

Parsha Shiur by Rabbi Mayer Friedman

פרשת צו

צו את אהרן ואת בניו לאמר זאת תורת העלה הוא העלה על מוקדה על המזבח כל הלילה עד הבקר ואש המזבח תוקד בו

“Command Aharon and his sons saying: This is the law of the elevation-offering: It is the elevation-offering on the fire on the altar all night until the morning - and the fire of the altar shall burn on it” (6:2)

Rashi comments that the word "tzav," "to command," is a language of "zerizus," a word used to urge people to pay close attention to follow this command, both for that time and for future generations. Rav Shimon Schwab asks: Why is there a special need to be careful regarding the commandments of the sacrifices and why is there a difference between the time of Moshe and future generations?

We find that man has needed to be educated by Hashem regarding the essence of sacrifices, even from the very beginning of time. Kayin and Hevel brought sacrifices together (Bereishis 4) - Hevel from the best of his sheep and Kayin from his inferior crops. Kayin felt that as long as he had proper intentions, Hashem did not care whether he gave from his best produce or his worst. However, only Hevel's sacrifice was accepted. Afterwards, Hashem explained to Kayin that having the best intentions does not mean that one can give an inferior sacrifice to Hashem.

Later on, we find that Shaul saves the livestock of Amalek to offer as sacrifices, rather than destroy them as Hashem commanded. Shmuel relays the word of Hashem to him (Shmuel I 15): "Does Hashem want sacrifices instead of listening to His voice? Listening is better than a good sacrifice, hearing better than the fat of rams." Shmuel explained to Shaul that, while sacrifices are a means of becoming closer to Hashem, they are only a means. One must understand why he is bringing the sacrifice. When the sacrifice becomes an end in its own right, more important than listening to the word of Hashem, then there needs to be a reassessment of priorities.

This problem persisted in the times of the first Bais HaMikdash. Yeshaya bears the message of Hashem shortly before the destruction (Yeshaya 1): "Why do I need your many sacrifices?" Hashem became disgusted with the sacrifices of His people and despised their celebration of Shabbos and Yom Tov because they were devoid of meaning. It had become meaningless ritual because the people had no interest in becoming closer to Hashem.

After the second Bais HaMikdash, it seems that the people had taken this message to heart, but swung again in the completely opposite direction. Malachi had to rebuke the people to improve the quality of the sacrifices and not focus solely on their intentions. "Would you bring this sacrifice to your governor?" asks Malachi (Malachi 1). Even though it is the thought that counts, one would certainly go to great lengths to ensure that a gift given to a high-ranking government official is absolutely perfect. The same should apply to our sacrifices to Hashem, the King of kings.

Thus, writes Rav Schwab, there does seem to be a special need to focus on the true meaning of sacrifices. The earlier generations, in the time of the first Mikdash, focused too much on the form, the actual number of sacrifices. The later generations, in the time of the second Mikdash, ignored the form and focused on the intentions. We need to find a proper balance and emphasize both aspects of mitzvos. We must work on our "kavana," on having the proper intent while performing a mitzvah. If one does a mitzvah without having the proper intentions, He has not completely fulfilled his obligations. However, we must also make sure to emphasize the "dikdukei hamitzvos," the precision in our mitzvah observance. We should not feel that as long as we have a good heart, Hashem will understand. In fact, the opposite is true. By going the extra mile to fulfill all the details of the mitzvos, we show that Hashem's commandments really do matter to us.

This lesson is very relevant to Pesach and the Seder night, a time when we do many mitzvos. We should make sure to perform the mitzvos properly but also understand why we are doing them. When we serve Hashem in this manner with the proper focus, our observance of Pesach and all other mitzvos will truly bring us closer to Hashem. [MJG]

אש תמיד תוקד על המזבח לא תכבה

“A permanent fire shall remain aflame on the Altar; it shall not be extinguished” (6:6)

Rashi comments that one who extinguishes the fire on the altar transgresses two negative commandments, as

the prohibition is mentioned twice in this section. Rav Kook says that if the physical fire on the altar cannot be extinguished, we certainly cannot allow the spiritual fire that resides in every Jew to be put out. It is forbidden to do anything that will weaken the spark that is in our soul. Our spiritual fire must be burning constantly, at all times, just like the fire on the altar.

R' Samson Raphael Hirsch writes that the Reform built beautiful edifices to serve as synagogues whereas many times the Orthodox shuls were not as nice. He writes that the Reform constructed aesthetically pleasing buildings because their observance was limited for the most part to their synagogues. When they left the synagogue, many left their religion behind. Those who are truly religious take their Judaism with them wherever they go, whatever they do and whoever they are with. Our bodies are our sanctuaries. The flame of the Torah can never be extinguished wherever we go. We must be mindful of this internal fire at all times. By doing good deeds and learning Torah and doing mitzvos, we can fan the flames of our fire and keep it blazing.

The Talmud Yerushalmi says that the prohibition against putting the fire of the altar out applied while traveling as well. For this purpose, a special protective covering was designed that was used during the journey to protect the flame. This teaches us an important lesson. Even while on the move, even while away from the company of friends and family and our religious surroundings, one must be on guard and ensure that his fire is burning strong. It is important to keep the fire at home as well as on the road.

**ואת הקרב ואת הכרעים רחץ במים ויקטר משה את כל האיל המזבחה עלה הוא לריח ניחח אשה הוא לה'
כאשר צוה ה' את משה**

“He washed the innards and the feet with water; Moshe caused the entire ram to go up in smoke on the Altar – it was an elevation-offering, for a satisfying aroma; it was a fire-offering to Hashem, as Hashem had commanded Moshe” (8:21)

Moshe did not reserve only the honorable tasks for himself, such as the burning of the animal. Rather, he was willing to get himself dirty and to take the less honorable tasks, such as washing the innards of the animal, and do them himself rather than delegate them. This is the sign of a true leader, but also holds true for every Jew. No commandment of Hashem and no way of serving Hashem is beneath one's dignity. One must be willing to do anything for the service of Hashem, even if he thinks it is beneath his level.

Pesach

The words “chametz” and “matzah” contain the same letters except that “chametz” has a letter “ches” whereas “matzah” has a letter “hey.” The difference between these two letters is only a small line. Although there is a small difference in the words, there is a large difference in reality. This teaches us a lesson for our daily lives as well. If we are not sensitive to the small things, such as greeting others with a smile and giving people compliments, that make a big difference in our lives and the lives of others, they can grow into big things and cause big problems.

Every Jewish home works tirelessly to clean out all of the chametz during the weeks leading up to Pesach. This cleaning process is symbolic of the cleaning process that we must put ourselves through. Just as we must clean out all of the chametz from our houses, we must clean out every bit of imperfection from ourselves. It takes a lot of hard work to change ourselves, just as it is difficult to clean out all of the chametz. The physical cleaning is symbolic of a spiritual cleansing that we must also undergo. Now that we have all cleaned our houses for Pesach and have realized the seemingly impossible task of eliminating all of the chametz, we can also see that our spiritual cleaning objective is also attainable if make the necessary effort.

Why is the first section of the Haggada written in Aramaic whereas the rest of the Haggada is in Hebrew? Chacham Ovadia Yosef answers this question with a story from the Gemara. The Gemara cites a story that one of the Amoraim gave his sick friend a blessing in Aramaic. The question is asked that we know that one should pray in Hebrew rather than in Aramaic because the intermediary angels who bring the prayer to Hashem do not understand Aramaic. The Gemara answers that a sick person is different because the Divine Presence is with him and there is a direct line to Hashem, regardless of the language in which one prays. This can also explain our original question. The first paragraph is in Aramaic to impress upon us that the Divine Presence is with us at our Seder and we should act accordingly. To express this fact, we say the first section in Aramaic to show our

understanding that Hashem is with us at the Seder and that we have a direct connection to Him.

In the paragraph of Amar Rabbi Elazar, we discuss the commandment to mention the Exodus from Egypt twice every day. Why is this important to bring up at the Seder? R' Yechiel Michel Schlesinger, founder of Yeshiva Kol Torah in Eretz Yisrael, answers that the Seder serves as our inspiration for remembering the Exodus every day for the rest of the year. After all, if we mention the Exodus twice daily and do many mitzvos that are based on the Exodus, what do we need a special Seder for? We need a Seder to strengthen our commitment to performing these mitzvos and remembering the tremendous miracles that Hashem openly performed in Egypt every day for the rest of the year. As this is the purpose of the Seder, it is therefore only fitting that we discuss our daily obligation in the Haggada as well.

The midrash says that the angels wanted to sing praises to Hashem at the time that the Egyptians were drowning in the sea. Hashem, however, told them that He did not want it because His creations were drowning. If this is so, asks Rav Aharon Kotler, how were the Jews permitted to sing their song of praise? He answers that a song serves two purposes: it is a token of thanks for what was done and it brings one closer to the object of his song. Angels cannot grow in their spirituality and they remain stagnant. For them, the only purpose of the song is as a recognition of what Hashem did and Hashem felt this to be wrong because of the downfall of his creations. However, the Jews still had a reason to sing their praise because it helped bring them closer to Hashem. Hashem desires that this vehicle should be used to its fullest extent. We must realize the power of song and that it can bring us closer to Hashem. This is why singing is such an integral part of the Seder and zemiros are a key component of our Shabbos meals.

Baruch College/NYU Parsha Shiur
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