely challenging times for so many people on so many levels, and our mettle is truly being tested. Much like our father Avraham, we are being given extremely heavy loads that in a very real way have the potential to completely break us. There is a great deal riding on our shoulders right now. And yet, despite the immense sadness many of us are feeling, the Ribono Shel Olam is asking us as a nation to muster every ounce of inner strength, talent, and wisdom that we collectively have, to push back against this destruction and take care of each other, to rise to even greater heights than we ever thought possible for the sake of our families, our people, and our world.

And it is specifically in these overwhelmingly challenging situations, the Akeidat Yitzchaks of life, that our true holiness and greatness comes to fruition. There's no class in Rabbinical school, yeshiva, or seminary on "How to Lead When the World Seems to be Falling Apart." And yet, every single class in these institutions was ultimately teaching us how to do this, because the essence of Torah is to develop an inner Divine compass. And when that compass is calibrated, it guides us through even the most challenging of situations. That's exactly what we're witnessing before our eyes -- an unbelievable effort by each of us to pick each other up when we're faltering at different times, strengthen each other through Torah and kindness, and overcome this challenge, despite immense fear and devastating losses.

The slaughter of Kodshei Kodshim in the north thus serves as an eternal reminder that, like the Akeidah, the highest degree of holiness exists when we persist in the Divine service despite difficulty. Through our present-day Mesirut Nefesh to fulfill G-d's will with Torah and kindness, we live out the legacy of our father, Avraham. May this holiest of services find favor in G-d's eyes, and may He bring an end to our travails speedily.