

SICHA SUMMARY

Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 28

Chag HaShavuos

The Morning After:

In his Shulchan Aruch the Alter Rebbe writes:

“It is forbidden to fast on the day following Shavuos according to the fundamentals of the law.”

The reasoning stems from a long-standing custom from the era of the Beis Hamikdash. The pilgrims who arrived for the holiday would not offer their burnt-offerings on Shavuos itself. Forbidden labors are permitted on holidays only for the sake of food preparation, but the burnt offerings are consumed entirely by the altar, without any human benefit. Being that there is a designated seven-day period to compensate for missed Shavuos offerings, the Jewish people would bring these burnt offerings on the day after Shavuos and observed it as a minor holiday.

The Alter Rebbe continues, “True, the above follows the rulings of the School of Shammai, while according to the School of Hillel, it is permitted to offer [these

sacrifices] even on the festival itself. Nevertheless, concerning this matter the School of Hillel followed the rulings [of the School of Shammai]. Many Jews followed [this practice] and offered [these sacrifices] after the festival.” (Shulchan Aruch HaRav, 494:19)

The Question:

Many authorities questioned this explanation, since the Talmudic source of the debate between the houses of Hillel and Shammai does not mention that the School of Hillel retracted their opinion or conducted themselves in accordance with the School of Shammai’s opinion.

The Explanation:

The source for this law seems to be an inference from two stories related by the Talmud in its discussion of this dispute.

The first episode: “An incident occurred involving Hillel the Elder, who brought his burnt-offering to the Courtyard of the Beis HaMikdash in order to place his hands [on the animal’s head on a festival]. The students of Shammai the Elder gathered around him and said to him: What is the nature of this animal [that you are bringing]? [Hillel did not want to quarrel

with them in the Beis HaMikdash and] said to them: It is a female, and I have brought it as a peace-offering... and they departed.

On that day [when the incident became known and it appeared that even Hillel had accepted Shammai's view], the School of Shammai gained the upper hand over the School of Hillel, and they sought to establish the halachah in accordance with their opinion. However, a certain Elder of the disciples of Shammai the Elder was there... who knew that the halachah is in accordance with the School of Hillel. He sent for and brought all the sheep of Kedar that were in Jerusalem, stood them in the Courtyard of the Beis HaMikdash, and said: "Anyone who wishes to place his hands [on the head of an animal] should come and place his hands."

On that day, the School of Hillel gained the upper hand [over the School of Shammai], and they established the halachah in accordance with their opinion, and there was no one there who disputed the matter in any way."

This seems to imply that the law firmly followed Beis Hillel. But the Talmud continues with a second story:

"Some time later, there was another incident involving a disciple from the School of Hillel, who brought his burnt-offering to the Courtyard of the Beis HaMikdash in order to place his hands [on the animal's head on a festival]. A disciple from the School of Shammai found him and said to him: "What is this placing of hands?", [i.e., why do you place your hands on the

animal's head and thereby violate the statement of the School of Shammai?]

[The student of the School of Hillel] rebuked him, replying: "What is this silence?", [i.e., why do you not stay silent, for the halachah was not established in accordance with that opinion?] (Beitzah 20a-b)

If the widespread custom followed Beis Hillel, then there would be nothing unusual about the student of Beis Hillel offering his burnt-offering on Shavuos. Everyone would be doing so; it would be unremarkable. The fact that the second incident occurred shows that it was not the widespread custom for people to bring burnt-offerings for the festival on the festival itself. Clearly, the people had adopted the practice of Beis Shammai.

Why, though, did Beis Hillel capitulate in this law? Beis Hillel had a textual derivation from a verse that permitted the offering of burnt sacrifices on holidays. The reason for this, they maintained, was so that "your tables should not be full while your Master's table is empty." It would be inappropriate to feast on the festival sacrifices while the burnt offerings intended for G-d alone would be neglected.

But Shavuos is an exception where the Torah makes clear that there must be material benefit and enjoyment on the holiday. This is to express our personal delight in receiving the Torah. Therefore, Beis Hillel eventually agreed that a burnt-sacrifice, which does not bring any physical delight to the people, is not offered on Shavuos.

Thus, the custom was adopted to celebrate the day after Shavuot as a continuation of the holiday, and to offer the burnt sacrifices then.

This practice highlights the active participation of the Jewish people in

receiving the Torah. The people adopted a custom — a human-initiated resolution — that was founded on the premise that receiving the Torah should be a subjectively satisfying experience that is felt in the physical body of the Jew.
