

THE ALMIGHTY DOLLAR

by Rabbi Pinchas Avruch

This week's parsha continues the instructions for the service in the Mishkan (Tabernacle) that Moshe is to relate to his brother Aaron, the Kohen Gadol (High Priest). But in contrast to prior directives where G-d has Moshe "tell" the procedures, with these orders he is to "Command Aaron" (Vayikra/Leviticus 6:2). Rashi explains that "command" implies stimulation to respond enthusiastically, a needed action given the financial loss associated with the elevation offering being discussed, since the elevation offering is completely consumed by fire, with no remaining meat to be enjoyed by the priests or the owner. Nachmanides (R' Moshe ben Nachman, 1194-1270, of Gerona, Spain, one of the leading Torah scholars of the Middle Ages; successfully defended Judaism at the dramatic debate in Barcelona in 1263) challenges this understanding: the priest, who is the one commanded, did not lose anything, as it was never his own animal being consumed! Numerous commentators on Rashi remove this question, pointing out that the priest counted on the remaining meat of the sacrifices for his and his family's sustenance. The lack of remaining meat, which he would have had with a different sacrifice, constitutes a loss. Additionally, his participation in the service in the Mishkan precluded the opportunity to earn a living. Thus, the priest suffered a financial hardship with this sacrifice and needed the additional stimulation that came with a command to ensure sincere and complete fulfillment of the charge.

However in Bamidbar/Numbers 8:1, Rashi notes the juxtaposition of the preceding narrative of the Dedication of the Mishkan with that verse's discussion of Aaron's responsibility to kindle the eternally burning lights of the Menorah. Aaron and his tribe of Levi were not included in the Dedication Rites, causing Aaron to be despondent. G-d advised him that his mandate of the Menorah, which would belong to his offspring forever, was the greater mitzvah. It is readily apparent that Aaron's treasure in life was the opportunity to serve G-d and that he saw the true, superior value of these opportunities over the temporal value of gold and silver. So why did Aaron, who did not ascribe any true value to material wealth, need additional stimulation to properly fulfill the elevation offering, the financial cost of which was trivial?

Rabbi Alter Henach Leibowitz (Rosh Yeshiva/Dean of Yeshiva Chofetz Chaim in Forest Hills, Queens, New York) deduces from this the innate, natural draw that humans feel toward wealth, such that even an Aaron could slack off in some minute way in his Divine service because of a trivial loss. For all of Aaron's knowledge of the inherent emptiness in material possessions, so great is the human urge that the stirrings in his heart of heart would cause a laxity in his alacrity in his most treasured service of G-d. This deficiency was remedied by the additional stimulation of the "command", G-d's

safeguard instituted for Aaron and his children. How much more vigilant we must be with our precautions in the course of our everyday business.

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