

Insights from the Meshech Chochma

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פְּרָשַׁת נֹחַ תִּשְׁפ"ו

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וַיִּבֶן נֹחַ מִזְבֵּחַ לַה' וַיִּקַּח מִכָּל הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה וּמִכָּל הָעוֹף הַטְּהוֹר וַיַּעַל עֲלֵית בְּמִזְבְּחֹהוּ. וַיִּרְחַח ה' אֶת רִיחַ הַנִּיחֹחַ...
(פרק ח' ב-כא)

Then Noach built an altar to Hashem and took of every pure animal and every pure bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. Hashem smelled the pleasant aroma...

After he and his family emerged safely from the Ark, Noach, in gratitude, offered קִרְבָּנוֹת to Hashem. And as Rashi explains, based on Midrash Rabba, he brought these קִרְבָּנוֹת from every kosher species, even those which the Torah *forbids* as offerings. He reasoned that Hashem would not have commanded him to take so many of those species unless He wanted him to offer them in this type of situation.

Rav Meir Simcha takes us to a different exegesis from this Midrash: “R’ Eliezer ben Yaakov says, ‘Noach brought his offerings on the site of the great Altar that was in the *Beis HaMikdash* in *Yerushalayim*, for Adam, the first man, also brought offerings there.’” (Is it possible that R’ Eliezer ben Yaakov felt that in the phrase וַיַּעַל עֲלֵית בְּמִזְבְּחוֹ, וַיַּעַל עֲלֵית is redundant, as the pasuk already told us נֹחַ מִזְבֵּחַ לַה'—he obviously brought the עֲלֵית upon it and so repeating בְּמִזְבְּחוֹ is to tell us that there was something extra special about *that* מִזְבֵּחַ? Perhaps.) The Midrash continues: “וְתִיטֵב לַה' מְשׁוֹר פֶּרֶךְ, תהילים סט” In *Doivid HaMelech* writes, *And it shall please Hashem more than a full-grown bull, possessed of horns and hoofs.* He is expressing his desire that his praise of Hashem be more pleasing to Him than a קִרְבָּן. In חז”ל explain that he is referring to the offering brought by Adam, and as Rashi explains, based on the description that the animal from its onset had horns and hoofs, this could only be the bull of Creation, which emerged from the earth upright and in a mature state i.e., with *horns and hoofs*. And a few pasukim later, we read כִּי אֶלְקִים יוֹשִׁיעַ צִיּוֹן/For G-d will deliver Zion and this, according to the Midrash, is telling us that Adam brought his offering on *Zion* i.e., what was to be the future site of the *Beis HaMikdash*.

Rav Meir Simcha’s explanation of R’ Yaakov ben Eliezer’s statement requires background information. Noach lived in a time when it was permitted to offer a קִרְבָּן on a *Bama*—any rock or stone platform. R’ Shimon in זבחים קח: refers to this simply as מִזְבֵּחַ בְּבָמָה i.e., when *Bama*-sacrifice was permitted, there was no need to have a מִזְבֵּחַ. Next: In זבחים קיג. the Mishna tells us that when *Bamos* were in use, there was also no need for a רִיחַ נִיחֹחַ i.e., the rule that meat of an עוֹלָה may not be roasted before it is put on the מִזְבֵּחַ’s fire, as this would prevent the meat from emitting its *pleasant aroma* while burning on the מִזְבֵּחַ. This is referred to as רִיחַ נִיחֹחַ בְּבָמָה. Applying these two rules to Noach, why did he find it necessary to build a מִזְבֵּחַ and why did the Torah have to inform us that Noach’s קִרְבָּנוֹת produced the

special *ניחוח*? According to Rav Meir Simcha, this is what “pushed” R’ Eliezer ben Yaakov to tell us that already from the time of Adam the place where Noach built his *מזבח* had the *קדושה* of the future *Beis HaMikdash* and so Noach had to abide by *its* rules. ... *וַיִּבֶן נֹחַ מִזְבֵּחַ לַה'.* And according to Targum Yonasan, Noach rebuilt the *actual* altar upon which Adam and his sons, Kayin and Hevel, had offered their sacrifices and which had been destroyed during the *Mabul*, adding an additional level of *קדושה* to his *עבודות*.

But Rav Meir Simcha is not yet finished. R’ Eliezer ben Yaakov’s exegesis raises several other issues which he addresses. Since Noach was sacrificing on an “official” *מזבח*, who was his officiating Kohen? To answer this, he alludes to a statement in *Bamidbar Rabba*: “...until the *Mishkan* was established, *Bamos* were permitted and the sacrificial service was performed by the firstborn.” The Midrash continues to list *בְּכוֹרוֹת* and includes Noach i.e., Noach was in fact the “Kohen” for his *עלית*. With this, Rav Meir Simcha says that it is *מִתְאִים* why our *pasuk* tells us that *וַיַּעַל עֹלֹת בַּמִּזְבֵּחַ*, Noach performed the service of bringing up and placing the meat on the *מזבח* to be burnt, but does not tell us that he also slaughtered the animals? Rav Meir Simcha proposes that the *pasuk* is teaching us that unlike the *עבודות*, of which *הַעֲלָאָה* is one and can only be performed by a Kohen, *נְשִׁיטָה* is not, and can be done by a non-Kohen! And this is all because, as R’ Eliezer ben Yaakov told us, Noach’s *מזבח* was *real*!

Rav Meir Simcha has one more issue to resolve. If we are dealing with sacrificing *קִרְבָּנוֹת* in the place of the future *Beis HaMikdash*, we also know that, as per *זבחים קטו*, “Until the *Mishkan* was erected... all animals were fit to be sacrificed: A domesticated animal, an undomesticated animal, or a bird, ...from kosher, but not from non-kosher species.” This changed when the *Mishkan* opened its doors. Not all *בְּהֵמוֹת* and certainly not any *חיות* could be brought as *קִרְבָּנוֹת*. And yet the *Gemara* tells us that *מִכָּל הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה* means that Noach presented *all* the *בְּהֵמוֹת טְהוֹרוֹת* and *חיות טְהוֹרוֹת*, because *חיה* is included in the word *בְּהֵמָה*. How do we reconcile this with R’ Eliezer ben Yaakov’s exegesis? His answer is based on an excerpt from *Vayikra Rabba*: “R’ Yehuda bar R’ Simon said: ‘HKBH said: ‘I have given you ten types of animals, three in your domain-an ox, a sheep, and a goat and seven that are not in your domain-a deer, a gazelle, a fallow deer, a wild goat, an oryx, an aurochs, and a wild sheep. I did not impose upon you to exhaust yourselves on the mountains to bring an offering from those that are not in your domain but rather, from what is in your domain and is raised from your trough.’” So that limiting the kosher animals that are permitted to be brought on the *מזבח* is a Rabbinic directive based on the above rationalization. Says Rav Meir Simcha, this did not apply to Noach since all the animals, as “residents of the Ark”, were still under his control. No especially extra effort would be needed to round them up and bring them as *קִרְבָּנוֹת*. So that even though Noach was in the confines of the future *Beis HaMikdash*, he would nonetheless be allowed to present sacrifices *מִכָּל הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה וּמִכָּל הָעוֹף הַטְּהוֹר*!

לזכר נשמת אבי מורי ר' ישראל מנחם בן ר' שלום ז"ל
לזכר נשמת אמי מורתי רחל בת ר' אלחנן אביגדור ע"ה
לזכר נשמת חמי מורי ר' יעקב נתן בן ר' ישראל שלמה ז"ל
ולזכר נשמת הרב יהודה בן ר' אברהם שמחה (קופרמן) זצ"ל
מחבר הגהות על ספר משך חכמה