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ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***MIKDASH***

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**Lecture #267: The History of the Divine Service at Altars (LXXVII) – The Prohibition of Bamot (LIV)**

In the [previous *shiur*](http://etzion.org.il/en/lecture-266-history-divine-service-altars-lxxvi-%E2%80%93-prohibition-bamot-liii)we considered the various formulations that express David's desire to be close to God, to see His face and to dwell in His house.

In order to complete the picture regarding David's service of God as it is reflected in the book of *Tehilim*, it is our intention in the next two *shiurim* to deal with David's attitude toward the world of sacrifices and prayer in general, and their connection to the Temple in particular.

We will begin in this *shiur* with the world of sacrifices.

### The world of sacrifices

We have seen that many psalms in the book of *Tehilim* draw a direct connection between prayer and the built Temple. In addition some of the psalms of *Tehilim* relate to the offerings that David wished to sacrifice.

Let us mention that during the period under discussion, the ark was separated from the great *bama*.[[1]](#footnote-1) According to the Halakha, in such a situation *bamot* are permitted, as is explained by the *Meshekh Chokhma*:

Now in the *Yerushalmi*, tractate *Megilla*, chap. 1, halakha 12: Rabbi Yisa [said] in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: This is the sign: Whenever the ark is inside, *bamot* are forbidden; if it went out, *bamot* are permitted. (*Meshekh Chokhma*, *Devarim* 12:8)

According to this principle, it is clear that throughout the days of David offerings could be brought in all places. Therefore, when David mentions the matter of offerings in general terms without specifying the location, it is reasonable to assume that the reference is to offerings brought in all places.

To which offerings is David referring? In Psalm 4, it is stated:

Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord. (*Tehilim* 4:6)

Not just any sacrifices, but sacrifices of righteousness. We will expand on their role below. In Psalm 20 we read:

May He send you help from the sanctuary, and strengthen you out of Zion! May He remember all your offerings, and accept with favor your burnt-offering! Sela. (*Tehilim* 20:3-4)

The connection between the two verses alludes to a link between God's help from the sanctuary in Zion and His remembering the offerings and burnt-offerings.

In this context it is stated that God will send His help from the sanctuary and that He will remember the sacrifices that were offered. The connection between prayer, sacrifices, and the site of the Temple is clear and explicit in the psalm.

The connection continues in Psalm 27:

Therefore I will offer in His tabernacle sacrifices of joy; I will sing, and I will make melody to the Lord. (*Tehilim* 27:6)

Here too there are sacrifices of joy in God's tabernacle and there is singing, making melody, and prayer to God in that very same place.

Another connection that we would like to see is the connection between sacrifices and the covenant. In Psalm 50 it is stated:

Gather My pious ones together to Me; those that made a covenant with Me by sacrifice. (*Tehillim* 50:5)

The psalmist relates here to the covenant made at Sinai over the offerings, as it is explicitly stated in the book of *Shemot*:

And he sent the young men of the children of Israel, who offered burnt-offerings… And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the hearing of the people… And Moshe took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you concerning all these words. *Shemot* 24:5-8)

In the continuation of the psalm the psalmist states:

I will not reprove you for your sacrifices; and your burnt-offerings are continually before Me. I will take no bullock out of your house, nor he goats out of your folds. For every beast of the forest is Mine, and the cattle and the wild beasts of the field are Mine. It I were hungry, I would not tell you: for the world is Mine, and the fullness thereof. Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer to God a thanksgiving; and pay your vows to the most high: and call upon Me in the day of trouble. I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me. (*Tehilim* 50:8-15)

Sacrifices are not favorably received by God if the person who brings them thinks that they are food for God. To counter this, it is fitting to offer them as sacrifices brought as a sign of thanksgiving for deliverance from troubles.

It is possible that the psalm was meant to be recited on festival days when all of Israel go up to Jerusalem and offer sacrifices in the Temple.[[2]](#footnote-2)

According to this understanding, all of Israel are called here pious ones because they are members of God's covenant and take shelter in His shadow. The Gemara in *Sukka* (55a) states that during the second Temple period this psalm was assigned as the song that the Levites would sing on the second say of *Chol ha-Mo'ed Sukkot.*

The psalm concludes with the words: "Whoever offers praise glorifies Me; and to him that orders his way aright, I will show the salvation of God" (*Tehilim* 50:23). A sacrifice is not food for God, but rather a symbol of the honor that man shows to God. In this sense, the highest offering is a thanksgiving-offering that makes known the wonders of God.

Psalm 51 deals with the repentance of a man who asks God to pardon his sins and help him purify his heart so that he not sin again in the future.

David recites this psalm in the context of his sin with Bat Sheva. When the prophet Nathan comes to rebuke him, David immediately admits that he had sinned to God. The psalm ends with the verses:

O Lord, open my lips; and my mouth shall rehearse Your praise. For You desire not sacrifice; or else I would give it: You delight not in burnt-offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise. Do good in Your favor to Zion; build You the walls of Jerusalem. Then shall You be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt-offering and whole burnt-offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon Your altar. (*Tehilim* 51:17-21)

Here the psalmist relates to the essence of the sacrifices offered to God. He takes a vow, but he does not vow to offer a sacrifice.[[3]](#footnote-3) On the other hand, he asks God to favorably receive the words of his mouth, since God does not desire the sacrifices of those who intentionally sinned.

The Radak writes as follows:

"For You desire not" – If I knew that You desired a sacrifice for the sin, I would give it. But I know that You prefer a broken heart, and therefore I repent before You with a broken heart. Even though God commanded sacrifices together with confession and repentance, He only commanded sacrifices for unwitting sins. But he had sinned wittingly, and there is no sacrifice for a witting sin, but rather repentance with a broken and depressed heart…. (*Tehilim* 51:18)

The Radak emphasizes the supreme importance of a broken heart and the removal of bodily desires from his heart, especially when a person sins intentionally.

In this sense a person essentially offers himself and his broken spirit as a sacrifice before God. His broken spirit is received by God more favorably than his sacrifices, which God does not actually desire.

In contrast to sacrifices in which God has no interest, when Jerusalem will be built, God will receive with love and desire offerings that are sacrifices of righteousness, as we saw in Psalm 4, and not sacrifices that come for atonement for sin. The desire to build the walls of Jerusalem will find expression in the offering of those sacrifices of righteousness that will be favorably received.

We wish to examine also the relationship between the sin of David and Bat Sheva mentioned at the beginning of the psalm (*Tehilim* 51:2) and the conclusion of the psalm: "Do good in Your favor to Zion; build You the walls of Jerusalem… then shall they offer bullocks upon Your altar" (*Tehilim* 51:20-21).

We find two different approaches to understanding these verses. The one of Rashi (in his commentary to v. 20) and R. Yeshaya of Trani: "To build Your Temple with Torah in the days of my son Shelomo."[[4]](#footnote-4)

The second, that of the Radak:

"Do good in Your favor" – In these last two verses it would appear that the holy spirit was restored to him while he was praying with this psalm, as he said: "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation" (*Tehilim* 51:14). And so it was that it was restored to him, because these verses are a prophecy about the future, for he saw with the holy spirit that the Temple would eventually be destroyed, the first Temple and the second Temple, because of sins… And in the days of the Messiah the sacrifices will be favorably received as all of Israel will be of one heart to serve the Lord. Therefore, he said: "Do good in Your favor to Zion." (*Tehilim* 51:20)

We wish to adopt the explanations of Rashi and R. Yeshaya of Trani which follows *Midrash Rabba*, and propose that part of David's repentance for his sin is connected to his fierce desire to build the Temple, on the understanding that it is possible that his sin is one of the factors because of which he was forbidden to build the Temple.

Many explanations have been offered for the verse in *Divrei Ha-Yamim* in which David is informed that he will not build the Temple:

But the word of the Lord came to me, saying, You have shed blood abundantly, and have made great wars: you shall not build a house to My name, because you have shed much blood upon the earth in My sight. (I *Divrei Ha-Yamim* 22:8)

The Radak (ad loc.) writes:

His saying: "You have shed much blood upon the earth," because there was innocent blood among the blood that he shed. (I *Divrei Ha-Yamim* 22:8)

The first example that the Radak brings of "innocent blood" is the blood of Uriya the Hittite.[[5]](#footnote-5)

This understanding involves an exceedingly harsh personal claim against David: Causing the death of Uriya the Hittite is what prevented David from building the Temple.

This understanding is connected to the famous passage in tractate *Shabbat*:

What is meant by: "Show me a token for good, that they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed" (*Tehilim* 86:17)? David prayed before the Holy One, blessed be He: Master of the Universe! Forgive me for that sin! He said to him: It is forgiven you. He said to him: Show me a token in my lifetime. He answered him: In your lifetime I will not make it known, but I will make it known in the lifetime of your son Shelomo. For when Shelomo built the Temple, he wanted to take the ark into the Holy of Holies, whereupon the gates stuck to each other. Shelomo uttered twenty-four prayers, yet he was not answered. He opened [his mouth] and exclaimed: "Lift up your heads, O you gates; and be you lifted up, you everlasting doors: And the King of glory shall come in" (*Tehilim* 24:7)… But he was not answered. But as soon as he prayed: "O Lord God, turn not away the face of Your anointed; remember the good deeds of David Your servant" (II *Divrei Ha-Yamim* 6:42), he was immediately answered. In that hour the faces of all David's enemies turned [black] like the bottom of a pot, and all Israel knew that the Holy One, blessed be He, had forgiven him that sin. (*Shabbat* 30a)

The connection between the issue of pardon for David's sin with Bat Sheva and bringing the ark into the Holy of Holies can perhaps be understood in light of the view of the Radak that David was not permitted to build the Temple because of the blood of Uriya the Hittite.[[6]](#footnote-6)

In this context we will bring *Chazal's* exposition regarding the juxtaposition of the mentioning of Uriya the Hittite at the end of the list of David's warriors (II *Shemuel* 23:39) and the story of the census and the plague that immediately follow it:

"And again the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and He incited David against them, saying, Go number Israel and Yehuda" (II *Shemuel* 24:1). What is written before that? When David came to count his warriors, he was counting. When he reached Uriya the Hittite, it is stated: "Thirty seven in all" (II *Shemuel* 23:39). And you find that he did not count another seventeen warriors, but in *Divrei Ha-Yamim* you find another seventeen. Rather, when he reached Uriya, immediately: "And again the anger of the Lord" (II *Shemuel* 24:1). This may be likened to a king who was sitting and calling out from his records all [the names of] his warriors. He called out So-and-so and So-and-so. When he reached So-and-so, they said to him: He died. Immediately he cast away his records, and became angry. So too when he mentioned Uriya, immediately: "And again the anger of the Lord." (*Yalkut Shimoni*, II *Shemuel* 2, no. 165)[[7]](#footnote-7)

According to this Midrash, the sin involving Uriya had additional ramifications: God's anger and the dreadful plague that it brought (in which 70,000 people died), and the revelation of the site of the Temple in the wake of David's readiness to assume responsibility and die in the plague.

The connection between David's sin and God's preventing him from building the Temple raises the question whether there is a connection between the chapters dealing at length with the Temple in *Divrei Ha-Yamim* and David's repentance.

The time of the census and of David's many preparations for the building of the Temple cannot be clearly determined. The time of David's sin with Uriya and Bat Sheva is also not known (II *Shemuel* 11), but the order of the chapters suggests that it was in the second half of his life. In the difficult events that took place in the wake of the sin (the incidents involving Tamar, Avshalom, Shimi ben Gera, and Sheva ben Bikhri), it is evident that David lost his leadership in all governmental matters. If all that is related in I *Divrei Ha-Yamim* 21-29 – the census, the revelation of the site of the Temple, and the intensive preparations for its construction – took place after the sin,[[8]](#footnote-8) perhaps we can say that Ezra describes David's actions on behalf of the Temple as a repair of his sin. Is it possible that God allowed David to realize his fierce desire to advance the building of the Temple, while absenting himself from governmental matters, as a sign of his repentance and acceptance of his punishment?[[9]](#footnote-9) If so, it turns out that in the later years of his reign, David occupied himself with repentance for his earlier sins, and invested himself heavily in the many preparations for the building of the Temple.[[10]](#footnote-10)

This possibility, that the preparations for building the Temple were part of David's repentance and repair of his sin, fits in well with the Radak's view that the verse: "You shall not build a house to My name, because you have shed much blood upon the earth in My sight" (I *Divrei Ha-Yamim* 22:8), relates to, among other things, the blood of Uriya the Hittite. David's preparations for the building of the Temple – the clear opposite of bloodshed and death, as the Temple expresses eternal life that is altogether removed from any trace of cruelty or injury to another – were then a direct repair of his sin.

In addition it fits in with the words of the Gemara cited above that links the completion of the building of the Temple and the ark's entry into the Holy of Holies to the pardon of David's sin.

In the next *shiur* we will complete our consideration of the sacrifices, and address prayer and its connection to the Temple, and thus conclude our study of the service of God as it is reflected in the book of *Tehilim.*

Translated by David Strauss

1. The ark rested in Kiryat-Ye'arim for twenty years (I *Shemuel* 7:2). Afterwards David brought the ark to the City of David (II *Shemuel* 2:6), where it remained until it was brought to the house of God when it was dedicated by Shelomo (I *Melakhim* 8:6).

   At the same time, the great *bama* was located for 13 years in Nov, then 44 years in Giv'on (according to the calculations of *Seder Olam Rabba*). The years in Nov parallel the period of the prophet Shemuel and King Shaul, while the years in Giv'on parallel the 40 years of David's monarchy and the first 4 years of Shelomo's reign before the Temple was built. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This is the opinion of Amos Chakham in his *Da'at Mikra* commentary to the book of *Tehilim*. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Similar to: "You do not desire sacrifice or meal offering" (*Tehilim* 40:7). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Based on *Vayikra Rabba* 7, 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. According to this possibility, the incident involving Uriya preceded David's request to build the Temple. This requires further study of the chronology of David's life as a whole. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Another Midrash that connects the sin involving Uriya to the building of the Temple is found in *Aggadat Bereishit*, chap. 38: "'Now King David was old, advanced in years' (I *Melakhim* 1:1). This is the meaning of the verse: 'But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength' (*Yeshaya* 40:31). Our Rabbis said: For thirteen years David was sick and bed-ridden, and they switched seven mattresses under him every day, because he would soak them, as it is stated: 'I am weary with my groaning: all the night I make my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears' (*Tehilim* 6:7). These thirteen years that he suffered afflictions, it was because he did that act [the sin involving Uriya]. And all of his enemies would say: When will this man die? As it is stated: 'My enemies speak evil of me, When shall he die, and his name perish?' (*Tehilim* 41:6). This continued until he begged for mercy before the Holy One, blessed be He. He said before Him: Master of the Universe, raise me up for the sake of the Temple that the prophet Shemuel passed to me…. Immediately the Holy One, blessed be He, accepted his prayer and he rose from his bed, as it is stated: 'Then David the king stood up upon his feet' (I *Divrei ha-Yamim* 28:2). Where does a man stand not upon his feet, and what is the meaning of 'upon his feet'? Rather he was cured, and he became healthy, and stood upon his feet after all those years, and he passed on to them the scroll of the Temple, 'All this is put in writing by the hand of the Lord who instructed me' (I *Divrei ha-Yamim* 28:19). And it is stated: 'Then David gave Shelomo his son the pattern of the porch' (I *Divrei ha-Yamim* 28:11)… 'And the pattern of all that he had by the spirit' (I *Divrei ha-Yamim* 28:12). Therefore it is stated: 'But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength' (*Yeshaya* 40:31)." According to this Midrash, David's request to complete the scroll of the Temple led to his recovery from the illness that befell him in the wake of his sin. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. A parallel source is found in *Pesikta Rabbati*, 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. This possibility fits in well with David's relating to Shelomo in these chapters as an adult, who is capable of accepting responsibility for building the Temple. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. In *Divrei ha-Yamim* David is described as an active and energetic figure, who gathers together the people of Israel and its leaders, and urges them to involve themselves in the building of the Temple. It is possible that David's activity in those years was wholly focused on the building of the Temple, and that it was accompanied by a total abstention from his other leadership duties, as a sign of his acceptance of the punishment for his sin. This matter requires further study. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. In what sense can the preparations for the building of the Temple serve as a repair of David's sin with Bat Sheva? This of course depends on how we understand the essence of his sin. For example, repairing the cancellation of the resting of the *Shekhina* between a man and his wife (*Sota* 17a) by working toward the resting of the *Shekhina* in the Temple; the Temple as the site of purity and modesty, as opposed to sin; and the like. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)