

## Is Holiness Contagious?

### About the concept המקדש - The altar sanctifies - Zevachim 83a-b

In the opening of the ninth perek (chapter) of Zevachim, we are introduced to the concept that even an invalid offering that is put on the altar, should be burned there rather than being removed. What is the logic behind this? Is the holiness of the altar somehow contagious, and it gets transferred even to an invalid sacrifice? What can we learn from this concept?

Questions? Email [dinanddaf@gmail.com](mailto:dinanddaf@gmail.com)

#### 1. זבחים פג. משנה

המזבח מקדש את הראוי לו. רבי יהושע אומר, כל הראוי לאשים, אם עלה לא ירד, שנאמר (ויקרא ו), הוא העלה על מוקדה על המזבח. מה עולה שהיא ראוי לאשים, אם עלתה לא תרד, אף כל דבר שהוא ראוי לאשים, אם עלה לא ירד. רבן גמליאל אומר, כל הראוי למזבח, אם עלה לא ירד, שנאמר, הוא העלה על מוקדה על המזבח. מה עולה שהיא ראוי למזבח אם עלתה לא תרד, אף כל דבר שהוא ראוי למזבח אם עלה לא ירד. אין בין דברי רבן גמליאל לדברי רבי יהושע אלא הדם והנסכים, שרבן גמליאל אומר לא ירדו, ורבי יהושע אומר ירדו. רבי שמעון אומר, הדבב כשר והנסכים פסולים, הנסכים כשרין והזבב פסול, אפלו זה וזה פסולין, הדבב לא ירד, והנסכים ירדו:

Certain unfit items, once they have been placed on the altar, are nevertheless sacrificed. The mishna teaches: The altar sanctifies only items that are suited to it. The *tanna'im* disagree as to the definition of suited for the altar. Rabbi Yehoshua says: Any item that is suited to be consumed by the fire on the altar, e.g., burnt offerings and the sacrificial portions of other offerings, which are burned on the altar, if it ascended upon the altar, even if it is disqualified from being sacrificed *ab initio*, it shall not descend. Since it was sanctified by its ascent upon the altar, it is sacrificed upon it, as it is stated: "It is the burnt offering on the pyre upon the altar" (Leviticus 6:2), from which it is derived: Just as with regard to a burnt offering, which is suited to be consumed by the fire on the altar, if it ascended it shall not descend, so too, with regard to any item that is suited to be consumed by the fire on the altar, if it ascended it shall not descend. Rabban Gamliel says: With regard to any item that is suited to ascend upon the altar, even if it is not typically consumed, if it ascended, it shall not descend, even if it is disqualified from being sacrificed *ab initio*, as it is stated: "It is the burnt offering on the pyre upon the altar," from which it is derived: Just as with regard to a burnt offering, which is fit for the altar, if it ascended it shall not descend, so too, any item that is fit for the altar, if it ascended it shall not descend. The mishna comments: The difference between the statement of Rabban Gamliel and the statement of Rabbi Yehoshua is only with regard to disqualified blood and disqualified libations, which are not consumed by the fire but do ascend upon the altar, as Rabban Gamliel says: They shall not descend, as they are fit to ascend upon the altar, and Rabbi Yehoshua says: They shall descend, as they are not burned on the altar. Rabbi Shimon says: Whether the offering was fit and the accompanying libations were unfit, e.g., if they became ritually impure or they were brought outside their designated area, or whether the libations were fit and the offering was unfit, rendering the accompanying libations unfit as well, and even if both this and that were unfit, the offering shall not descend, as it was sanctified by the altar, but the libations shall descend.

2. ויקרא ו:א-ב  
א וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר:

God spoke to Moses, saying:

ב צו אֶת־אַהֲרֹן וְאֶת־בָּנָיו לֵאמֹר זֹאת תֹּנֶת הָעֹלָה הִוא הָעֹלָה עַל־מוֹקְדָהּ עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ כָּל־הַלַּיְלָה עַד־הַבֹּקֶר וְאֵשׁ הַמִּזְבֵּחַ תִּיקָד בּוֹ:

Command Aaron and his sons thus: This is the ritual of the burnt offering: The burnt offering itself shall remain where it is burned upon the altar all night until morning, while the fire on the altar is kept going on it.

3. רש"י ויקרא ו:ב

זאת תורת העולה וגו'. הרי הענין הזה בא ללמד על הקטר חלבים ואברים שיהא כשר כל הלילה, וללמד על הפסולים אי זה אם עלה ירד, ואי זה אם עלה לא ירד, שכל תורה לרבות הוא בא, לומר — תורה אחת לכל העולים, ואפלו פסולים, שאם עלו לא ירדו (שם):

THIS IS THE LAW OF THE BURNT OFFERING: [SUCH BURNT OFFERING SHALL REMAIN ON THE FIRE-PLACE UPON THE ALTAR ALL NIGHT] — This paragraph (vv.1—2) is intended to teach, with reference to the burning of the fat-portions and limbs of sacrifices that it is permissible during the whole night (Megillah 21a); and to teach regarding disqualified sacrifices, which of them, if already brought up on the altar, must be taken down, and which, if brought up, need not be taken down. The latter case may happen, because the term, תורה wherever it occurs in Scripture as an introduction to a group of laws (cf. Leviticus 6:7, 18; 7:1,11 etc.) is intended as an all-inclusive term (to include all of the class mentioned); here it is intended to tell us: One law applies to all animals that may be brought up on the altar, even certain disqualified ones — that if these have once been brought up on the altar they shall not be taken down again (Sifra, Tzav, Chapter 1 7; Zevachim 27b).

הוא העלה. למעט את הרובע ואת הנרבע וכיוצא בהן, שלא יהיה פסול בקדש, שנפסלו קדם שבאו לעזרה (שם ח): — is intended to exclude from the general law of male and female cattle with which sexual sin had been committed and the like (i. e. that even if they were put on the altar they must be taken down again), because their disqualification did not occur in the Holy Place, since they were dis-qualified before they came into the forecourt (Sifra, Tzav, Chapter 1 8).

4. ר' דוד הכהן ראפאפארט, מקדש דוד סימן ד'

וְגַם זֶה יֵשׁ לַחֲקוֹר בַּפְּסוּלִים שֶׁאִם עָלוּ לֹא יֵרְדוּ אִם  
לְרִיבִים מִלַּח לְהַקְטִיר דַּאֲפֶשֶׁר דְּרַק קִרְנָנוּת כַּשְׂרִים  
וְהַקְטָרֶתן הַקְטָרָה מַעֲלִיחָא וּמִרְנָה לְרִיבִים מִלַּח אֲבָל  
בַּפְּסוּלִים דְּאִין הַקְטָרֶתן מִרְנָה וְרַק דִּינָא הוּא דִּלֹא יֵרְדוּ  
אֲפֶשֶׁר דִּבְאֵלוּ לִיכָא דִּין מִלַּח [מִיְהוּ מִהַמְלִימָא שְׂכַחַב דּוּחַ

And one should examine regarding the invalid sacrifices that ascended and therefore do not descent - weather they require salting in order to burn them, for perhaps only valid sacrifices whose burning are proper burning and effect Divine validation require salting, but invalid sacrifices which do not effect Divine validation, but instead are only burned because there is a rule that they should not be removed (once they have ascended), perhaps there is no law of salting these.

#### 5. מנחות ז.

אמר רבי יוחנן...כלי שרת אין מקדשין אלא מדעת.

Concerning this challenge, Rabbi Yohanan said: ...service vessels sanctify items placed in them only when they are placed there with specific intent that they be sanctified by that vessel.

#### 6. זבחים פג:

רבי יוסי הגלילי אומר: מתוך שנאמר "כל הנגע במזבח יקדש" – שומע אני בין ראוי ובין שאינו ראוי; תלמוד לומר "כבשים" – מה כבשים ראויין, אף כל ראוי. רבי עקיבא אומר: "עלה" – מה עולה ראוי, אף כל ראוי. Rabbi Yosei HaGelili says: From that which is stated: "Whatever touches the altar shall be sacred" (Exodus 29:37), I would derive that the altar sanctifies any item that ascends upon it, whether it is fit for the altar or whether it is unfit. Therefore, the verse states: "Now this is that which you shall offer upon the altar: Two lambs" (Exodus 29:38), to teach: Just as lambs are fit for the altar and are sanctified by it, so too, all items fit for the altar are sanctified by it. Rabbi Akiva says that the verse states: "Burnt offering," to teach: Just as a burnt offering is fit for the altar and is sanctified by it, so too, all items fit for the altar are sanctified by it.

#### 7. שמות כט:לז-לח

לז שבעת ימים תכפר על-המזבח וקדשת אתו והיה המזבח קדש קדשים כל-הנגע במזבח יקדש: {ס} Seven days you shall perform purification for the altar to consecrate it, and the altar shall become most holy; whatever touches the altar shall become consecrated.

לח וזה אשר תעשה על-המזבח כבשים בני-שנה שנים ליום תמיד: Now this is what you shall offer upon the altar: two yearling lambs each day, regularly.

#### 8. רש"י שמות כט:לז

והיה המזבח קדש. ומה היא קדשתו? כל הנגע במזבח יקדש. And the altar will be(come) holy. And what is it holiness? All that touches the altar will become holy.

#### 9. בכור שור שמות כט:לז

כל הנוגע במזבח יקדש. לפי פשוטו יהיה קדוש שצריך לקדשו ולטהר מפני שמזבח קדש קדשים וי"ל שאחר שהמזבח מקודש ע"י משחה הנוגע בו ימשח ממנו כי הנוגע בדבר נמשח גם הוא נמשח שהמשיחה שביה מושחת הנוגע ולהחזיר שלא יגעו בו שלא לצורך אמר כן ורבות' פי' כל הראוי למזבח המזבח מקדשו להיות לו קדושת הגוף וה"ה לשאר כלי שרת שמקדשין את הראוי להם:

All that touches the altar will become holy: The plain meaning that it will be holy means that one needs to become holy and purify themselves because the altar is holy of holies. And one might say that because the altar is consecrated through anointing, one who touches it will become anointed by it: for one who touches something anointed will also become anointed - for the anointing in it also anoint whoever touches it, and so that people will not touch it unnecessarily it says so. And our rabbis explained: anything that is fitting for the altar, the altar consecrates it to have physical sanctity (as opposed to simply its value being sanctified - קדושת דמים). And the same applies to the other service vessels, which also consecrate that which is fitting for them.

#### 10. ר' אברהם אבן עזרא שמות כט:לז

כל הנגע במזבח יקדש. כמו כל אשר יגע בבשרה יקדש (ויקרא ו, כ) יש אומרים כי על הלחם לבדו ידבר שלא יגעו אם לא יהיו קדושים והטעם שלא יהיו טמאים:

All that touches the altar will become holy: Like “all that touches is flesh shall become holy. Some say this is only about the bread - i.e., that they may not touch it unless they are holy, meaning that they may not be ritually impure.

#### 11. שמות כט:א-ב,לז

א וזה הדבר אשר תעשה להם לקדש אתם לכהן לי לקח פר אחד בן בקר ואילים שנים תמימים:

This is what you shall do to them in consecrating them to serve Me as priests: Take a young bull of the herd and two rams without blemish;

ב ולחם מצות וחלת מצת בלילת בשמן וירקיקי מצות משחים בשמן סלת חטים תעשה אתם:

also unleavened bread, unleavened cakes with oil mixed in, and unleavened wafers spread with oil—make these of choice wheat flour.

לז שבעת ימים תכפר על המזבח וקדשת אתו והיה המזבח קדש קדשים כל הנגע במזבח יקדש: {ס}

Seven days you shall perform purification for the altar to consecrate it, and the altar shall become most holy; whatever touches the altar shall become consecrated.

#### 12. ויקרא ו:יז-כ

יז וידבר יהוה אל משה לאמר:

God spoke to Moses, saying:

יח דבר אל אהרן ואל בניו לאמר זאת תורת החטאת במקום אשר תשחט העולה תשחט החטאת לפני יהוה קדש קדשים הוא:

Speak to Aaron and his sons thus: This is the ritual of the sin offering: the sin offering shall be slaughtered before God, at the spot where the burnt offering is slaughtered: it is most holy.

יט הכהן המחטא אתה יאכלנה במקום קדש תאכל בחצר אהל מועד:

The priest who offers it as a sin offering shall eat of it; it shall be eaten in the sacred precinct, in the enclosure of the Tent of Meeting.

כ כל אשר יגע בבשרה יקדש ואשר יזה מדמה על הבגד אשר יזה עליה תכבס במקום קדש:

Anything that touches its flesh shall become holy; and if any of its blood is spattered upon a garment, you shall wash the bespattered part in the sacred precinct.

### 13. חזקוני

**קדש קדשים** קדש כאחד מן הקדשים

**כל הנגע במזבח** כל הרוצה ליגע בו יזמן ויטהר עצמו מקודם לכן, וכן כתיב או בגשתם אל המזבח וגו' דוגמא וגם הכהנים הנגשים אל ה' יתקדשו.

Holy of holies: holy like one of the consecrated items.

All that touches the altar: Anyone who wishes to touch it should prepare and purify themselves ritually beforehand. And likewise it is written: "or when they approach the altar..." and likewise, "and also the kohanim who approach God should purify themselves."

### 14. שמות כח: מא-מג

**מא** וְהִלְבַּשְׁתָּ אֹתָם אֶת־אַהֲרֹן אֶחָיִךְ וְאֶת־בָּנָיו אִתּוֹ וּמִשְׁחָתָ אֹתָם וּמִלֵּאתָ אֶת־יָדָם וְקִדַּשְׁתָּ אֹתָם וְכַהֲנֵי לִי:

Put these on your brother Aaron and on his sons as well; anoint them, and ordain them \*and ordain them Lit. "and fill their hands." and consecrate them to serve Me as priests.

**מב** וַעֲשֵׂה לָהֶם מְכַסֵּי־בָד לְכִסּוֹת בָּשָׂר עֲרוֹה מִמֶּתְנִים וְעַד־יְרֵכִים יִהְיוּ:

You shall also make for them linen breeches to cover their nakedness; they shall extend from the hips to the thighs.

**מג** וְהָיוּ עַל־אַהֲרֹן וְעַל־בָּנָיו בְּבָאָם אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד אֹו בְּגִשְׁתָּם אֶל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לְשִׁרְתוֹ בְּקֹדֶשׁ וְלֹא־יָשְׂאוּ עוֹן וּמָתוּ חֲקַת עוֹלָם לֹו וְלִזְרָעוֹ אַחֲרָיו: {ס}

They shall be worn by Aaron and his sons when they enter the Tent of Meeting or when they approach the altar to officiate in the sanctuary, so that they do not incur punishment and die. It shall be a law for all time for him and for his offspring to come.

### 15. שמות יט: כב וגם הכהנים הנגשים אל־י־ה'ה יתקדשו פן־יפרץ בהם י־ה'ה:

The priests also, who come near God, must stay pure, lest God break out against them."

### 16. הכתב והקלבה שם

**כל הנוגע במזבח יקדש**. תיב"ע כל דיקרב במדבחה יתקדש מן בני אהרן ברם מן שאר עמא לית אפשר להון למקרב. וכפי' רשב"ם וראב"ע כל הנוגע וקרב אל המזבח יקדש, ויהיה טהור תחלה בטרם יקרב אל המזבח, אמנם לרבותינו (זבחים פ"ג פ"ד) טעם המקרא כל קרבן שהיה ראוי למזבח אף שנפסל אחר שהובא לעזרה, אם עלה על המזבח קדשו המזבח להכשירו שלא ירד, ולאו דוקא בשעלה הקרבן בראשו של מזבח ונגע עצם הקרבן בעצמו של מזבח, אלא אפי' כשהוא בידו של כהן העומד בראש המזבח גם כן נתקדש, דאורו של מזבח כמזבח דהנחת גופו של כהן כהנחת קרבן דמי, ולא יסתפקו שם רק כשעלה הקרבן בראשו של מזבח באור ע"י קנה שביד הכהן העומד למטה, ע"ש.

Yonatan ben Uzziel translated: All who come close to the altar from among the sons of Aaron shall purify themselves. However, from among the rest of the nation, no one may come close.

And it is like the explanation of the Rashbam and Ibn Ezra: Anyone who touches and comes close to the altar should become consecrated, i.e., should be pure before coming close to the altar. However, according to our rabbis (Zevachim 83, 84) the meaning of the verse is that all that is fitting to the altar even if it has become invalid once it entered the *azarah*, if it ascended to the altar, the altar consecrated it to make it valid to the degree that it will not descend. And this is not only if the sacrifice went to the top of the altar and physically touches the altar; rather, even if it is in the hand of the kohen standing at the top of the altar, it also becomes purified, for the very airspace of the altar is like the altar, for the resting of the land of the kohen is like the resting of the sacrifice. And the only question is when the sacrifice ascended to the airspace of the altar via a reed that is in the hand of the kohen, who is standing below, see there.

מדנקטי רבותינו לשון שעלה בראש המזבח ואף בשלא נגע בו, א"כ מה הוא לשון הנוגע במזבח דאמר קרא? וצריכים לפרש לשון הנוגע כמו וראשו לעב יגיע (איוב כ"ו) שאינו נגיעת עצם בעצם דבר שבצדו (בעריהרען) כ"א עליית דבר ממטה למעלה (עמפארשטייגן) וכמו נגע אל השמים משפטה (ירמיה נ"א ט') כל' גבה לשמים, ובי"ת במזבח כמלת על, כמו הבהמה אשר אנכי רוכב בה (נחמיה ב' י"ב) כלומר רוכב עליה, וטעם הנוגע במזבח העולה על המזבח (דיא אפפערשטאטטע איבערשטייגט), והא דלא קאמר קרא לשון העולה על המזבח שהוא לשון היות ברור, נ"ל שבא לכלול גם התנאי ההכרחי למתקדשין בעליית המזבח, שהוא דוקא בשהיו ראויים למזבח ונפסלו בקדש, לא בנפסלו קודם בואם לעזרה.

From the fact that our rabbis said "that it ascended to the top of the altar," even without it having touched it - if so, why does the verse use the language of "that touches"? And we must explain the language of "touches" like "and his head reaching the clouds (Iyov 20:6)" which is not about literally touching something, but only something ascended from below above. And its similar to "for her punishment reaches to heaven (Yirmiyahu 51:9)" - i.e., it ascended to the heavens. And the "ב" of "במזבח" is like the word "on" - like "the beast that I was riding (Nehemiah 2:12," meaning riding upon. And the meaning of "all that touches altar" means "on the altar." And the fact that the verse did not use the language of "ascending on the altar," which is clearer language- it seems to me that it comes to also include the necessary condition for those which become sanctified by ascending to the altar: namely that they must be fitting for the altar and became invalid in the *kodesh* - not that they became invalid before they came to the *azarah*. For the language of touching

כי לשון נגיעה ישמשוהו רבותינו הרבה על השייכות שיש לדבר עם דבר (אנהאנגיג) כלשונם נוגע בעדות וכדומה לזה, שאינו כ"א נגיעה מחשבית והתקרבות ודבקות רצוני, ועל נגיעה מחשבית כזו שאינה כ"א שייכות רמז קרא בכוונה שניה בלשון הנוגע במזבח כלומר כל קרבן שהיה לו שייכות במזבח כגון שהיה ראוי להיות נקרב על המזבח:

For the language of "touching" our rabbis use it a lot about the belonging of one thing with another - e.g., implicated by the testimony, and the like - which is an ideational connection, closeness and connected will. And the verse indeed to such ideational touching like this which really refers to belonging as secondary intention through the language of "touching the altar," meaning any sacrifice that is connected to the altar - e.g., if it had been worthy of being given on the altar.