

HOW CAN WE REPAY HASHEM?

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Moreinu Ha'Rav Gedaliah ben Zev Ha'Kohen Anemer z"l

We recite in Hallel on Yom Tov, which recently ended, and on Rosh Chodesh, which begins this Motzai Shabbat: "How can I repay Hashem for all His bounty to me? I will raise the cup of salvations and the Name of Hashem I will invoke." R' Ben Zion Neshet shlita (one of the senior rabbis in Tel Aviv, Israel) explains that the question in the quoted verse should be understood as follows: "How can I repay Hashem?" No matter what I would give Him or do for Him, "all His bounty [is] to me!" No matter what I would do, my very ability to do it comes from Him, so I am stuck in an endless cycle of indebtedness!

The resolution of this dilemma, writes R' Neshet, is in the next verse: "I will raise the cup of salvations and the Name of Hashem I will invoke." If I invoke His Name in public and cause others to learn Torah and perform Mitzvot, then I can repay Hashem. This may be understood through a parable about a Torah scholar who claimed that he engaged in Torah study for 26 hours on Shabbat. When he was asked how that was possible, given that there are not that many hours in a day, he explained that he taught a one hour long class that had 26 participants. Thus, he was responsible for 26 hours of learning.

Similarly, King David is saying in our verse: I use each hour that Hashem gives me to invoke His Name in order to cause others to learn Torah and perform Mitzvot. By doing so, I "create" additional hours out of each hour Hashem gave me, and with those hours I can repay Hashem. (Haggadah Shel Pesach Shir Tziyon p. 99)

"He said to Aharon, 'Take for yourself a young bull for a Chatat / sin-offering and a ram for an Olah / elevation-offering -- unblemished -- and offer [them] before Hashem.'" (9:2)

"A fire went forth from before Hashem and consumed upon the Altar the Olah and the fats [of the Chatat] . . ." (9:24)

"Moshe . . . was angry with Elazar and Itamar, Aharon's remaining sons, saying, 'Why did you not eat the Chatat . . . ?'" (10:16-17)

"Aharon spoke to Moshe, 'Was it they who this day offered their Chatat and their Olah before Hashem?'" (10:19)

"Moshe heard and he approved." (10:20)

Why is the Chatat mentioned before the Olah in verse 2, but after the Olah in verse 24? And, what was the nature of the debate between Moshe and Aharon?

R' Zalman Ze'ev z"l (1789-1867; "R' Velvele, the Maggid of Vilna") explains: Midrashim teach that Aharon was afraid to approach the Altar because he was ashamed of having made the golden calf. His fears were strengthened by the command in verse 2 to take an animal for a Chatat before taking an animal for an Olah. The reason a Chatat ordinarily precedes an Olah is that the former atones for sins, while the latter is a "gift." Before one can bring a gift -- a sign of friendship -- to a king, one must obtain the king's forgiveness for any wrong done him. Aharon reasoned, therefore: From the fact that Hashem commanded that the Chatat be taken before the Olah, I infer that He is still angry at me! And, Aharon concluded that it was his own sin that had caused the deaths of two of his sons, Nadav and Avihu. In that case, he should not have been performing the Avodah / sacrificial service and should not eat the Chatat.

However, verse 24 states that the fire consumed the Olah before the Chatat. This means, Moshe argued, that Hashem was not angry with Aharon and Aharon was not responsible for the death of his sons. Therefore, Aharon could perform the Avodah and could eat the Chatat.

Aharon responded: Granted the fire consumed the Olah first to show that I have been forgiven. Nevertheless, at the time the sacrifices were offered, Hashem was still angry at me, as demonstrated by the fact that He commanded that the Chatat precede the Olah. And Moshe agreed.

The Maggid adds: In the expanded version of the blessing of "Retzei" that the Chazzan recites on Yom Tov before Birkat Kohanim, the Olah is mentioned before the Chatat. The reason is that an Olah is meant to be burnt entirely on the Altar; since it is all for Hashem, it can be replaced with prayer alone. In contrast, a Chatat does not provide full atonement until the Kohanim eat from it. Therefore, mentioning the Chatat in our prayers provides only partial atonement. (Drashot Me'onei Arayot ch.11)

"Hashem spoke to Aaron saying, 'Do not drink intoxicating wine, you and your sons with you, when you come to the Ohel Mo'ed, that you not die -- this is an eternal decree for your generations.'" (10:8-9)

What is added by the phrase "You and your sons with you"? R' Yosef Feimer z"l (1796-1864; rabbi of Slutsk, Belarus) explains:

The Halachah is that a rabbi may not issue a Halachic ruling (for example, regarding Kashrut or family purity) for a period of time after he has consumed wine. Nevertheless, he may sit on a Bet Din to rule on monetary matters even after drinking wine. The difference is that a Bet Din has three members; if one is not at his sharpest, the other two can guide him to the correct answer. In contrast, since a rabbi may issue Halachic rulings on his own, he must not have impaired judgment when doing so.

In light of this distinction, one might have thought that only a lone Kohen is prohibited from performing the Avodah after drinking, but that he may do so as part of a group. The phrase "You and your sons" serves to dispel that notion. (Derashot Rabbeinu Yosef Mi'Slutzk p.183)

"This is the Torah [i.e., the law] of the animal, the bird, every living creature that swarms in the water, and for every creature that teems on the ground." (11:46)

The Gemara (Pesachim 49b) comments: Rabbi [Yehuda Ha'Nasi] says, "A person who is ignorant of Torah is not permitted to eat meat, as it is written, 'This is the Torah of the animal . . .' One who studies Torah is permitted to eat animals, and one who does not study Torah is not permitted." [Until here from the Gemara]

R' Yitzchak Isaac Chaver z"l (1789-1852; rabbi of Suvalk, Lithuania, and a prolific author in all areas of Torah study) explains: What defines a Jew as a person is the fact that he studies Torah. That activity strengthens his "human soul" and elevates his "animal soul" with it. In contrast, if one does not study Torah, he has nothing more than his "animal soul," just like any animal. If he is no better than an animal, by what right would he slaughter one and eat it?! (Quoted in Lekket Perushei R' Y.I. Chaver p.231)

From the Wisdom of Our Sages . . .

It is said in the name of R' Yisrael Lipkin z"l (1810-1883; "R' Yisrael Salanter"; founder of the Mussar movement) that there are three things we can learn from the train:

- (1) Even a delay of one moment is enough to miss the train;
- (2) Getting derailed even a little bit can be catastrophic; and
- (3) One who rides without paying the price can expect punishment. (Quoted in Tenu'at Ha'mussar I p.286)

Pirkei Avot

"Be deliberate in judgment . . ." (Ch.1)

R' Yisrael Hager z"l (1860-1936; Vizhnitzer Rebbe) comments: The Gemara (Yevamot 109b) teaches that a judge should imagine that the gates of Gehinom are open beneath him, ready to swallow him up if he fails to judge properly. To avoid this fate, a judge must weigh the evidence and the law deliberately.

This is the meaning of the verse (Tehilim 75:3), "When I shall seize the appointed time, I shall judge with fairness." If a judge takes his time and does not rush to judgment, he will judge fairly.

The Mishnah's word for "deliberate" is "matun" ("mem-tav-vav-nun"). This alludes to the above teaching from the Gemara, as the four letters of "matun" are the initials of the Hebrew phrase (Tehilim 86:13), "You have rescued my soul from the nethermost depths." (Quoted in Yalkut Avhan Ila'een p.18)

"Shammai, says, 'Welcome every person with a pleasant countenance'." (Ch.1)

We usually think of the sage Shammai as representing the attribute of strict justice; we more would have expected Hillel, usually associated with kindness and compassion, to have made the above statement. No! Says R' Chaim Friedlander z"l (1923-1986) in the name of R' Eliyahu Dessler z"l (1891-1953; both of these sages served as Mashgiach Ruchani of the Ponovezh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak, Israel). It is proper for Shammai to say this. Showing a pleasant countenance to another person is not a favor or act of compassion (which would put it in Hillel's realm). Rather, it is an obligation, demanded by the attribute of justice, for every person is entitled to be greeted that way. (Siftei Chaim I p.25)