

SICHA SUMMARY

PROJECT LIKKUTEI SICHOS | 5783 - YEAR OF HAKHEL



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Ki Tisa , Sicha 1

The Verse:

One of the prerequisites a Kohen must do before performing the Temple service is the washing of his hands and feet:

“When they enter the Tent of Meeting, they shall wash with water so that they will not die; or when they approach the altar to serve, to make a fire offering rise up in smoke to G-d. (Shemos 30:20)

Rashi details the scenarios where the Kohen must wash when entering the “Tent of Meeting.”

When they enter the Tent of Meeting — to bring the incense up in smoke in the morning and in the afternoon, or to sprinkle some of the blood of the bull of the anointed Kohen [Gadol, who erred in his halachic decision and practiced according to that erroneous decision,] (Vayikra, 4:3-12) and the blood of the kids for [sin offerings for having engaged in] idolatry (Bamidbar 15:22-26).

The Question:

Why does Rashi need to specify the services that were performed in the Tent of Meeting? Reading the verse in its plain sense, it is evident that “when they enter the Tent of Meeting” means when the Kohen enters to perform the services whose place is in the Tent of Meeting — because it is highly unusual to enter the Tent without any service to perform. Why, then, does Rashi need to comment here at all? And if Rashi does find it necessary to mention the specific services, why does he only mention the incense and not include the preparing and lighting of the Menorah, the arranging of the bread on the table, etc?

The Explanation:

Rashi is perturbed by the verse splicing the directive to wash before the Temple service into two separate clauses: 1) “When they enter the Tent of Meeting, they shall wash with water so that they will not die; 2) or when they approach the altar to serve, to make a fire offering rise up in smoke to G-d.” Why not include both scenarios together, “When they enter the Tent of Meeting, or when they approach the altar

to serve... they shall wash with water so that they will not die”?

Rashi therefore concludes that the obligation to wash differs when entering the Tent of Meeting and when approaching the altar.

The purpose of the ritual washing was to ensure the Kohen was clean and purified before engaging in the Temple service. The outer courtyard was heavily trafficked with Levites and Israelites who were bringing their animals for offerings. The Tent of Meeting, however, was quiet and empty of anyone besides for the Kohen performing the services. Therefore, it stands to reason that the Kohen would have to wash before every act of service at the outer altar, because he would come into contact with other people and animals in between each service. Conversely, a single washing before entering the Tent of Meeting would suffice for all the services performed during that visit.

When Rashi specifies the services performed in the Tent, he is simply noting the juncture at which the Kohen enters the Tent to perform a set of services. “To bring the incense up in smoke in the morning and in the afternoon:” The most important service of the morning was the lighting of incense (according to Rashi, the Menorah was not lit in the morning, but only cleaned and prepared for its lighting in the afternoon). Rashi is therefore saying that the Kohen washes himself before entering the Tent in the morning for the first time to light the incense, and that washing suffices for all the subsequent services he would

perform during that visit. Then he washes once again in the afternoon, because he is reentering after being outside the Tent for a prolonged duration.

Rashi then adds two additional circumstances — the blood of the anointed bull and the sacrifice for the sin of idolatry — which are not part of the daily routine, to clarify that when entering during these unplanned times, the kohen would need to wash again.

The Deeper Dimension:

The outer altar — where physical animals were consumed by the Divine fire — represents the dimension of a person when they are “outward facing,” engaged with the material world to refine it and elevate it to G-d. The inner altar where incense was offered alludes to the inner dimension of a person which seeks to connect intimately with G-d. The word for incense is related to the words for connection and bonding.

When we are engaged with the foreign substance of the material world, we must “wash” ourselves of negative motives and impulses before every interaction. Otherwise, the physical may influence us more than we influence the physical.

When we are focused on deepening our connection with G-d, however, we only need an initial “washing” of negativity, for in the space that includes only us and G-d, there is no further negativity to tempt us. However, even in the Tent of Meeting, there are times when we must seek atonement; at these times we must again be wary of negativity and “wash” ourselves once again.