



“He shall slaughter the bull before Hashem”

Slaughtering a Korban Rectifies the Trachea and the Esophagus the Two Conduits that Connect Yisrael with HKB”H

This week’s parsha, parshas Vayikra, teaches us about the service of the korbanos in the Beis HaMikdash. Here is the opening passuk (Vayikra 1, 1): **“ויקרא אל משה וידבר: אליו מאהל מועד לאמר, דבר אל בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם אדם כי יקריב—מכם קרבן לה’, מן הבהמה מן הבקר ומן הצאן תקריבו את קרבנכם—He summoned Moshe, and Hashem spoke to him from the Ohel Moed, saying: When a person from among you will bring a korban to Hashem from the animals—from the cattle and from the flocks you shall bring your offering.** In this essay, we will focus on the procedure of “shechitah”—slaughtering the animal. It is the first of four procedures performed when offering a korban: **שחיטה, קבלה, הולכה, זריקה** (ibid. 5): **“ושחט את בן הבקר לפני ה’ והקריבו בני אהרן הכהנים את:—he shall slaughter the bull before Hashem; the sons of Aharon, the kohanim, shall bring the blood, and they shall throw the blood on the mizbeiach, all around—which is at the entrance to the Ohel Moed.**

The procedure of “shechitah” is unique in that it can be performed by a non-kohen. In his commentary on this passuk, Rashi notes that from the step of “kabbalah”—receiving the blood of the slaughtered animal—onward, the service must be performed by a kohen. **This teaches us that with regards to the “shechitah,” it is valid if performed by a non-kohen.**

It is important to point out that the procedures related to the korbanos are extremely relevant to us even today,

even though we do not have a Beis HaMikdash in which to offer the korbanos, due to our countless transgressions. Instead, we fulfill this obligation in keeping with the passuk (Hoshea 14, 3): **“ונשלמה פרים שפתינו.”—and let our lips substitute for bulls.** Rashi explains this as follows: Let the Torah-portion we recite with our lips be accepted in place of the sacrificial animals we would have offered in the Beis HaMikdash.

This concurs with a teaching in the Gemara (Berachos 26b): **“רבי יהושע בן לוי אמר תפלות כנגד תמידין תקנום”—Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: The tefilos were instituted (by the Anshei Kenesses HaGedolah) to correspond to the (daily) “Tamid” offerings.** Shacharis corresponds to the morning korban “tamid”; Minchah corresponds to the afternoon korban “tamid”; Arvis corresponds to the limbs and fats that remained unconsumed by the mizbeiach during the day and were offered on the mizbeiach throughout the night. Accordingly, we are still performing the avodah of the korbanos today, albeit via the respective Torah-portions recited with our lips, which are accepted in place of the actual korbanos. Now, since the step of “shechitah” is kosher even if performed by a non-kohen, this implies that every single Jew is obligated to perform this avodah.

The Beis HaMikdash is Analogous to the Neck that Joins HKB”H the Head with Yisrael the Body

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by referring to a passuk in parshas Vayigash. Immediately

after Yosef reveals his true identity to his brothers, it says (Bereishis 45, 14): "ויפול על צווארי בנימין אחיו ויבך ובנימין בכה על" —"צוואריו"—then he fell upon his brother Binyamin's neck and wept; and Binyamin wept upon his neck. Based on the Gemara (Megillah 16b), Rashi comments: "He (Yosef) fell upon his brother Binyamin's neck and wept" over the two Temples that were destined to be in the portion of Binyamin and would ultimately be destroyed. "And Binyamin wept upon his neck" over the Mishkan in Shiloh destined to be in Yosef's portion and in the end would be destroyed.

This elucidation of the words "he fell upon Binyamin's neck" is also presented in the Zohar hakadosh (Vayigash 209b) with an explanation as to why the Beis HaMikdash is alluded to by the neck. We find a similar analogy in the following passuk (Shir HaShirim 4, 4): "כמגדל דויד צווארך בנוי: לתלפיות—your neck is like the Tower of David, built as a landmark ("Talpiyos"). According to the Zohar, "your neck" refers to the Beis HaMikdash down on earth. The Gemara (Berachos 30a) expounds on the word "Talpiyos": "תל שכל פיות פונים בו"—a hill towards which all mouths turn—since wherever one stands to pray, one must face the Kodosh HaKodashim.

The Chasam Sofer (Vayigash) explains that the Beis HaMikdash is compared to a neck, because it connects the brain with the heart. The brain imparts its wisdom and understanding to the heart, so that it will know how to properly sustain and manage all of the bodily systems. In return, the heart supplies blood and life support to the brain. Additionally, food and nutrition that enters the body through the mouth in a person's head is transported to the rest of the body via the neck.

The Beis HaMikdash provides a similar two-way connection like the neck. HKB"H, our Father in Heaven, is the head, so to speak. The people of Yisrael, the body, as it were, receive all their sustenance and life-support—both material and spiritual—from Him through the Beis HaMikdash. In return, all of Yisrael's avodah ascends from the Beis HaMikdash to please Hashem. The Shem MiShmuel (Vayigash 5673) writes in the name of his esteemed father,

the author of the Avnei Neizer, zy"a: **The reason the Beis HaMikdash is referred to as a "neck" . . . because just as the neck is the connection between the head and the body, so, too, the Beis HaMikdash is the connection between the upper and lower worlds.**

The Trachea and Esophagus Are Two Conduits Connecting Yisrael with HKB"H

We will expand on this sacred insight based on the fact that HKB"H and His children, Yisrael, form a single body, as it were. HKB"H is the "head of Bnei Yisrael," so to speak; while Bnei Yisrael are likened to the body that is attached to the head. As such, HKB"H provides them with the necessary life-support. Let us refer to the Pesikta Rabbasi (10, 11) related to the passuk (Shemos 30, 12): "כי תשא את ראש בני ישראל:—when you elevate the head of Bnei Yisrael:

HKB"H said to Moshe: Moshe, whatever you can do to elevate this nation, elevate it; for it is as if you are elevating Me. For it says: "When you elevate the head of Bnei Yisrael." It does not say "when you elevate Bnei Yisrael" but rather the "head." And the head of Yisrael is none other than HKB"H, as it says (Michah 2, 13): "Their king will pass in front of them, with Hashem at their head."

Now, we find the following declaration from Iyov (Iyov 19, 26): "ומבשרי אחזה אלוך"—and from my flesh, I see G-d. In other words, from a human being's physical being and flesh, it is possible to perceive and gain an understanding of the ways of Hashem. This idea is based on an explicit passuk (Bereishis 1, 27): "ויברא אלקים את האדם בצלמו בצלם אלקים ברא:—G-d created the man in his image; in the image of G-d He created him. This implies that we can deduce how HKB"H relates to mankind from man's flesh. This is the basis for Iyov's declaration: "ומבשרי אחזה אלוך."

Thus, we can better understand the relationship between the people of Yisrael—the so-called "body"—and HKB"H—the so-called "head"—from the human body. As long as the two are connected, the body is sustained and remains alive. The moment the body is detached from the

head, chas v'shalom, it dies. We find a saying in the Gemara that reflects this fact (Shabbas 75a): "פסיק רישא ולא ימות"—if the head is detached from the body, death is inevitable.

In similar fashion, Yisrael can only exist if they are connected to their head, HKB”H; for He provides them with life. As it is written (Devarim 4, 4): "ואתם הדבקים בה' אלקיכם" **and you who cling to Hashem, your G-d, you are all alive today.** Now, we know based on human anatomy and physiology that the human head and body are connected by two main conduits—the trachea and the esophagus. Similarly, the relationship between Yisrael and HKB”H relies on the analogs of these two major conduits.

One of the functions of the trachea is to facilitate the power of speech; the function of the esophagus is to supply food and drink to the body to sustain it. Likewise, Yisrael use the power of speech provided by the trachea to study Torah; they eat and drink l'shem shamayim with the esophagus. In a sense, this is the meaning of the passuk (Mishlei 3, 6): "בכל דרכיך דעהו"—**in all your endeavors know Him.**

Talking while Eating Can Be Dangerous

We will now introduce a fascinating insight from the Chasam Sofer, zy”a, in Drushim V'Aggados, where he addresses the following passage in the Gemara (Ta'anis 5b):

"רב נחמן ורבי יצחק הוו יתבי בסעודתא, אמר ליה רב נחמן לרבי יצחק, לימא מר מילתא, אמר ליה הכי אמר רבי יוחנן, אין מסיחין בסעודה, שמא יקדים קנה לושט ויבא לידי סכנה, בתר דסעוד אמר ליה, הכי אמר רבי יוחנן, יעקב אבינו לא מת."

Rav Nachman and Rabbi Yitzchak were sitting and eating a meal together. Rav Nachman said to Rabbi Yitzchak: Let the Master say a matter, i.e., share a dvar-Torah with me. He said to him, thus did Rabbi Yochanan say: One may not speak during a meal, lest the trachea will precede the esophagus, and he will endanger his life, i.e., if the food enters the trachea instead of the esophagus, he could choke. After they had eaten, he (Rav Yitzchak) said to him (Rav Nachman), thus did Rabbi Yochanan say: Yaakov Avinu did not die.

In his own inimitable way, the Chasam Sofer explains that Rabbi Yochanan's statement—"one may not speak during a meal, lest the trachea will precede the esophagus, and he will endanger his life"—conveys two distinct messages to two distinct groups. To simple, average people like us, it means exactly what it says—that it is risky to speak while eating.

To consummate tzaddikim, the elite who have purified their physical bodies to resemble heavenly beings, Rabbi Yochanan was conveying a totally different message. For them, eating is a sacred avodah akin to offering korbanos. Hence, there is no need for them to speak divrei-Torah during a meal. Doing so might lead them to the erroneous conclusion that their act of eating is not important to Hashem; when, in point of fact, Hashem considers consummate tzaddikim's avodah of eating to be like Torah-study.

Thus, with regards to these tzaddikim, Rabbi Yochanan taught: **"One may not speak (divrei-Torah) during a meal, lest the trachea will precede the esophagus"**—for perhaps one might attach greater importance to the study of Torah with the trachea than to the avodah of eating with the esophagus. **"And he will endanger his life"**—he will run the risk of minimizing and belittling, chas v'shalom, the avodah of eating with kedushah and taharah, because of the false assumption that studying Torah is the primary avodah to the exclusion of the avodah of eating.

Therefore, when Rav Nachman asked Rabbi Yitzchak **לימא מר מילתא**—to give over a dvar-Torah—he understood that his colleague, due to his extreme humility, underestimated his avodah of eating. Hence, he asked Rabbi Yitzchak to say a dvar-Torah during the seudah. This elicited the response: **"הכי אמר רבי יוחנן, אין מסיחין בסעודה, שמא יקדים קנה לושט"**. In other words, a venerable tzaddik such as yourself need not prioritize the value of Torah-study performed with the trachea over the avodah of eating performed with the esophagus. This is the gist of his sacred remarks.

The Menorah and the Shulchan Connect HKB”H and Yisrael Like the Trachea and the Esophagus

As a loyal servant in the presence of his master, I would like to add my own two cents to the sacred insights of the

Chasam Sofer and the Avnei Neizer, zy”a. Where do we find in the Beis HaMikdash—which functions as a “neck”—two conduits like the trachea and esophagus connecting Yisrael with HKB”H? These functions were fulfilled gloriously by the Shulchan and the Menorah. Regarding the Shulchan, it is written (Shemos 25, 30): “ונתת על השלחן לחם פנים לפני תמיד” — **you shall place on the Shulchan the Show Bread (“lechem hapanim”) before Me, always.** Regarding the Menorah, it is written (ibid. 27, 20): “ואתה תצוה את בני ישראל ויקחו אליך שמן: —and you shall command Bnei Yisrael that they shall take for you clear olive oil, crushed for illumination, to light a lamp continually.

Furthermore, we learn in the Gemara (B.B. 25b): “הרוצה” —one who wants to become wise should face south (Rashi: He should turn slightly southward while davening), **while one who wants to become wealthy should face north** (he should turn slightly northward while davening); **and your mnemonic is: The Shulchan stood in the north, while the Menorah stood in the south.** This teaches us that the Menorah and the kindling of its lamps on the southern side of the Heichal represents the wisdom of the Torah. This is expressed as follows (Mishlei 6, 23): “כי נר מצוה ותורה אור” —**for a mitzvah is a lamp and the Torah is light.** The Shulchan, on the other hand, located on the northern side of the Heichal, laden with the “lechem hapanim,” represents affluence.

Thus, we can propose that the Menorah, representing the illumination of Torah, resembles the trachea, which transmits the spoken words of Torah. The Shulchan, on the other hand, represents the esophagus, which is associated with eating and drinking. Accordingly, these two vessels in the Beis HaMikdash functioned as the two conduits located in the neck. This explains very nicely why it says of the Beis HaMikdash: “כמגדל דויד צווארך בנוי לתלפיות” —it functions like a neck connecting Yisrael with their Father in Heaven.

The Shulchan Was in the North the Menorah Was in the South and the Mizbeiach Was in the Middle Pulled Outwards

Understood in this light, it gives me great pleasure to interpret a teaching in the Gemara (Yoma 33b): “שלחן בצפון”

משוך מן הכותל שתי אמות ומחצה, ומנורה בדרום משוכה מן הכותל שתי אמות ומחצה, מזבח ממוצע ועומד באמצע ומשוך כלפי חוץ קימעא, ונוקמיה The Shulchan stood in the north (of the Heichal), removed two and a half cubits from the wall. And the Menorah stood in the south (of the Heichal), removed two and a half cubits from the wall. The mizbeiach was centered and standing in the middle (of the Heichal), drawn slightly outward. The Gemara questions the placement of the mizbeiach: **Why not place the mizbeiach directly between them** (aligned with them)? Why was it drawn outward? The Gemara answers: **Because it is written (Shemos 26, 35): “And the Menorah opposite the Shulchan”—we require that they see each other.**

In other words, the Menorah and the Shulchan must be situated so that they are visible to one another. Hence, the mizbeiach which stood centered in between them had to be pulled slightly outward so as not to obstruct their view of each other, so to speak. The great Admor, the Mahari of Belz, zy”a, explained the rationale for the requirement that the Shulchan and Menorah see each other based on a ruling of the michaber in the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 231):

“בכל מה שיהנה בעולם הזה לא יכוין להנאתו אלא לעבודת הכורא יתברך כדכתיב בכל דרכיך דעהו ואמרו חכמים כל מעשיך יהיו לשם שמים, שאפילו דברים של רשות, כגון האכילה והשתיה וההליכה והשיבה והקימה והשיחה וכל צרכי גופך, יהיו כולם לעבודת בוראך או לדבר הגורם עבודתו.”

Whatever a person derives pleasure from in Olam HaZeh, he should not do so for his own pleasure but rather for the service of the blessed Creator, as it is written (Mishlei 3, 6): “In all your endeavors know (emulate) Him.” And our sages said (Avos 2, 12): “Let all your deeds be for the sake of Heaven.” Even optional matters, such as eating, drinking, walking, sitting, rising, talking, and all bodily needs, they should all be for the sake of serving your Creator or for something related to His service.

This then is the reason that the Torah emphasizes that the Menorah and the Shulchan had to be aligned with each other. It is teaching us that when a Jew eats and drinks—alluded to by the Shulchan laden with the “lechem

hapanim”—it is imperative that his intent be “l’shem shamayim”—to provide him with the strength to study Torah—alluded to by the illumination of the Menorah.

With this in mind, let us embellish his sacred insight. We have asserted that the Menorah and the Shulchan are cognates of the trachea and the esophagus that are situated next to each other in the body. The Menorah kindled with the light of the Torah is analogous to the trachea which transmits the voice of the Torah. The Shulchan upon which the “lechem hapanim” were placed is analogous to the esophagus through which enters the body. On account of these two conduits, the Beis HaMikdash is referred to as a “neck” connecting Yisrael with HKB”H. As such, they must be aligned with one another and see each other; as the Mahari explained, so that one eats and drinks with the esophagus for the sake of engaging in Torah-study with the trachea. When a Jew does this, he is uniting the Menorah with the Shulchan. We can suggest that this is hinted at by the directive above: **“Let all your deeds be לַשֵּׁם שָׁמַיִם.”** We can interpret the term ש”ם as an acronym for ש’לחן מ’נוֹרָה.

In this same vein, we can also appreciate why HKB”H interposed the mizbeiach between the Menorah and the Shulchan. This mizbeiach was designated for the burning of the ketores—the incense; this procedure symbolized the slaughtering of the yetzer hara, which resembles the foul-smelling “chelbinah.” Now, the yetzer hara is also known as סמא”ל. Note that the name of this nemesis has a holy component—the name א”ל. In the future, HKB”H is destined to slaughter the yetzer hara and confiscate this holy component. Thus, the Gemara says (Sanhedrin 43b): **“כל הזובח את יצריו”**—**whoever slaughters his yetzer**—i.e., his animalistic nature and negative inclinations. Now, when we serve Hashem with these two conduits—the trachea and the esophagus—it is of the utmost importance to slaughter the yetzer hara by avoiding everything bad and negative—i.e., “sur mei’ra.” Regarding the voice coming out of the trachea, one must take great care to refrain from speaking lashon hara. Similarly, regarding the esophagus, it is essential to sanctify one’s eating and drinking l’shem shamayim, not to be a glutton eating merely to satisfy one’s cravings, and not to eat that which is prohibited.

For this reason, HKB”H commanded that the Menorah and the Shulchan be aligned and associated with each other like the trachea and the esophagus to illustrate the connection between Yisrael and HKB”H effected through Torah-study with the trachea and eating for a higher purpose with the esophagus. Additionally, we were commanded to place the mizbeiach between them but pulled slightly outwards. This placement alludes to the fact that it is our sacred duty to slaughter the yetzer hara, so that it will not interfere with the voice emerging from the trachea and the food entering the esophagus and corrupt them. The reason the mizbeiach was pulled outwards was to teach us that if we sanctify the two vital conduits surrounding it, it will be unnecessary to offer a korban on the mizbeiach to correct flaws related to the trachea and esophagus. For, they are cognates of the Menorah and the Shulchan, the two conduits that connect Yisrael with their Father in Heaven.

This helps us understand why even a non-kohen is permitted to perform the step of “shechitah.” After all, this avodah is aimed at atoning for the flaws related to the trachea—improper speech—and the flaws related to the esophagus—eating to satisfy the cravings incited by the yetzer of eating rather than eating l’shem shamayim. To atone for these flaws, it is necessary to bring a korban and sever these two anatomical landmarks—the trachea and the esophagus. For, according to the Ramban (Vayikra 1, 9), when a person brings a korban, he is to have in mind that everything being done to the sacrificial animal should deservedly be done to him; however, HKB”H had mercy on him and accepted the korban as his substitute.

The Avodah of Shechitah which Can Be Performed by a Non-Kohen Is to Eat L’shem Shamayim and to Speak Divrei Torah

Based on what we have learned, it behooves us to explain how we can perform the avodah of “shechitah” even today. We learn in the Gemara (Berachos 55a) that the table upon which a Jew eats functions like a mizbeiach providing atonement. They derived this from a juxtaposition of pesukim: **“דכתיב המזבח עץ שלש אמות גבוה,”**

וכתיב וידבר אלי זה השלחן אשר לפני ה', פתח במזבח וסיים בשלחן, רבי יוחנן ורבי אלעזר דאמרי תרוייהו, כל זמן שבית המקדש קיים מזבח מכפר "—על ישראל, ועכשיו שלחנו של אדם מכפר עליו" (Yechezkel 41, 22): "The mizbeiach was of wood, three cubits high," and it is written (later on in the passuk): "He said to me, 'This is the Shulchan that is before Hashem.'" It begins by mentioning the mizbeiach but concludes by mentioning the Shulchan. Both Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Elazar said: **The entire time that the Beis HaMikdash was extant, the mizbeiach would atone for Yisrael; but now, a man's table (shulchan) atones for him.**

Let us clarify this statement based on the halachah cited above from the michaber: **Whatever a person derives pleasure from in Olam HaZeh, he should not do so for his own pleasure but rather for the service of the blessed Creator, as it is written: "In all your endeavors know (emulate) Him."** Thus, a Jew who eats l'shem shamayim and not merely to satisfy his hunger and cravings is sanctifying the esophagus and connecting with HKB"H—"the head of Bnei Yisrael." Additionally, a Jew must speak words of Torah at his table to sanctify the trachea. We find a related teaching in the Mishnah (Avos 3, 3): "שלשה שאכלו על שלחן אחד ולא אמרו עליו דברי תורה, כאילו אכלו: מזבחי מתים... אבל שלשה שאכלו על שלחן אחד ואמרו עליו דברי תורה, כאילו אכלו משלחנו של מקום ברוך הוא, שנאמר וידבר אלי זה השלחן

Three people who ate at the same table and did not speak divrei-Torah at the table, it is as if they had eaten of offerings to the dead . . . But three people who ate at the same table and did speak divrei-Torah at the table, it is as if they had eaten at the table of the Omnipresent, Blessed is He, as it is said: "And he said to me, 'This is the table that is before Hashem.'"

This coincides magnificently with what we have discussed. The avodahs in the Beis HaMikdash involving the kindling of the Menorah and the "lechem hapanim" on the Shulchan function like a spiritual trachea and esophagus to connect Yisrael with HKB"H—"ראש בני ישראל". The mizbeiach was interposed between them to atone for flaws related to the trachea and esophagus. Therefore, even today, when we do not have a Beis HaMikdash, a Jew's table atones for him in lieu of the mizbeiach. To receive this atonement, he must eat l'shem shamayim and sacrifice all of his eating-related cravings. This is comparable to the "lechem hapanim" placed upon the Shulchan, which was consumed by the kohanim l'shem shamayim. He must also speak words of Torah at his table, which is comparable to the kindling of the Menorah disseminating the light of the Torah. By fulfilling these two criteria, a Jew's "shulchan" atones for him like the mizbeiach.



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