

Parsha Ponders

Tzav | March 31, 2023 | 9 Nissan 5783

*Less culpable, harder atonement*¹

צו את-אהרן ואת-בניו לאמר זאת תורת העולה וגו'

Command Aharon and his sons, saying: "This is the law of the *Olah* offering" ...²

This week's *parsha* begins with a discussion of the *Olah* offering. This offering is often voluntary, and can be used to atone for failing to fulfill positive precepts³. The offering is totally burned on the altar, not to be consumed by man. It's entirely "elevated" to Hashem, and is thus called an *Olah*. One can ask why the *parsha* begins discussing the *Olah* offering when the *Chatas* offering, brought for certain severe sins, always⁴ precedes an *Olah*⁵.

If we look carefully throughout the previous *parsha* of *Vayikra*, we'll see that Aharon, the chief Kohen, is strangely absent. The entire *parsha* is discussing the laws of the Temple offerings, and everything is directed towards his sons. Why is this⁶? The *Midrash* tells us⁷ that it was a punishment for his involvement in the sin of the Golden Calf. The people demanded an idol, and he made it for them. Despite his good intentions to control the mob and stall for time so Moshe could return, he was considered somewhat responsible. As such, his name doesn't appear once. Moshe prayed⁸ that this punishment suffice to atone for the Golden Calf, and Hashem forgave Aharon. We then find this week's *parsha* begins by addressing Aharon.

Hashem addressing Aharon was meant to serve as an appeasement to him. How so? Aharon was bothered by a question. Why is it that he was forgiven much later than the rest of the Jews? Those that actually worshipped the calf seemed to have been forgiven much more easily. The establishment of the *Mishkan* was testimony that their sin had been forgiven⁹. All Aharon did was enable them to worship the calf, by constructing it. Why then wasn't Hashem addressing Aharon with the Temple service commands? Hashem answered this by first discussing the *Olah* offering in this week's *parsha*, which isn't usually the case.

Something unique about the *Olah* offering is that it is entirely consumed on the Temple altar. This is unlike a *Chatas* offering, which is partially eaten by the Kohanim. One could possibly have thought the reverse was more appropriate, as a *Chatas* is brought by someone who did a terrible sin, and an *Olah* is

¹ Based on Shenos Chaim Kuntres Derech HaChaim parshas Tzav by Rav Shlomo Kluger. He was a very prolific writer. There are currently over 50 volumes of his collected *chiddushim* on the *parsha*, about one per *parsha*, each one spanning over 500 pages. And that's just on *chumash*

² Leviticus 6:2

³ Rashi to Leviticus 1:4, based on Toras Kohanim ad. loc.

⁴ See Zevachim 89a, Tosafos to Zevachim 64b s.v. חטאת העוף, brought by Tosafos Yom Tov to Zevachim 6:4, Rash to Taharos 1:3, and Rashi to Leviticus 12:8

⁵ One can ask why Rav Shlomo Kluger only asks this question on this week's *parsha*, when *parshas Vayikra* also began discussing the *Olah* offering. I would assume it's because of what he's about to discuss, that this was told to Aharon, as opposed to last week's *parsha*, where Aharon doesn't appear

⁶ Cf. <https://parshaponders.com/tzav-5778/>

⁷ Vayikra Rabbah 7:1. See also Moshav Zekeinim to Leviticus 1:5 who say this, without citation, as an answer to a different question

⁸ Cf. Moshav Zekeinim *loc. cit.* who say it was Aharon who prayed

⁹ Rashi to Exodus 38:21

usually reserved for a minor oversight or episode of laziness. The *Chatas* should be entirely burned, and the *Olah* partially consumed. Why is it not like that?

The answer to all of these questions is the same. Since an *Olah* is usually for a minor infraction, people don't feel so bad about what they did wrong. They bring an *Olah* and move on, despite lacking the requisite feelings of regret. Since it's so easy to not take a failure to perform a *mitzvah* seriously, people don't easily achieve the full atonement they need. Lip service and animal slaughter aren't enough. They need to feel guilty. This is unlike a *Chatas*, where the sin was enormous, it doesn't take much for a Jew to feel the required guilt. To address this issue, Hashem, in a way, made the *Olah* offering more stringent; it is entirely consumed on the altar.

This is exactly the answer to what was bothering Aharon. Those that actually worshipped the idol felt bad without difficulty. Their repentance was thus complete and their atonement immediate. Aharon, however, didn't feel as culpable. Since he didn't actually participate in idol worship, he merely created the idol, and his intentions were for the sake of heaven, he didn't feel as guilty. Since, at the end of the day, he was partially responsible for what happened, he required atonement. Hashem, by addressing the *Olah* offering unusually first, was telling Aharon that his atonement was harder to achieve, due to the understandable lack of guilt. Moshe's prayers granted Aharon his needed forgiveness, and Aharon's concerns were alleviated¹⁰.

Good Shabbos

¹⁰ See further in the original piece, where [Rav Shlomo Kluger](#) says this answers the question of the [Magen Avraham Orach Chaim 1:5 § 8](#) on the [Tur ad. loc.](#), who says to recite the *parsha* of the *Olah* before the *parsha* of the *Chatas*