
THE MYSTERY OF THE NORTH

In discussing the designated site on the *mizbei'ach* for the sacrificing of the *karban olah*, the Torah states:

ושחט אתו על ירך המזבח צפנה

And he shall sacrifice it on the northern side of the altar (*Vayikra* 1:11).

Then the Torah applies this information to the *karban chatas* and *karban asham*:

במקום אשר תשחט העולה תשחט החטאת

In the place where the burnt offering is sacrificed shall the sin offering be sacrificed (*ibid.* 6:18).

במקום אשר ישחטו את העולה ישחטו את האשם

In the place where they sacrifice the burnt offering shall they sacrifice the trespass offering (*ibid.* 7:2).

It was thus ordained that the proper site for sacrifice of all basic offerings is the northern side of the *mizbei'ach*.

The reason for this is so that the onlooker should be unable to distinguish between the various *karbanos*. Hence, the observer on the sideline might assume that the offering is an *olah*, and perhaps not the more embarrassing *chatas* or *asham* (*Yerushalmi Yevamos* 49:). A similar idea is expressed by *Chazal* (*Sotah* 32:) regarding the established rule of the silent *Shemoneh Esrei*. In order to avoid the humiliation of having bystanders listening in on a petitioner's personal supplication to Hashem, *Chazal* decided that the prayer should be recited silently. *Chazal* were very sensitive to the potential embarrassment of the sinner, hence the institution of the silent prayer and the universal *tzad tzafon* —northern side— of the *mizbei'ach* for most *karbanos*.

Tzafon — north — was always associated with sin, and the *Gemara* (*Sukkah* 52•) states that the word “*tzafon*” is another name for the *yeitzer hara*. *Tzafon* has always been linked with wickedness, as indicated by the following:

אעלה ממעל לכוכבי-קל ארים כסאי ואשב בהר-מועד בירכתי צפון

“I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of Hashem, I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the side of the north” (*Yeshayah* 14:13).

מצפון תפתח הרעה

Out of the north an evil shall break forth (*Yirmiyah* 1:14).

נטה צפון על תוהו

He stretches out the north over the empty place (*Iyov* 26:7).

The north is inhabited by demons and spirits (*Yalkut, Iyov* 913).

צפון : משם החשך יוצא לעולם

From the north emanates darkness to the world (*Bamidbar Rabbah* 2:10).

Pirkei D'Rebbe Eliezer (3) relates that the northern portion of the world was created by Hashem in an imperfect state:

He created the northern side, but did not complete it. He said, “Whoever considers himself a deity — come and complete it.”

The primary purpose of creation was to set the stage for the exercise of man’s *bechirah* (free will). This can only be achieved by including the possibility of human “judgment error” in creation. By leaving the northern border of the universe unfinished, Hashem left room in man’s mind for the worship of idols. The Maharal (*Chidushei Aggados, Bava Basra* 25•) explains that it was impossible for the universe to be perfect; there had to be imperfection in creation. Hashem is perfect, but He wanted His creation to leave room for doubt in the human mind. Hence, the “northern-side” is symbolic of Hashem’s (seeming) competition: idol worship.

Sheivet Dan, who “is synonymous with *avodah zarah*” (*Shabbos* 67:), always occupied the northern traveling position in the *midbar*, and inhabited the northern-most territory of *Eretz Yisrael* (*Yehoshua* 19:40). All the gentile nations of the world are traditionally referred to by the appellation “*tzafon*”:

עורי צפון ובואי תימן

Awake you of the North, and come you of the South (*Shir Hashirim* 4:16).

The *Gemara* (*Zevachim* 116•) explains this verse to refer to the nations of the world, whose animal sacrifices to Hashem were traditionally restricted to the northern side of the *mizbei'ach*. For they only brought sacrifices which were totally consumed by the fire of the *mizbei'ach*. This is in contradistinction to *Klal Yisrael* who were permitted to offer sacrifices on both the northern and southern sides (as in the case of the *karban shelamim*) of the *mizbei'ach*.

The Maharal (*ibid.*) explains that the *karban olah* was *Kodesh Kadoshim*, and therefore Hashem designated for them a specific location on the *mizbei'ach*. However, the *karban shelamim* are *Kadshim Kalim* and therefore do not require an especially designated spot on the *mizbei'ach*. The gentiles were restricted to the *karban olah* offering which was totally consumed on the *mizbei'ach*, and none of the animal flesh was eaten by man. The *karban shelamim*, however, was to be partly consumed by *Klal Yisrael*. Hence, *Klal Yisrael* now became a partner with Hashem in the animal offering. The name “*shelamim*” implies peace to Hashem, peace to the *mizbei'ach*, and peace to its offerers. The gentiles have no part of this — they are ineligible for the *karban shelamim*. Hence, the gentiles are referred to as “North,” in reference to their limited position on the *mizbei'ach*, while *Klal Yisrael* is alluded to as “South” (see *Midrash Bereishis Rabba* 34:9).

Now, the restriction of the sin offerings (*chatas* and *asham*) to the *tzafon* side of the *mizbei'ach*, together with the *karban olah*, is more understandable. The *olah* is the standard offering for all humanity. Implicit in the word “*karban*” is the word “*karev*” — “to get close to.” That section of humanity which desired to identify with Hashem were permitted to offer a sacrifice to Hashem, and it would be totally consumed. The sin offerings were unique to *Klal*

Yisrael, as opposed to the nations, but these offerings were also to be offered on the north. For sin emanates from the north, necessitating a rectification which recognizes the origin of sin. The offerings of the northern side of the *mizbei'ach* were a reparation for the spiritual damage resulting from the northern side of the world.

Klal Yisrael, however, were no longer merely a nation — they were now a super-nation. In a sense they were now partners with Hashem, and therefore they had more options available to them. At the time of its introduction, this was an earth-shattering, revolutionary idea. The notion that a human could now share a *karban* with Hashem was a source of wonder to the nations and the basis of much envy. *Klal Yisrael* was now elevated from among the nations. Thus, in describing the laws of *karban shelamim* (*Vayikra* 7:11-38), no mention is made of a restricted area of the *mizbei'ach* — for this is now an offering which shattered the restrictions.

The *karban olah*, the *karban chatas*, and the *karban asham* represent mankind's response to the seeming deficiency of *Olam Hazeah*, man's desire to sin. Sin emanates from the north, and therefore man's rejoinder is symbolized on the northern side of the *mizbei'ach*. The *karban shelamim* represents a completely different category of *karban*, with a completely different significance.

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