

Why a Lamb for the Daily Sacrifice?

Six Reasons from the Alter Rebbe as to Why a Lamb Is Used for the Korbán Tamid

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The Torah portion of Pinchas discusses (in chapter 28 and 29) the ongoing sacrifices in the Beit HaMikdash. It covers the daily sacrifice, those for Shabbat, Rosh Chodesh, and finally all of the sacrifices for the various *Yamim Tovim* (holidays).

According to the simple reading of the text, the daily sacrifice consisted of two lambs, as the verse ([Numbers 28:3-4](#)) says, וְאָמַרְתָּ לָהֶם זֶה הָאֲשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרִיבוּ לַיהוָה כִּבְשִׂים בְּנֵי שָׁנָה תְּמִימִם שְׁנַיִם, “And you shall say to them, ‘This is the fire offering which you shall offer to the L-rd, two unblemished lambs in their first year, each day as a continual burnt offering. The one lamb you shall offer up in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer up in the afternoon.’”

What about Goats?

Since the daily sacrifice (*Tamid*) was an *Olah* (burnt offering) which can be brought from either sheep or goats (and even cattle), there is a discussion among the commentaries as to whether or not goats were, in fact, acceptable for this sacrifice.

No Goats

The following commentaries say that goats were not acceptable for the Tamid as the simple reading of the text indicates that only sheep are acceptable.

- The **Sifri Zuta** (quoted in *Pardes Yosef*) says that the word “lambs” excludes goats.
- **Rabbeinu Bachaye** ([on this verse](#)) says that “lambs” excludes any other animal.
- The **Rambam** writes ([Hilchot Ma’aseh Hakorbanot 1:15](#)), “All of the communal burnt offerings (of which the Tamid is one) are from sheep or cattle.” This would exclude

goats. (Presumably the cattles refers to other communal burnt offerings, not the Tamid regarding which the Torah writes “lambs.” At the very least this should exclude cattle.)

- The **Talmud Yerushalmi** tells the following story which seems to indicate that goats cannot be used for the daily Tamid:

The Goats of the Greeks

The [Talmud Yerushalmi Ta'anit 4:5 \(23a\)](#) relates that in the days when the Greeks ruled over Israel there was a siege around the city of Jerusalem. (Perhaps this was during one of the wars between the Hasmoneans and the Greeks.) Every day the Jews would lower two baskets of gold down the city walls to the Greeks outside. In return the Greeks would send them two lambs in the baskets which the Jews would use for their daily sacrifice. One day the Greeks sent up goats instead of lambs. (See the commentaries on Chapter 8 of Daniel that the Greeks are associated with goats.) At that time G-d brightened their eyes (of the Jewish people) and they found two lambs in the chamber of lambs. (This was a room in the Beit HaMikdash where they kept lambs for several days before sacrificing them.) It was regarding this incident that Rabbi Yehudah, son of Abba, said that the Tamid was sacrificed in the fourth hour of the day. (The Babylonian Talmud [[Bava Kamma 82b](#)] tells a similar story, albeit with different details. In addition, the Midrash [[Vayikra Rabbah 12:5](#)] relates that the Tamid was brought in the fourth hour on the day of the inauguration of the first Beit HaMikdash. See there as to why this occurred.)

It seems clear from this story that only lambs may be used for the daily sacrifice and not goats. This is indeed how the *Korban Ha'eida* (one of the classical commentaries on the Jerusalem Talmud) interprets the story.

Other Interpretations

Several commentaries interpret the above story differently, and in their opinion, goats are acceptable (although not preferred) for the Tamid sacrifice.

- The Penei Moshe (another classical commentator on the Jerusalem Talmud) [on [Jerusalem Talmud Brachot 4:1/30a](#)] writes that it was merely a custom that the Tamid sacrifice was a lamb and that the Jewish people (in the story above) did not want to diverge from their custom.
- The Rash Sirlo says that the Greeks sent up adult goats which are disqualified for the Tamid as the verse indicates that the animals must be young (“in their first year”).
- The Shitah Mekubetzet on Keritut 4a also indicates that (kid) goats are eligible for the Tamid sacrifice.

Why Didn't They Sacrifice the Goats?

The Penei Moshe's interpretation is difficult to understand. According to his opinion, why did the Jewish people in the above story not sacrifice the goats since it was permissible to do so by the letter of the law?

It is possible that they would have done so had they not found the lambs. But, not willing to forgo their custom unless they had no alternative, they continued to search for lambs and G-d helped, and they were able to find them.

In addition, it has been suggested (Pardes Yosef here) that the reason they hesitated is because it is proper to examine the animals brought as sacrifices in the Beit HaMikdash for four days prior to the sacrifice in order to ensure that they have no blemish. (As to the lambs provided by the Greeks on a daily basis, there may have been an arrangement with the Greeks that the Greeks inspect them for four days before sending them up. [Rav Elyashiv, quoted in the Bi'urei HaDaf on the Talmud Yerushalmi - HaMa'or]. But since the goats were unexpected, the Jews assumed that they had not been examined. It has also been suggested [see *ibid*] that they kept the lambs for four days to examine them before sacrificing them.) As such, they kept on looking for pre-checked animals which they eventually found in the chamber of the lambs.

Why Lambs?

The commentaries offer many possible reasons as to why lambs must be used for the Tamid sacrifice. (According to those who say that goats are acceptable, these explanations can be used to explain why lambs are *preferred* as mentioned above.)

Six Reasons and How The Tamid Relates to Our Prayers

Here are six interpretations given by the Alter Rebbe in Likutei Torah (Parshat Pinchas pg. 158a) as to why lambs were used for the Tamid sacrifice. All of these explanations are based on the premise that our daily prayers are patterned after the Tamid sacrifice and, as such, we can draw lessons from this sacrifice that relate to our prayers.

1) To Arouse Mercy

The sound of lambs bleating is one which inspires one to have mercy on them. Similarly, during our prayers, we should feel mercy for our soul which has descended at our birth from a high tower (spiritual level) to a deep (spiritual) pit. (The physical world we inhabit is a place of Divine concealment and is full of temptation to sin. As such, it is considered a "deep pit." Even if we do not feel pity for our souls, we ask G-d to have mercy on us in light of the above. As we say in the blessings before Shema, "With Your great mercy, have mercy on us" and "Our Father, merciful Father, have mercy on us..." We ask that

G-d enable us to feel true compassion on our soul so that we make sure to restore it to its former glory.

2) Wool Represents the Words of Our Prayers and G-d's Response

Lambs are unique in that we use their hair to make wool which we turn into clothing for ourselves. These hairs represent both the words of our prayers as well as G-d's response to these prayers for the following reason:

Kabbalistically, hair represents the Divine energy that comes into this world in the form of the Ten Utterances which constantly enliven this world. Since the energy in these words is very limited, it is compared to a hair that has a very limited life-force compared to the head from which it comes. This is why we feel no pain when our hair is cut. Similarly, human speech can be compared to hairs as the words contain only a small amount of the deeper emotion and thought that one is expressing. When we speak the words of prayer, the angel Sandalphon ties these words into a crown for G-d. In response to these prayers, G-d blesses us and sends His "words" (Divine energy) to bless our *parnassah* and heal the sick.

3) Sheep Represent Tzaddikim

Although the Talmud says that *ba'alei teshuvah* (penitents) achieve a higher level than *tzadikim* (righteous men who never sin) because they serve Him with greater strength, there are aspects in which *tzadikim* are higher than *ba'alei teshuvah*. (See [Brachot 34b](#) in the opinion of Rabbi Yochanan.) This is why G-d specifically discussed whether or not to create the world with *tzadikim* and not with *ba'alei teshuvah*. Cattle, which are much stronger than sheep, represent *ba'alei teshuvah*. Sheep represent *tzadikim* for these three reasons:

- a) Sheep produce wool which is worn as a garment. The *tzadikim* fulfill mitzvot which are like garments for the soul, and they study Torah which is compared to hair (see Daniel 7:9).
- b) *Tzadikim* constantly overpower their *yetzer hara* (evil inclination), alluded to in the word for lamb כֶּבֶשׂ which is similar to כָּבוֹשׁ or conquer.
- c) *Tzadikim* are humble and silent when embarrassed by others. This is similar to lambs which are silent and submissive when they are brought to be shorn (see Isaiah 53:7).

The reason that the Tamid sacrifice represents *tzadikim* as opposed to *ba'alei teshuvah* is because the standard service of G-d which one should aspire to achieve on a constant basis (*tamid* means constant) is that of a *tzadik*. Whereas the level of a *ba'al teshuvah* is only appropriate if, G-d forbid, one sinned.

4) Reaching the Secret Levels

The word for sheep כֶּבֶשׂ is similar to the word כְּבוֹשׁ which can mean secret in Aramaic (see [Brachot 10a](#) לְךָ כְּבוֹשׁ דְּרַחֲמָנָא לְמָה לָךְ). (In Hebrew the word כְּבוֹשׁ can mean to “hold down” - similar to “conquer” as mentioned above. This relates to a secret which is “held down” and not revealed.) This represents a deep level of G-d which is beyond human comprehension. The Tamid sacrifice seeks to elicit Divine compassion from this sublime level of G-d.

5) Sheep are Light

The Talmud ([Shabbat 77b](#)) indicates that sheep are (usually) light-colored while goats are (usually) dark. As such, goats symbolize a lower level of G-dliness, the level of G-d that is manifest in nature. This level is considered dark as it is not readily apparent that it is G-d providing this energy. Sheep, which are light, represent the level of G-dliness that is beyond this world and that is not concealed. It is this level of G-dliness that we seek to reveal through this sacrifice.

6) Sheep Represent Praising G-d

The word for sheep in Aramaic is אֵימָרִי (see Shabbat ibid). This alludes to the verse in [Deut. 26:17](#) that says ה' הָאֵימַרְתָּ הַיּוֹם which means that the Jewish people proclaim G-d's greatness. Similarly, by sacrificing and praying to G-d, we are proclaiming G-d's greatness to the world.

May we soon merit to bring these sacrifices again with the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash speedily in our days.

Wishing you a Shabbat Shalom UMevorach!

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