

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter XLI: Pinchas (Num. 25:10–30:1)

Essay 5. The decreasing number of sacrifices over Sukkot

Num. 29:12–39 discusses the seven days of Sukkot and the Eighth Day of Assembly, *Shemini Atzeret*. The Torah lists the animals to be sacrificed each day, with the numbers decreasing each day. On the first day of Sukkot, 13 bulls are sacrificed. On the second day of Sukkot, 12 bulls are sacrificed. On the third day of Sukkot, 11 bulls are sacrificed. On the fourth day of Sukkot, 10 bulls are sacrificed. On the fifth day of Sukkot, 9 bulls are sacrificed. On the sixth day of Sukkot, 8 bulls are sacrificed. On the seventh day of Sukkot, 7 bulls are sacrificed. These sacrifices for the seven days of Sukkot total seventy bulls. On the Eighth Day of Assembly, only one bull is sacrificed.

מדרש רבה על פסוק "ביום השמיני עצרת" וכו', מה ראה להיות פוסת והולך בכל יום, למדך תורה דרך ארץ מן הקרבנות, שאם לך לאכסניא וקבלו חבירו, ביום ראשון מאכילו עופות וכו' עד ששמאכילו קטנית. "תהיה לכם", מהו "תהיה לכם", אומר להם המועדים נאים לכם עכ"ל.

There is a Midrash Rabbah on the verse, “On the eighth day, you shall have for yourselves a break; you shall not work at your occupations. You shall present a burnt offering, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the L-rd; one bull, one ram, seven yearling lambs, without blemish.”¹ The Midrash states:

“On the eighth day.”: What was the reason for [the number of sacrificial animals] being reduced each day? The Torah is simply teaching you etiquette from the sacrifices. Thus, if someone goes for lodging, and his host receives him; on the first day he receives him properly and feeds him fowl. Then on the second he feeds him meat; on the third he feeds him fish; on the fourth he feeds him greens. So does he continue to reduce, until he is feeding him legumes.

“You shall have for yourselves.” What is [the meaning of] “for yourselves?” [G-d] said to them, “Festival times are pleasant for you.”

- Num. Rabbah 21:26

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¹ Num. 29:35–36.

והקשו המפרשים דלמה הקשה המדרש מה ראה להיות פוחת על "ביום השמיני", הנה לו להקשות זה על פסוק "והקרבתם" דסמיך ליה "פר אחד איל אחד" דמירי לענין הקרבן. אלא נדאי צריך לומר שהמדרש הקדים המאחר בשביל להקשות על "תהנה לכם" דלא אתי שפיר לפי דרשה זו, צריך עיון איך בלא דרשה זו אתי שפיר "תהנה לכם" ואחר דרשה זו דנקא לש הקושיא מהו "תהנה לכם".

The commentators questioned why the Midrash questioned, “What was the reason for [the number of sacrificial animals] being reduced” on the verse, “On the eighth day.” It should have questioned this on the verse adjacent to this, “You shall present a burnt offering, an offering by fire of pleasing odor to the L-rd, one bull, one ram, seven yearling lambs, without blemish,”² as [the Midrash] is speaking about the matter of the sacrifice, which is specifically addressed in Num. 29:36, rather than in Num. 29:35. I.e., why didn’t the Midrash first question the meaning of “you shall have,” from Num. 29:35, and then question why the number of sacrifices decreased each day, from Num. 29:36?

Rather, certainly it must be said that the Midrash advanced the later [verse] in order to question and analyze the earlier verse about the words “you shall have,” for it wouldn’t have been good according to this explanation, i.e., had the Midrash first taught its explanation of “you shall have” and then afterward taught its explanation of the diminishing number of sacrifices. It requires investigation how, without this explanation of the teaching of etiquette via the sacrifices, the words “you shall have” would have been fine, and after this explanation there is the difficulty of what is [the meaning of] “you shall have” requiring the Midrash to answer, Festival times are pleasant for you.”

ותירצו הם דבלא זה היתי אומר שהפירוש של "תהנה לכם" הוא כפירוש המדרש אחר, הביאו רש"י בפירוש, את מוצא בכל ימי החג הקריבו פרים כנגד שבועים אמות וביום השמיני הקריבו על עצמכם, משל למלך שעשה סעודה וכו' ביום האחרון אמר לאוהבו נגלגל אני ואתה וכו'.

They explained that without this, I would have said that the explanation of “you shall have” would be like the explanation of another Midrash, as Rashi brought on the parsha, i.e., on our verse, Num. 29:35, “You find that on every day of the Festival they brought bulls corresponding to the seventy nations of the world,” and on the eighth day, they brought [a sacrifice] for themselves.³ This is brought in the Talmud:

Rabbi Elazar said: These seventy bulls [that are sacrificed as additional offerings over the course of the seven days of Sukkot], to what do they correspond? They correspond to the seventy nations [of the world, and are brought to atone for their sins and to hasten world peace]. Why is a single bull [sacrificed on Shemini Atzeret]? It corresponds to the singular nation, Israel.

- Sukkah 55b

² Num. 29:36.

³ Rashi on Num. 29:35.

[This is like] a parable of “a king that made a feast lasting for seven days to which he invited all of the country’s inhabitants. **On the final day, he said to his close associate,** ‘We have given the citizens that which is due them. **Let us now celebrate together, you and I,** with whatever can be found—a portion of meat, or of fish or a vegetable.’ This is what G-d told Israel: ‘On the eighth day, it shall be an assembly for you.’ Celebrate with whatever can be found, with a single ox.”⁴

אָמַנְם לְפִי הַמְדַרְשׁ הַזֶּה לֹא יִתְכַנַּן פִּירוּשׁ זֶה וְאֵם כֵּן מֵהוּ "תְּהִינָה לָכֶם"? עַד כָּאן דְּבָרָיו. וְצָרִיךְ עֵינַי מֵהַ תִּירוּץ הוּא זֶה שֶׁל הַמּוֹעֲדִים נְאִים לָכֶם, דְּמָה עֲנִין זֶה עִם בְּכָל יוֹם פּוֹחַת וְהוֹלֵךְ לְאַכְסֻנְיָא. וְעוֹד קִשָּׁה דְמֵאִיזָה טַעַם אָמַר שֶׁהַמּוֹעֲדִים נְאִים לָכֶם דְּלָמָּה דְּנִקְא נְאִים לָהֶם וְלֹא לְאוֹמוֹת? וְעוֹד קִשָּׁה וְכִי עֲדִיין לֹא יָדַע אֲמִיתוֹת הַטַּעַם שֶׁכְּתוּב בְּזוֹהַר סוּף פְּרָשַׁת פְּנִיחָס שֶׁהַקְּרָבָנוֹת פּוֹחַתִין בְּכָל יוֹם דְּכַמָּה דְּאִינוֹן מְתַמְעֵטִין הֵכִי נִמְי אֲמַעֲט טוֹבָה דִּילְהוֹן שֶׁל הָאוֹמוֹת, רַמְזֵי לְדָבָר "וְהַמִּים הֵיוּ הַלּוֹךְ וְהַסּוֹר" וְכוּ' וְעֵי"ש שֶׁהָאֲרִיךְ.

However, according to the Midrash above, this explanation cannot be, as the Midrash instead says that the Torah is simply teaching you etiquette from the sacrifices, that if one is a guest, he should be treated to the best food on the best day, and then the food can gradually decrease in quality. **If the Midrash’s explanation is so, what is the meaning of “you shall have”?** The Midrash answers that “Festival times are pleasant for you”? **It requires investigation what this solution is that “Festival times are pleasant for you,” for how does this relate with [a meal] being reduced each day for lodging?**

Another difficulty is for what reason did [G-d] say that “Festival times are pleasant for you,” for why did he specifically choose to say pleasant for them, i.e., for Israel, and not for the nations, as Rabbi Elazar said that the seventy bulls sacrificed were to atone for the seventy nations?

Another difficulty is we still don’t know the certainty of the reason written in the Zohar III:259a, at the end of parshat Pinchas that the sacrifices were reduced each day as indeed the prosperity of the nations [of the world] diminishes, a hint of the matter, “And the waters decreased continually until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first of the month, the tops of the mountains became visible.”⁵ See there in the Zohar at length. The Zohar states:

During the seven days of Sukkot, Israel used to sacrifice seventy bulls to make atonement for the seventy ministers of the seventy nations, so that the world would not remain destroyed because of them. And this is what the verse says: “And on the fifteenth day . . . you shall offer a burnt offering, a sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savor to the L-rd: thirteen young bulls . . . without blemish.”⁶ And on the second day twelve, and on the third day eleven bulls, and on the fourth day ten, and

⁴ Num. Rabbah 21:24.

⁵ Gen. 8:5.

⁶ Num. 29:12–13.

on the fifth day nine bulls, and on the sixth day eight bulls, and on the seventh day seven. And all told, there are seventy bulls, each day one less being presented. [Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai] asks, why was there a reduction?

And he answers that the verse here gives us a hint. “And the ark rested in the seventh month,”⁷ which is Tishrei. And just as then in the days of the Flood, when the waters decreased continually, so also here, in Tishrei, which is the seven month, in which there are a number of precepts, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, Sukkah, Lulav and Etrog, the kinds of the Lulav and Shofar. For then, the upper Shechinah rests on Yisrael, and this is Repentance, namely, [the Sefira of] Binah, which is called “repentance,” and is the esoteric secret of Sukkah, Etrog, which is [the Sefira of] Malchut, and Lulav, that is the Holy One, blessed be He, namely, Zeir Anpin. Immediately, “And the waters decreased continually,”⁸ for the sins of Israel become less. So, too, the angels of destruction who are appointed over them, over the iniquities, become less, for the iniquities are similar to the waters of the Flood, as has been taught: He that commits one transgression, gets for himself one accuser. And at the time that the iniquities become less, their bulls are reduced in number, the appointees over the seventy nations are reduced, the seventy nations diminish, and their prosperity becomes less.

- Zohar III:259a

וניש לומר שגם הוא יודע זה אכל קשה ליה על "ביום השמיני", דבשלקמא "ביום" ניקח שהוא נפרד משאר הימים, דבכלהו כתיב "וביום" ונאן כתיב "ביום" להורות שאין שום שייכות ודביקות ל'ישראל עם האומות, אכל "השמיני" לא ניקח שהרי הוא שם המצטרף עם הקודמים. והנה לו לומר ביום שמים ועשרים בחדש כדי שלא לצרף כלל 'ישראל עם האומות. אלא נדאי צריך לומר שאם הנה אומר הכתוב ביום שמים ועשרים לחדש היו יכולים האומות להתרעם על 'ישראל ולשנוא אותם, לפי שפשמקריבים עליהם הפרים כדאיתא במסכת סוכה אינה טובה שלימה אלא מדה חסרה, ויש להם ראיה גמורה שביום השמיני הובדלו 'ישראל מהם ולא הנה לנו טעם אחר להשיב להם למח הקרבנות פוחתין והולכין בכל יום.

It can be said that [the author of the Midrash] also knows this, but it is difficult for him [to understand the words] “On the eighth day,” because indeed the selection of the word “on the eighth day” [ביום] [ba’yom] is fine, showing that it is separate from the other days, because for all the other days it is written “and on the xth day” [וביום] [u’va’yom], i.e., “and on the second day,” “and on the third day,” . . . “and on the seventh day.” But here, it is written only, “on the eighth day,” i.e., without the prefaced “and,” to teach that Israel has no relation or connection to the nations. But the selection of the word “the eighth” [השמיני] [ha’shmini] is problematic, for it is still a name that partners with those that precede it. I.e., even without

⁷ Gen. 8:4.

⁸ Gen. 8:5.

the prefaced “and,” the fact that it is called “the eighth day” means that it is related to the other days of the Festival.

I.e., we say that Shmini Atzeret is not part of Sukkot, but is instead a separate holiday, so why then do we refer to it as “the Eighth Day of Assembly”? How could a greater distinction have been made? In introducing Sukkot, Num. 29:12 says, “On the fifteenth day of the seventh month, you shall observe a sacred occasion: you shall not work at your occupations; seven days you shall observe a festival of the L-rd.” In introducing Shemini Atzeret, [Scripture] in Num. 29:35 **should have said “On the twenty-second day of the month,” so as not to attach Israel at all to the nations.** I.e., instead of referring to it as “the eighth day,” as though it’s a continuation of Sukkot, Scripture could have referred to it by the calendar day on which it falls.

Rather, it’s certainly necessary to say that if Scripture had said “on the twenty-second day of the month,” the nations could have resented Israel and hated them, because when they brought the bulls for sacrifice as is brought in tractate Sukkah (55b), it would not be completely good. Rather, it would have been a short measure. In other words, as it stands now, the Eighth Day of Assembly is considered to be somewhat of an extension of Sukkot, so 70 bulls are sacrificed on the first seven days, and one bull is sacrificed on the eighth day, totaling 71 bulls for the seventy nations and Israel. If instead, the twenty-second day of Tishrei had been considered a completely separate holiday, not even called the “eighth day,” but given another name or just called after the calendar date, then Sukkot could only be considered as a Festival in which seventy bulls were sacrificed for seventy nations, for if it were intended to be for the seventy nations and Israel, the sacrifices would be short by one bull. Then, **they would have complete evidence that on the eighth day, i.e., on the holiday that would not be called Shemini Atzeret, but rather known by a different name, that Israel was separated from them.** This by itself would lead to resentment and hatred. **Also, we had no other reason to tell them why the sacrifices were decreasing every day; i.e., it would have been an admission that the sacrifices were decreasing as a sort of curse, that the prosperity of the seventy nations should decrease.**

אָבֵל עֵתָהּ שְׂאֵמֶר הַכֶּתוּב "בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי" שְׁנֵי עָשָׂר בָּיּוֹם יִשְׂרָאֵל עִמָּהֶם, עַל פְּרֻחַ צְרִידָה לֹא מֵעַם אֲחֵר לְמַעַן הַקְּרִיבֵנּוּ פֻּחֲתִין, וּבַטֶּעַם הַזֶּה יְכוּלִים לְהַפְלִיל יִשְׂרָאֵל עִם הָאֻמוֹת וְאֵינָם יְכוּלִים עוֹד לְהִתְרַעֵם וּלְעַרְעֵר עִם יִשְׂרָאֵל, דְּדִילְמָא הַטֶּעַם הַרְאִישׁוֹן אֵינּוּ אֶמֶת, וּמִשּׁוּם הַכִּי שְׂאֵל הַמְדַרְשׁ מָה רָאָה לְהֵיוֹת פּוּחַת וְהוֹלֵךְ בְּכָל יוֹם.

But now that Scripture said, “On the eighth day,” that seems to include Israel with them, it must necessarily be said that there is another reason why the sacrifices are reduced, because we don’t want to say that Israel only being represented by one bull means very little prosperity for Israel. In that reason, Israel can be included with the nations, and they can no longer resent and challenge Israel, as perhaps the first reason, as given by the Zohar, that the decreasing numbers represent the decreasing prosperity of the nations, is not true.

Because of this, the Midrash questions, “What was the reason for [the number of sacrificial animals] being reduced each day?” The Midrash therefore comes up with an

explanation different than that of the Zohar, that the Torah is simply teaching you etiquette from the sacrifices, that if one is a guest, he should be treated to the best food on the best day, and then the food can gradually decrease in quality.

ואחר כך חזר ושאל מהו "תהיה לכם", שהרי נודע שבחג הסוכות באים אושפיזין עילאין עמנו בסוכה, וכי סלקא דעתך לומר שאף ישראל יעשו כך שבכל יום ויום יפחות בכבוד המועד. ומירץ אדרבה המועדים נאים להם, שהם מתכוננים להוסיף בכבוד המועד, שבימים הראשונים הם מתענגים מעט בעניני הגוף מפני ששמחים במצות סוכה ולולב, וביום האחרון אדרבא מוסיפים בתענוג קדחנן בקרק "אותו ואת בנו" בארבעה פרקים בשנה וכו' ואלו הן ערב יום טוב האחרון של חג וכו'.

Afterward, [the author of the Midrash] went back to Num. 29:35 and questioned, “What is [the meaning of] “for yourselves?” For it was known that on the Festival of Sukkot, honored guests [*Ushpizin*] come with you into the Sukkah,⁹ if it should enter your mind to say that even Israel should do this, that each and every day they should decrease the honor of the Festival. The solution, to the contrary, is that Festival times are pleasant for them, that they intend to add to the honor of the Festival. That is, in the first days, they are a bit more refined in the interests of the body because they are happy with the mitzvot of the Sukkah and lulav. On the last day, to the contrary, they add enjoyment, as was taught in a Mishnah in the fifth chapter of tractate Chullin, entitled, “He and his son,” that, “On four occasions during the year, one who sells an animal to another is required to inform him: I sold the mother of [this animal today for the buyer] to slaughter [it, or]: I sold the daughter of [this animal today for the buyer] to slaughter [it, for there is a prohibition against slaughtering an animal and its offspring on the same day]. And those [four occasions] are: The eve of the last day of the festival [of Sukkot], the eve of the first day of the festival of Passover, and the eve of Shavuot, and the eve of Rosh HaShana.”¹⁰ I.e., the warning was given because these were times in which people were preparing big feasts to enjoy on the Festival.

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⁹ Zohar III:103b.

¹⁰ Mishnah Chullin 5:3.