

CHARITY AND STUDY - A LITTLE BIT GOES A LONG WAY

by Rabbi Eliyahu Hoffmann

Parshas Vayikra is the first of a number of Parshios dealing primarily with the topic of korbanos - ritual offerings and sacrifices. The Gemara (Sukkah 49b) declares that, "The mitzvah of charity is even greater than the bringing of ritual offerings, as it is written (Mishlei/Proverbs 21:3), 'Those who perform charity and justice - are preferable to Hashem than an offering.'" The fact that the Talmud chose to compare tzedaka, charity, to ritual sacrifice, indicates that there must be some internal connection between the two. Certainly, it is not to say, G-d forbid, that just as we do tzedaka with the poor by giving them from our possessions, so too we do charity with Hashem by offering Him our sacrifices. As David HaMelech (King David) writes (Tehillim/Psalms 50:12-13), "Even were I hungry - I would not tell you; for Mine is the world and its fullness! Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?..." What, then, is the relationship between tzedaka and ritual offerings?

With the korban we find the unique idea that by giving part, we elevate the whole. Most korbanos (with the exception of the Olah and certain Chataos which were entirely consumed upon the Altar) were divided into two distinct parts: The pieces offered (burned) upon the Altar, and the eaten sections (either by the Kohanim/Priests, or the owners). Yet even the parts of the korban which were fit for consumption were considered holy; they had to be eaten with ritual bodily purity, only in certain areas of Jerusalem, and only during specified times. By taking parts of the animal and separating them for Hashem, the entire animal attains a status of elevation.

Sefarim write further that it was not only this single animal that was elevated through its sacrifice. By offering sacrifices, the entire sphere of living creatures (known as "chai") was elevated to Hashem. All plant life ("tzomeach") was elevated through the "tenth of an eiphah of flour" that accompanied the korban. The salt served to elevate all inanimate matter ("domem"). Thus, through the ritual offerings, all aspects, divisions and levels of life were elevated and aroused to a higher level of existence - even though the korban included only a minute representation of the different facets of creation.

We are commanded (Shemos/Exodus 25:8), "Let them make for Me a Sanctuary; and I will dwell within them." Chazal, our Sages, note that it does not say "I will dwell within it" - which would imply the Sanctuary, but rather, "I will dwell within them!" We are commanded to make ourselves a Sanctuary; a resting place for Hashem. Indeed, our Sages say that "the Patriarchs - they were the Divine Chariot," meaning that they were a vehicle for G-d's presence in the physical world. Yet how are we, who spend the better part of our lives focused on our own physical existence (earning a living, eating, sleeping, etc.) to emulate this and become "a Sanctuary for G-d?"

From the concept of korban, however, we see that dedicating a small part has the potential to elevate and sanctify the whole. So too, if we separate a tenth (which is the minimum obligation!) or a fifth (which is the maximum) of our earnings and possessions for charity, not only does the portion we give become elevated, but all of our earnings and all of our efforts and endeavors take on a new level of sanctity. If a korban - a mundane animal with no inherent holiness (and very limited intellect) - can be elevated by separating parts of it for Hashem, how much more so do our worldly efforts have the potential of being uplifted and sanctified by the charity and kindness we perform with our earnings! This is why, "The mitzvah of charity is even greater than the bringing of ritual offerings."

Just like one elevates his possessions by setting part of them aside for charity, so too one who dedicates part of his day to Torah study elevates and sanctifies his entire day. The Talmud (Berachos 8a) declares, "From the day that the Beis HaMikdash (Holy Temple) was destroyed, the 'four cubits' of halacha (i.e. Torah study) are the only Sanctuary which the Holy One, Blessed be He, has in His world [for His presence to dwell]."

Although different and varied korbanos were sacrificed on any given day, the Korban Tamid - the Constant Offering - was always the first offering of the morning, and the last offering of the day. Some days provide us the opportunity for many hours of Torah study. At other times, our time is very limited. Yet our Sages say (Shabbos 31a) that one of the first questions we will be asked when giving our reckoning before the Heavenly tribunal is: Did you set aside [consistent] time for Torah study?! How much time we were able to dedicate is a personal matter; but without consistent, unflinching Torah study, even when life is at its busiest (let's see - when would that be?), we fail to elevate and sanctify the rest of our lives - and that is a shame and an irreconcilable loss. [Based on Likutei Amarim Tanya chapter 34]

So, even during these busy days, before the holy Yom Tov of Pesach, don't forget to separate money each day for charity, and dedicate at least some time to Torah study! It would be a shame to work so hard, and leave everything we do anchored to the earth.

Have a good Shabbos.

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