

PAYING THE RENT

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

Parshas Emor

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Chapter 23 of Vayikra/Leviticus contains a review of all of the mo'adim, the festivals of the year that offer us the opportunity to renew our relationship with the Creator of the Universe, and the Divine Service that was performed on each of these holy days. Shavuos, the Festival of Weeks that follows the seven weeks of counting from the Omer Offering brought on the second night of Pesach, is the day the Torah was given on Sinai and was the day that the first fruits were brought to the Bais Hamikdash (Temple) in Jerusalem. Following the service of this day, before the text continues with Rosh Hashanah, the Torah injects, "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not remove completely the corners of your field as you reap, and you shall not gather the gleanings of your harvest; for the poor and the convert shall you leave them, I am Hashem your G-d." (23:22). How is the mitzvah (Divine command) to leave gifts for the poor germane to a discussion of holidays and Divine service?

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (1895-1986; Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Mesivtha Tifereth Jerusalem in New York City; the leading Halachic/Jewish legal decisor and foremost leader of Jewry of his time) elucidates that the chapter opens with a discussion of Shabbos, the Jewish Sabbath, the observance of which is a statement of faith that G-d is the Creator of the Universe. The concentration of the chapter is observance of the festivals, which focus on the tremendous compassion demonstrated by G-d through all phases of our departure from Egypt and travels through the wilderness and, thereby, act as an affirmation of our faith that G-d Himself guides the moment-by-moment events of the universe. So, too, a tenet of our faith is the knowledge that our sustenance and livelihood and all the benevolence bestowed upon us are directly from Heaven. The tzedaka (charity) we are commanded to leave for the destitute is a "payback" for the blessing we have received.

Furthermore, Rabbi Feinstein notes that there should be no personal challenge in leaving this gift, for just as a shopkeeper willingly pays rent, understanding that without his rent payment there is no

shop to keep, similarly the charity itself is a declaration of conviction that the entirety of our sustenance, of which we are giving a small part to the poor, is a gift from above. Charity is not simply a Divinely encouraged act of humanistic kindness. It is truly a statement of devotion to G-d's mastery and benevolence, the same as Sabbath and holiday celebration.

Have a good Shabbos!

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Kol HaKollel is a publication of the Milwaukee Kollel Center for Jewish Studies 5007 West Keefe Avenue; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; 414-447-7999