

ONE STEP AT A TIME!

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"If one is poor, and he cannot afford [the regular sacrifice]..." [14:21]

While the first *parsha* this week, *Tazria*, concerns the acquisition of impurity, the second reading of *Metzora* begins by describing the purification process of the *Metzora*, one afflicted with *Tzora'as* (often [inadequately] translated as "leprosy"). The *parsha* first describes the regular sacrifice, but then offers a second, less expensive sacrifice for a person who cannot afford the standard obligation.

Rabbi Yisroel Mayer Kagan, the *Chofetz Chaim*, applies this concept to our day: to "serve G-d" means something different for each person, dependent on his or her current "wealth." He reprimands those who use the world around them as an excuse to relax. There are some people, he says, who learn *Torah* and pray to some extent, and tell themselves that if they are really not performing their obligations properly, their friends and neighbors do not even reach their own level of mediocre performance.

He explains that these excuse-makers fail to see that those friends and neighbors are "poor in understanding," meaning that they do not understand their obligations at the same level. If one is poor, he can make do with a less expensive sacrifice, but a wealthy individual who brings the offering of the poor does not fulfill his obligation. So too in the performance of *Mitzvos* - a scholar is expected to demonstrate extra precision.

There is a flip side to this as well, which also deserves our consideration. Every week, we at Project Genesis receive letters from around the world from Jews who have never studied their own Judaism seriously, and don't know where to begin. They look at our various offerings, and wonder how they can ever understand it all.

First of all, we should be providing more introductory material on our Web site, to help people get started. This is a section that we do hope to create and develop over the coming months, with the generous support of readers and other contributors. Please be patient as we develop this resource.

A new reader should also realize that he or she is not expected to understand everything, and that this represents no failure. A person can only absorb so much, and one without an extensive background can fulfill his or her obligation with less material and a lesser level of understanding.

There was a Jewish man who was inducted into the Czar's army as a young boy (as was customary at that time), and as a result never received a solid Jewish education. Nonetheless, when he finally left Russia, he settled in New York and began to faithfully attend a local class in Talmud intended for those with a far more extensive background. It was clear that he understood little or nothing of what was being discussed, so some asked him why he bothered to attend.

"In the Tsar's army," he replied, "I was required each morning to recite the names of the members of the royal family, and all the Tsar's closest advisers, all from memory. When I reach the Heavenly Court, at least I will be able to identify the leading members of G-d's 'family,' the scholars of His law!"

Whatever a person understands is valuable, and is a step forward. As with everything else, Jewish studies come "one step at a time!"

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