

## Devar Torah- Parashat Acharei Mot

We read in Parashat Acharei-Mot of the prohibition of *shechutei chutz*, offering sacrifices outside the *Beit Ha-mikdash*. The Torah treats this prohibition with particular severity, assigning it the punishment of *karet* (eternal excision from the Jewish people).

In the context of this discussion, the Torah appears to provide the reason underlying the prohibition of *shechutei chutz*. “They [*Bnei Yisrael*] shall no longer offer their sacrifices to the demons to which they are led astray” (17:7). If we had been allowed to offer sacrifices to Hashem anywhere we wished, many people would offer sacrifices to “demons,” to foreign deities or natural forces. The establishment of an exclusive site for sacrificial worship helps ensure that this worship will always be directed toward Hashem. Rituals performed in varying locations would, almost inevitably, result in rituals performed for varying deities. The Torah insisted on sacrificing only in the *Mikdash* in order to ensure that we sacrifice only to Hashem. By denying us the choice of where to offer sacrifices, the Torah effectively denies us the choice of to whom to offer sacrifices.

When viewed from this perspective, the prohibition of *shechutei chutz* seeks to preserve the integrity of our *avodat Hashem*, to ensure that our service of Hashem does not “mix” with the service of foreign deities. It forces us to direct our religious devotion and spirituality solely to the Almighty, and not to anything else.

Our devotion to Hashem must not be casual, on a whim, or incidental. We cannot devote ourselves to Torah when we feel so inclined, and devote ourselves to something else when we feel so inclined. *Avodat Hashem* is, by definition, to the exclusion of any other “*avoda*,” any other spiritual commitment. We must make a firm, definitive choice between Hashem and “*azazel*,” between sacrificing to Hashem and sacrificing to the “demons,” between leading a Torah lifestyle and leading the lifestyle of the Egyptians or Canaanites. And we must follow through on that commitment throughout our lives, regardless of our mood or inclination, with firm conviction and unwavering devotion to the Almighty.

### Discussion Point

What are the challenges of fully devoting oneself to Hashem?