

FINANCIAL ADVICE

by Rabbi Dovid Green

"And G-d spoke to Moshe saying: 'Command Aharon and his children as follows, This is the law of the (completely) burnt offering...' (Leviticus 6:1-2). The medieval commentator, Rashi, explains that the expression "command" used here is intended to exhort the Kohanim (dedicated servants of G-d) to act. Why do they need encouragement here? It is because there is a loss of money in the fulfillment of this commandment, and in that case there is an extra need for encouragement.

What loss of money is there in this particular commandment? One explanation is that since this is a completely burnt offering, the Kohanim receive no share of it, and they will prefer to involve themselves in bringing the offerings in which they do receive a share.

Others explain that the fact that there was an obligation to keep a fire going all night on the altar regardless of the need, involved seeming unnecessary use of the wood, and a "waste" of money.

The overall point is that there is a level of human nature which needs to be addressed when doing the right thing involves divesting oneself of, or losing anticipated funds.

The Sfas Emes, a 19th century Chassidic leader and luminary, explained as follows. These words are said regarding the generations of Jews living through the Diaspora. So many were up against anti-Semites who held the Jews back from making a living and made it extremely difficult for them to observe the commandments, due to poverty and preoccupation with eking out a living. The Torah is strongly encouraging them to persevere.

I'm no sage, but I think the same can be said about the generation we are living in as well. So many of us in the Western world are living in such relative comfort that we have become preoccupied with our "toys," and maintaining our financial security, to the exclusion of pursuit of spiritual growth - Torah learning, and Mitzvah observance. We all feel disappointed by the failure of our material and physical pleasures to provide us with a sustained contentment, but we delude ourselves into just taking a larger dose. We are barking up the wrong tree. By and large, the people who the Sfas Emes was speaking to understood that Torah, and service of G-d, was their source of strength and spirituality. We, who live in the generations of relative luxury, are now challenged to recognize the same. Let us remember the words of Rabbi Yossi Ben Kisma (Chapters of the Fathers 6:9) "for when a person leaves this world, nothing accompanies him - not silver and gold, or priceless stones and pearls, - but Torah (learning) and good deeds alone." Let us not look to the "new gods" which society has created for itself, but let us rediscover the true source of happiness and lasting worth - Torah

learning, and observance of its commandments.

Good Shabbos!

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