

HIGH DIVIDEND INVESTMENTS

by Rabbi Yisroel Ciner

This week we read the parsha of Tzav (command). "Tzav es Aharon v'es banav laimore zos toras ha'olah (command Aharon and his sons, telling them the instructions for the `oleh' sacrifice) [6:2]." Hashem usually instructed Moshe to tell others the law. Why, in this instance, was Moshe instructed to command them?

Rashi quotes the opinion of Rav Shimon that the Torah needs to urge us when the command involves a loss of money. The 'oleh' sacrifice was kalil (totally consumed by the flames of the altar). Unlike other sacrifices where the owners and/or the kohanim would receive a portion for their own personal consumption, the `oleh' was kalil. No edible portions were distributed. The Torah, therefore, needed to bolster this mitzvah with "tzav" - Moshe commanded.

At first glance this would seem to be unnecessary. The oleh was brought voluntarily by a person wanting to draw close to Hashem. He would go to the Temple, the place where Hashem's presence tangibly rested, and offer this sacrifice. The kohanim were people who spiritually represented the rest of the nation. They served at this spiritual center of the world. True, neither the owners nor the Kohanim received a portion of meat, but could it be that such people would need this extra urging simply because they wouldn't walk away with a few hamburgers?!

The Divrei Yisroel brings the Medrash to explain this difficulty. The yetzer harah (evil inclination) challenges a person when he's about to donate to charity: "Why are you spending your money on strangers and not on your own children?" We need the extra urging to counterbalance that claim. While we might be willing to spend money on many different things, when it comes to mitzvah matters, we're not quite so willing. We know that the mitzvos are our only ticket to eternity, we know that we can't take our money `with us', yet we still have a hard time translating those realizations into actions.

Even if we do spend a fair amount of money on mitzvos, we have to honestly assess if we are truly acting in accordance with our beliefs. Rav Sholom Schwadron zt"l would tell the following story about Rav Levi Yitzchak, the Berditchiver Rav. (Found in "Around the Maggid's Table".) It offers a sharp insight into the way that our actions are assessed.

One Yom Kippur night, the crowd in the Berditchiv shul (synagogue) waited for the chazzan (prayer leader) to begin the holy Kil Nidre prayers. The Rav motioned to the chazzan, requesting that he wait. All quietly awaited the Rav's signal to begin but he was immersed deeply in thought. The minutes

passed by with people wondering why the Rav was waiting. He was clearly not yet ready to begin.

Soon he turned to his shamash (attendant) and asked if Muttel from the town of Zhitomer was there. All of those within earshot wondered what the Rav might want from Muttel. Scanning the large crowd, the attendant found Muttel, the plain, poor, simple Jew from Zhitomer, sitting off to the side.

"Yes", the attendant responded, "Muttel is here". The Rav asked that Muttel be summoned. As soon as Muttel was brought, the Rav began to question him. "Tell me, don't you live on the land owned by Vladik (a gentile landowner)?" "Yes", answered the surprised Muttel. "Does Vladik own a dog?", continued the Rav. "Yes", answered Muttel again, wondering what this information had to do with the Yom Kippur prayers. "Do you know the amount of money that he spent on the dog?", persisted the Rav. "I do", said Muttel. "He always brags that he spent four hundred rubles to acquire that rare dog." The Rav was thrilled. "Four hundred rubles? That's fantastic!" To the astonishment of all those assembled, the Rav, having been supplied with this information about Vladik's dog, was now ready to begin Kol Nidre. He motioned to the chazzan to begin.

After the t'filos (prayers) were completed, a group approached the Rav inquiring about his discussion with Muttel. The Berditchiver smiled and explained. "This year, an incident occurred which troubled me. A poor teacher came to Berdichev from a distant town. Being in debt, he was planning to tutor children, save the money and then return home to pay his creditors. He was here for almost a year, earned the money he needed and began his return trip. One fateful night, as he slept at an inn, the bag with his hard-earned money was stolen. In the morning, when he realized what had happened, he broke down in tears. A whole years worth of effort had been stolen. Staying at the same inn was Vladik. Hearing the heart-wrenching cries of the teacher he inquired as to what had happened. Upon hearing the story, he approached the teacher, asking him how much money had been stolen. Hearing the sum of four hundred rubles, he immediately removed that amount from his wallet and handed it to the amazed and thankful teacher.

"As we were about to start Kol Nidre, that incident worried me. How could we hope that Hashem would view us favorably? Who amongst us had performed an act as generous and kind as that of Vladik?

"Then I remembered the dog. I had heard that he had spent a large sum on a pet but I didn't know how much. When Muttel told me that it had been four hundred rubles, I was at ease. That amount clearly didn't mean all that much to him. His helping the teacher was an act of kindness but not an act of sacrifice. I felt we could start Kol Nidre."

Rav Sholom then continued. "We're proud when we spend \$50 on an esrog, or we give \$250 to tzedakah, or we spend \$500 on t'filin. Beautiful! But how much was the stereo? How much was the computer? Perhaps the money spent on the mitzvah wasn't really the sacrifice that we believed it was. If we spend freely on our material objects then we must also spend freely on our spiritual objects."

In this week's (Shabbos Hagdol) haftorah, the possuk (verse) (Malachi 3:10) states: "Bring your ma'aser (tithe given to the tribe of Levi) to the storehouse and let there be sustenance in 'my' house. Please test Me on this, says Hashem, to see if your doing this won't cause me to open the windows of heaven and shower you with an abundance of blessing."

Why did the prophet connect receiving this blessing of abundance with our giving ma'aser. We are obligated to fulfill all of the Torah's mitzvahs regardless of our receiving any earthly reward!

Rav Chaim Soveichik zt"l explains based on the Talmud [Brachos 35A]. "Come and see the difference between the earlier and the later generations. The earlier generations would bring the fruits into their houses in a way that obligated them in ma'aser. The later generations did it in a way that exempted them."

What was the claim against the later generations if halachically (according to Torah law) they were exempted?

He explains that they were making a very serious error. They were willing to fulfill mitzvot... as long as it wouldn't cost them. Otherwise, they searched for loopholes to exempt themselves. They didn't realize that one doesn't lose a thing by fulfilling mitzvot, even when money must be spent. On the contrary, one only gains - both in this world and in the next. This point was understood by the earlier generations but missed by the later ones.

With this we understand the first possuk. Ma'aser of the fruits on which they were obligated they certainly gave. Hashem, through the prophet, was addressing the ma'aser which they could feasibly exempt themselves from. The very act of obligating yourselves in the expenses of a mitzvah will bring wealth - test me.

On the first morning of Succos Rabbi Elimelech of Lisensk was intrigued by a scent in the shul's air. After the t'filah, he began to investigate the esrogim of the congregants. He wasn't at ease until he had smelled the small, simple esrog of a stranger sitting in the corner. "Where did you acquire this esrog? It has the scent of Gan Eden (the Garden of Eden)!"

The guest hesitantly told the following story. "I don't make a lot of money but every year I save enough to buy an expensive esrog. This year, I took the fifty gulden I had saved and traveled to Lemberg in search of a beautiful esrog. At one of my lodgings, I heard a commotion downstairs. A burly man was begging the innkeeper to help him. He was a wagon-driver and his horse had broken his leg. The innkeeper had a horse for sale for fifty gulden which was far beyond the means of the wagon-driver. I approached the innkeeper and offered to pay him forty five gulden for the horse. He agreed and I handed the reins over to the wagon-driver. With the remaining five gulden, I could only afford this small, simple esrog."

Rabbi Elimelech now understood why the scent of Gan Eden was emanating from this esrog. He requested to hold such an esrog for a few moments.

Such clarity. A poor man focusing his limited resources on a mitzvah. Then, after months of saving for one particular mitzvah, being able to prioritize and redirect those funds toward another more pressing mitzvah. The scent of Gan Eden... Heaven on earth... The opportunities are all around us. Let's invest.

Good Shabbos,

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