

Dvar Torah – Siyum Masechet Zevachim

Maimonides Kehillah

Shabbat Beshalach – Shirah

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The importance of place within Judaism cannot be underestimated. We refer to HaKadosh Baruch Hu by the word Makom. The Midrash in Bereishit Rabbah shares the source for this appellation.

וַיִּפְגַּע בְּמָקוֹם (בראשית כח, יא) רַב הוּנָא בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי אֲמִי אָמַר מִפְּנֵי מָה מְכַנֵּין שְׁמוֹ שֶׁל הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא וְקוֹרְאִין אוֹתוֹ מָקוֹם, שֶׁהוּא מְקוֹמוֹ שֶׁל עוֹלָם וְאֵין עוֹלָמוֹ מְקוֹמוֹ

And Yaakov Avinu met or approached the place/Place. Said R. Huna in the name of R. Amay: Why do we rephrase the name of the Holy One Blessed Be He and call Him Makom (the One who is everywhere)? He answers that HaShem is the place [mekomo] of the world/universe, and His world is not His Place.

HaShem is beyond the world that He created, but HaShem is the essential place of our world. Where does the Jew place HaShem within their lives? We situate HaShem directly in the center. All of our tefillot focus toward a common place; all of our bakashot vector toward a common receiver.

The concept of place is fundamental to human society because it blends physical space with social, emotional, and cultural meaning, forming the foundation for identity, community, and belonging. A deep “sense of place” connects people to their surroundings, affecting personal comfort, psychological well-being, and community pride.

In the realm of Tefillah, while the Halacha certainly permits the Jew to pray wherever they are, we are encouraged to pray together in a common place. We congregate in a Kehillah. The room, with its seats, siddurim, and songs, provides a shared experience for its congregants.

Our Bait Miqdash Me-At of today offers us in the post-Churban period a pale yet palpable feel of what coming close to HaShem in Tefilah or Hakravah might have looked like when the Bayt HaMiqdash stood.

Our contemporary space has Sifrei Torah in the front of the room, much as the Kodosh Kodoshim was west-most in the Miqdash, and the vast array of Avodah services performed there faced or were in proximity to the holiest place on our planet.

Our contemporary space has a bimah table on and around which we lead Tefillot and read the Torah. This place reflects the Mizbeach/altar that occupied the key location just outside the Heichal/Sanctuary building.

Our tefillot, recited in our Bayt Miqdash Me-at, strikingly request a return to the Avodah of ancient times. As we say in Musaf on a regular basis:

וּשְׁמָנוּ נַעֲשֶׂה לְפָנֶיךָ אֶת קִרְבָּנוֹת חֻבּוֹתֵינוּ תְּמִידִים כַּסֵּדֶרָם וּמוֹסָפִים כְּהִלְכָתָם

“And there (in the Temple) let us perform the Avodah before You, the offerings meant to address our obligations to You, the daily offerings according to their sequence and the additional offerings according to their protocols.”

Masechet Zvachim, the first Masechet of Seder Kodashim, discusses the details surrounding both animal and bird korbanot. Through 14 chapters and 119 double-sided pages of text, this Mesechta provides for us the minutiae of what occurred in the Miqdash during the time that the edifice stood “al mechono/on its foundation”.

The fifth Perek of the Mesechta is titled: Eizehu Mekoman Shel Zevachim (what are the appropriate places for proper sacrificial offerings?) We, of course, recognize the title of this Perek and its Mishnayot since we have the privilege of reading them every day in our davening. A takeaway from this Perek is that the Torah is very particular about where every type of korban/offering, be it an animal, a bird, or a flour offering, is brought. Place is everything.

The Rambam, in Hilchot Maaseh HaKorbanot, starting in Perek 5, Halacha 1, summarizes that even though we have learned earlier about the slaughtering and blood collection steps:

אֲבָל מְקוֹם שְׁחִיטָתוֹ וּמְקוֹם קְבוּלָּתוֹ דָּמֵן אֵינוֹ שׂוֹהַ בְּכֻלּוֹ:

But the place of their slaughter and the place where we collect the blood to be used later for sprinkling is not the same for all korbanot.

Place is critical.

The final Perek of Zevachim, among other topics, presents many details about bamot, that is, raised areas used for sacrificial rites, which were of two types: a personal altar outside your home or in your field, the Bamah Ketana, and a communal altar, the Bamah Gedolah.

What recourse did the Jewish people have to offer korbanot during specific historical periods prior to the building of the Beit HaMiqdash? The final Mishna of the Mesechta (Daf 112) includes the following details:

- Until the Mishkan was erected in Eretz Yisrael, Bamot were permitted.
- Once the Mishkan was erected in Eretz Yisrael, Bamot were prohibited.
- Once the locus of Jewish presence in Eretz Yisrael centered on Gilgal (in Sefer Yehoshua), Bamot were permitted.
- Once the Mishkan was erected in Shiloh (Sefer Yehoshua and Sefer Shmuel), Bamot were prohibited.
- Once the people came to Nov and Gidon (in Sefer Shoftim), Bamot were once again permitted.
- Once the people reached Yerushalyim, Bamot were permanently prohibited.

One key takeaway from this Mishna is that the Torah sought to ensure that, no matter the historical conditions the Jews faced after entering Eretz Yisrael, they would always have a special place to establish their connection to HaShem.

What was the Bamah? The Gemara explains that, if the place you wished to establish as your Bamah was higher than the surrounding ground, you could utilize that location as your place. This Bamah did not have to look like the Mizbeach of the Temple. This Bamah could be a flat-topped rock or a mound in your field, higher than its surrounding topography.

The Mesechta ends on a detail related to one of many illustrations of how a person can violate the issur d'oraysa of Piggul. Piggul occurs when the person bringing the korban, at certain key steps of the offering process, intends to consume the korban's meat after the Halachically valid threshold.

תנו רבנן: מנין לעשות זמן בבמה קטנה כבמה גדולה? אמרה תורה: לן ישראל, ופיגול ישראל; מה פיגול – פסול בבמה, אף לן – פסול בבמה

There is a Brayta: Where do we derive the Halacha that an intention to leave a korban over the allotted time that renders the korban Pasul in the case of a private altar, as it is for a public altar? The Torah states: If a korban left overnight (Linah) must be burned and Piggul must be burned, then let's draw a parallel here. Just as Piggul is pasul by a private Bamah, Linah would also disqualify an offering brought on a private Bamah.

או כלך לדרך זו – דהא אמרה תורה: לן ישראל, ויוצא ישראל; מה יוצא – כשר בבמה, אף לן – בבמה. ולא קל וחומר הוא מעופות כשר

Or look at it another way: The Torah stated that a korban left overnight is burned and a korban that was taken out of the Azarah of the Miqdash is burned. So, just as an offering at a private altar is kosher no matter how far you remove the korban from the Bamah since there is no set perimeter, so also a korban that was left overnight (Linah) should also be

kosher in the case of a Bamah. This would suggest that the Halakah of time would not apply to a private altar.

Comments the Gemara – but wait – are we sure about this conclusion about time? The Gemara brings a kal v'chomer from a Halakha of bird korbanot.

מה עופות, שאין המום פוסל בהן – זמן פוסל בהן; קדשי במה קטנה, שהמום פוסל בהן – אינו דין שזמן פוסל בהן?!

If, in the case of bird offerings, where a Mum/blemish does not disqualify them, time does, then, korbanot of animals on a private Bamah, which are disqualified by a Mum, should also be disqualified by time?

Concludes the Gemara:

מה לעופות – שכן אין הזר כשר בהן; תאמר בבמה קטנה, שהזר כשר בה – לא יהא זמן פסול בה? ! תלמוד לומר: "וזאת תורת זבח השלמים" – לעשות זמן במה קטנה כזמן במה גדולה.

This kal v'chomer is problematic. A non-Kohen is prohibited from sacrificing birds. Are you going to extend this to korbanot on a Bamah Ketanah, where a non-Kohen is allowed, and that "time" should not be a disqualifying factor?

Comes the Pasuk: "And this is the Law of the Shlamim offering (which equates all Shlamim offerings – offered in public or in private)" thus rendering the Halakha of zman by a private Bamah identical to the halakha of a public altar.

May our continued sensitivity to place, the divine within that place, and our place within that divine, be a hallmark of our dedication to our Masorah.

Hadran Alach Masechet Zvachim