



Likkutei Sichos

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Waiting to Chop

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We have put in a lot of effort to ensure the translation is accurate and easy to understand. However, it's important to note that there is always a chance of unintentional errors in any translation.

Feedback is appreciated — please send comments to: info@projectlikkuteisichos.org

¹ The 20th day of the month of Av commemorates the *yahrzeit* of the Rebbe's father, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Schneersohn. He passed away in the year 5704 (1944), in the city of Almaty, Kazakhstan.

1.

WOOD OFFERING

On numerous occasions,² we have discussed that the 20th day of the month of Av was one of the nine “times for the wood donation of the kohanim and the people.”³ As the Gemara recounts:⁴ “When the exiles returned to Israel, they found no wood in the storeroom” {for use on the altar}; certain families donated their own wood. Therefore, the Sages established that in the future, each of these families would have {the privilege} one day every year to provide the wood for the pyre, and the kohanim would use this wood for the altar, “even if the storeroom were full of wood.” These families celebrated their day assigned as a festival, and {to express their gratitude for this privilege} they would bring a “wood offering.”⁵

Concerning a situation when one of these occasions — for example, the 20th of Av — would coincide with Shabbos, a day on which these families could not bring the wood offering (because the wood offering does not override Shabbos), the mishnah says,⁶ “they postpone and do not advance” {their observances}. The same law applies in other instances, as the mishnah recounts, “the fast of the Ninth of Av; the Yom Tov *chagigah* offering;⁷ and *Hakhel*.”⁸

Regarding these last few instances mentioned above, the Gemara explains why “they postpone and do not advance”:

The fast of the Ninth of Av is not advanced because one does not advance calamity; the Yom Tov *chagigah* offering and *Hakhel* are not advanced because the time of their obligation had not yet arrived.

² See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 4, pp. 1103 ff.; vol. 9, pp. 86 ff.

³ *Taanis* 26a.

⁴ *Taanis* 28a.

⁵ See *Taanis* 12a and Rashi, loc. cit., s.v. “*sheYom Tov*.” {Meaning, aside from wood donated to be used to burn all the regular sacrifices, the respective families would also bring wood that *itself* was burnt on the altar as a sacrifice.}

⁶ *Megillah* 5a.

⁷ {A person who came to Yerushalayim on any of the three pilgrimage festivals was obligated to offer a *shelamim* sacrifice for the sake of the Yom Tov; see *Shemos* 23:14, 12:14; *Devarim* 16:10,15.}

⁸ {Once every seven years on Sukkos, in the year following the *shemittah* year, the entire Jewish nation would gather to hear the king read from the Torah.}

Regarding the “times for the wood donation of kohanim and the people,” however, the Gemara does not say why these days are postponed and not advanced.

We find different (seemingly contradictory) explanations in Rashi’s commentary on the Gemara and Rashi’s commentary on *Rif*:

Commenting on the Gemara, Rashi explains:

Because the time of their obligation had not yet arrived, and if they would advance these rites, they would not fulfill their obligations. **And the same applies** to the time for the wood donation of kohanim and the people, for they established a set time for the donations.

In other words, this reason — “because the time of their obligation had not yet arrived” — also applies to the wood offerings.

In contrast, in his commentary on *Rif*, Rashi says:

They would postpone the rite until after Shabbos because the entire Friday is the timeslot of the previous wood donor. Therefore, they did not want to infringe upon their time by bringing wood and the wood offering during the previous donor’s timeslot.⁹

(For this reason, the Gemara does not need to explain why we postpone the wood offering of the kohanim and the people and do not advance it — for the rationale of doing so is obvious, based on the above-mentioned reason.)

On this basis, it emerges that had the previous wood donor **not** minded if another family would bring wood and a wood offering during their timeslot, the next family **would** be able to advance their wood offering to Friday, even though the time of their obligation had **not** yet arrived.

⁹ Along the same lines, *Ran* writes (s.v., “*ve’henach*”): “...because of his companion {the previous benefactor} who is supplying wood then, he {the second benefactor} may not encroach on the other’s timeslot.”

2.

TZEDAKAH ISSUES

The difference between Rashi's two interpretations — whether we suggest the reason the wood offering was not advanced is “because the time of their obligation had not yet arrived” or for another reason — is also relevant in other contexts:

The *Jerusalem Talmud*¹⁰ records a debate between *Amoraim* about whether a tzedakah administrator must borrow money for a needy pauper when the communal funds have been depleted (and then repay the loan with tzedakah money that will be donated later). The Rogatchover Gaon¹¹ explains that the rationale of the authority who maintains that the administrator should not borrow the money is linked with Rashi's comments on the Gemara mentioned above. Rashi's remarks indicate that when a person pledges to bring an offering on a specific date, if he brings the offering beforehand, he does not fulfill his obligation. The same applies in this case of tzedakah:

The reason the tzedakah administrator would not be allowed to borrow money (when the funds are depleted) is as follows: He cannot use tzedakah money that will be pledged (and received) **later** to repay a **past** loan. Were he to do this, then essentially, the tzedakah money would have been distributed before the pledge was made.¹² Meaning, the mitzvah of tzedakah would have been performed before the giver established and pledged the money for tzedakah. Thus, when the administrator repays the previous loan, it emerges that the person who donated the money did not fulfill his obligation to pay his pledge.

On this basis, it emerges that according to Rashi's commentary on *Rif*, if not for the previous family objecting to the next family impinging upon their

¹⁰ *Jerusalem Talmud*, “*Kesuvos*,” ch. 6, halachah 5.

¹¹ *Tzafnas Paaneach*, second ed., 10c.

¹² And the one who holds the opposing viewpoint, who maintains that the administrator should borrow (does **not** argue because he disputes this reasoning, but rather, he) holds this opinion because “the Master of the festivals exists eternally” {*Jerusalem Talmud*, “*Kesuvos*,” 6:5}. This means that {giving the tzedakah before the time the pledge was established, is not an issue,} because from **Hashem's perspective**, there is no category of time (*Tzafnas Paneach*, *ibid*).

time, the next family **would be allowed** to advance their wood offering (even though this would be before the established time of the pledge — “the time of their obligation had not yet arrived”). Thus, the rationale for the opinion that the tzedakah administrator should not borrow money falls aside.

3.

WHY DO WE CARE WHAT THEY WANT?

This will be clarified by prefacing with something astonishing in Rashi’s commentary on *Rif* mentioned above — that we do not advance the time of the wood offering to Friday, for Friday was the previous donor’s time, and **they would not want** the next donor to intrude upon their time. We need to clarify:

Why were the wishes of the preceding family germane? The prophets (the consensus of the Jewish court)¹³ established the times for the wood offerings. If a situation arises in which there is room to consider advancing the time of the wood offering to Friday, why should we be concerned about the wishes of the previous family?

4.

THAT WAS THEIR INTENTION FROM THE BEGINNING

We can explain that Rashi’s two interpretations are not contradictory. On the contrary, they are complementary. By way of introduction:

During the “times for the wood donation of kohanim and the people,” the obligation upon these **families** to bring a wood offering was based on the laws

¹³ {The prophets acted as the recipients of Torah from the Elders, and did not, in this case, serve in their capacity as prophets (“... and the Elders to the prophets, and the prophets conveyed it to the Men of the Great Assembly” — *Avos* 1:1); see fn. 16 in the original.}

regarding *nederim*.¹⁴ When considering the scope and details of a *neder*, we must consider¹⁵ the person's intention when he made the *neder*.

Since it was not atypical for the date of one or more of these nine occasions {for the wood donation} to fall on Shabbos,¹⁶ certainly the donors, **from the outset**, considered what to do when their turn to offer the {wood} sacrifice fell on Shabbos: Would their day to bring the wood offering be moved to the day before Shabbos or the day after?

This explains how Rashi's comments on *Rif* add clarity to Rashi's comments on the Gemara: It is not solely due to Friday being the day before Shabbos that the time of the obligation for wood donations by kohanim and the people had not yet arrived. In this particular instance, the obligation time only begins after Shabbos. Since the previous family did not want the next family to infringe upon their timeslot, it was the intention of the donor (namely, the next family) from the outset¹⁷ that when their day would coincide with Shabbos, they would bring the wood offering **after** Shabbos. (After all, keeping the peace is crucial, especially regarding matters associated with the altar and sacrifices).¹⁸

(On the contrary, if not for the fact that the previous donor family would not want the next family to intrude upon their time, it would have been reasonable to assume that the donor's intention, from the outset, would have been specifically to **advance** the wood offering to Friday. This choice would have been reasonable because (a) {of the principle,} “do not allow a mitzvah that comes to your hand to become ‘leavened’”¹⁹ {meaning, do not delay it}; (b) if this family's **wood** was used (for the communal offerings) in the actual appointed time (on the 20th of Av [or whenever]), even when it coincided with Shabbos,²⁰ it would emerge that when they postpone the wood offering until after Shabbos, a

¹⁴ {“*Neder*,” singular. A vow.}

¹⁵ *Nedarim* 55b.

¹⁶ Particularly during the time of the Temple, as they would sanctify the month based on when witnesses saw the new moon {and not according to a set calendar}.

¹⁷ Note *Kol HaRamaz* on Megillah 1:3: “This was their arrangement from the outset.”

¹⁸ See *Mechilta* and Rashi on *Shemos* 20:22.

¹⁹ See *Mechilta* (and Rashi) on *Shemos* 12:17.

²⁰ As is implied from Rambam's “*Introduction to Mishnah*” on *Megillah*, ch. 1, mishnah 3, where he writes explicitly that “the offering was (postponed to) Sunday” {but he does not mention postponing the use of that family's wood}. Similarly, this is implied from Rashi's comments on *Rif*, *ibid*.

day passes on which they do not thank Hashem for the merit of bringing the wood.)

Therefore, in **this** situation, obviously, we postpone this rite instead of advancing it (and the Gemara does not even need to give a reason for it, as mentioned in Section 1) — even in situations where the previous family would occasionally agree to have the following family bring the wood offering during their timeslot. This is because **here**, “the time of their obligation had not yet arrived” since the obligation (the intention of the donor) from the outset was to postpone.

In my humble opinion, no proof either can be derived from this law to the dispute concerning whether we tell a tzedakah administrator to borrow money. (The Rogatchover Gaon maintains proof can be derived, as discussed in Section 2). In **our** situation, the rite was not moved earlier because the donor initially intended to postpone it. Thus, from here, we cannot infer any laws regarding a different situation when the donor did not factor in a (somewhat) irregular occurrence — such as paying back a loan — if a person can fulfill their mitzvah of tzedakah before the time for which the pledge was established.

5.

ADVANCING TZEDAKAH

From here, we can draw an inference regarding a *yahrzeit* that coincides with Shabbos. The custom is to donate tzedakah on the day of the *yahrzeit*. (Similarly, many communities customarily fast on the day of the *yahrzeit*.)²¹ This is a type of *neder*.²² We might ask: Should we advance these customs and perform them before Shabbos, or should we postpone them until Sunday?

According to the Rogatchover’s opinion mentioned above, seemingly, we should delay fulfilling these customs until after the date for which the *neder* was

²¹ *Beis Yosef*, “*Yoreh Deah*,” end of sec. 403; *Rema*, “*Yoreh Deah*,” sec. 376, par. 4, end of sec. 402.

²² *Bach*, *Taz* and Alter Rebbe’s *Shulchan Aruch*, “*Orach Chaim*,” end of sec. 249, et al.

earmarked. Based on the explanation above, however, we can presume that since, from the outset, we know that (in many years) the *yahrzeit* will fall on Shabbos, the *neder*, from the outset, was made in a way that better complies with the instruction of our Sages, “A mitzvah that comes to your hand, do not allow it to become ‘leavened.’” We should **bring forward** our tzedakah to Friday to prioritize the performance of the mitzvah.²³

—From a talk delivered on Shabbos *parshas Ekev*, the 20th of Menachem-Av, 5727 (1967)

²³ See also *Chasam Sofer*’s responsa, “*Orach Chaim*,” sec. 162, et al (cited in *Sdei Chemed*, “*Asifas Dinim*,” “*maareches Aveilus*,” sec. 96). *Magen Avraham*, sec. 568, sub-par. 20 and *Machatzis Hashekel* there.