

Nature in the Parasha

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Parashat Tzav – The Twilight Ram

The Curved, Bent Ram's Horn for the Shofar

This week we will focus on the אֵיל/Ayil – Ram, mentioned eight times in *Parashat Tzav*. It was used for public burnt-offerings, guilt-offerings and peace-offerings.

ספר ויקרא פרק ח (יח) וַיִּקְרַב אֶת אֵיל הָעֹלָה וַיִּסְמְכוּ אֹהֲרֹן וּבָנָיו אֶת יְדֵיהֶם עַל רֹאשׁ הָאֵיל:
 “The ram of the burnt-offering was presented; and Aaron and his sons laid their hands upon the head of the ram” (*Vayikra* 8:18).

The ram's horn is the choice kind of horn to blow on Rosh Hashana, because it is curved like repentance, which is a long-winding road, or rather in order to repent we need to be bent over and humble as if our heart is broken within us (Ramban, *Teachings for Rosh Hashana*). The curved and bend ram's horn also teaches us to bend our hearts in prayer, and worship Hashem through awe and fear (Maharal, *Netivat Olam, The Path of Service* 11). The Ram's horn, moreover, reminds us of the ram that was substituted for Yitzchak's near sacrifice (*Babylonian Talmud, Rosh Hashana* 16a). Rams are the male sheep and I have to admit I'm a bit afraid of them. Rams can be quite aggressive and are even known to sometimes attack women.

Transforming the Ram within to a Lamb

This month of Nissan corresponds to the astrological sign of Aries with the ram as its symbol. The ram has come to represent male fertility, aggression, and courage. The mitzvah to sacrifice a ram may signify channeling the male carnal desires towards the Divine will. I never understood why the astrological sign of this month is Aries the world over, but the Jewish equivalent is a טָלָה /*taleh* – a lamb instead of a ram. The ram was associated with various gods from Egypt's earliest history even though sheep were considered to be unclean, or pure, by the ancient Egyptians. In Egypt people worshipped the ram. Its strength was idolized. The Egyptian lifestyle was wild and uninhibited, they let the ram wild in themselves. They gave in to their every instinct. It was the evil inclination within themselves that they worshipped. It is this same ram, people worship today, at the bars, discotheques, beaches, streets, concert halls and on the internet.

The Jewish people represents the exact opposite of this kind of 'civilization.' We never idolized the ram; on the contrary, we sacrificed it to G-d. When we realize that our life-force is only a means to worship the higher powers, we are able to control the 'ram' within us and turn it into a lamb. The lamb symbolizes our striving towards subduing the animal instinct within us. This is perhaps why we were commanded to sacrifice the Pascal Lamb to G-d before being able to leave Egypt. Our job is to tame the *yetzer hara* (evil impulse), the way you would tame a wild ram and transform its nature to the compliant lamb. This is what brings us holiness.

The Twilight Ram

According to the Midrash, one of the mystical creatures that Hashem created at twilight of the Sixth Day of Creation was a special ram. At the near sacrifice of Yitzchak, "Avraham lifted his eyes and looked and behold behind him a ram caught in the thicket by his horns" (*Bereishit* 22:13). Hashem did not create this ram for nothing. The 'Twilight Ram' was waiting in the Garden of Eden for its special opportunity to make a difference in the world. When it saw that Yitzchak was close to being sacrificed, it ran from the Garden to save him. However, the Evil One tried to prevent the ram from reaching Avraham so it made its horns get stuck in the brush between the trees. Yet, this ram extended its 'hands' and 'feet' to hold on to Avraham's *talit* (prayer shawl). Then Avraham looked behind him, saw the ram and sacrificed it in place of Yitzchak (*Yalkut Shimoni* 22:101).

Everything created at twilight on the Sixth day of Creation has a supernatural quality, such as the mouth of earth that swallowed up Korach the well of Miriam, the mouth Bilam's donkey, the rainbow and the manna etc. (*Pirkei Avot* 5:6). Perhaps, the mention of the ram exactly eight times in our Torah portion alludes to the fact that the ram is included in the list of the special supernatural creatures created in between times, as number eight represent the miraculous.

The Ram for King David's Music and the Horn of Mashiach

Rabbi Chanina son of Dosa explains how no parts of the special 'twilight ram' was created in vain. Its sinews became the ten strings of David's violin that he would play. The skin of this ram became the belt of the prophet Eliyahu. Its left horn was blown at Mount Sinai when the Torah was given, as it states, "The voice of the shofar grew louder and louder" (*Shemot* 19:19 with Rashi). In the future Eliyahu will blow its right horn, which is greater than its left, as it states, "On that day it will blown on the great shofar" (*Yeshayahu* 27:13), (*Yalkut Shimoni* 22:101). I found this Midrash very interesting and asked myself, what does Yitzchak's near sacrifice, David's music, Eliyahu's strength, the giving of the Torah and the proclamation of redemption have in common, and how do they all connect with the character traits of the ram?

The Eternal Power of the 'Twilight Ram'

Each of the incidents in which a part of the 'Twilight Ram' was employed makes a very strong eternal statement in the world. The ram used in the near sacrifice of Yitzchak made a clear statement about Avraham's merit, which stands eternally for all of his descendants, to such an extent that we draw upon this merit to protect us at the Day of Judgment every Rosh Hashana. King David's music likewise is eternalized through his *Tehillim* (psalms) recited and sung for all occasions throughout the generations. It is part of the daily prayer service and anyone going through hardships can find solace in the eternal words of King David's psalm.

In the future, they will be played once more in our eternal Temple. It is known about the prophet Eliyahu that he lives forever. He appears at every circumcision and attends all of our Pesach Seders until the end of days. At the Carmel Mountain, he was teaching the Jews to serve

the one and only eternal G-d rather than impermanent idols. The Torah, as well, is eternal and will never ever be changed, as Rambam writes, "The perfection of the Torah is perpetual.

Since Hashem dictated the Torah, it consists of everlasting statutes for all generations; therefore, it is prohibited for anyone to add or diminish from either the Written Torah or its Oral interpretation. Anyone claiming to add to the Torah is a false prophet" (Rambam, *The Thirteen Principles of Faith, Principle Nine*). The Torah and Redemption go hand in hand and are two sides of the same coin, as are the two horns of the 'Twilight Ram.' The Torah heralds redemption, and redemption is the ultimate manifestation of the vision of the Torah. Each of these pivotal accomplishments embodied a consciousness shift that needed the strength and power of the ram to perpetuate their eternal messages. The 'Twilight Ram' exemplified in the very truest way the channeling of aggressive power towards the ultimate service of the Divine. As the power of spring awakens our desires, may too merit channeling them towards *kedushah* (holiness)!