

# IT'S ALL A MATTER OF TIMING

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Last week's parsha ended off with the special gifts that the princes of the tribes brought in honor of the inauguration of the Mishkan. Anyone who followed the reading in shul, or reviews the parsha in advance of Shabbos (like we're supposed to), must have noticed that the gifts brought by each of the princes were identical to each other. If so, then why did the Torah enumerate each and not simply provide a grand total?

One important lesson we can draw from this is that no two people can perform the same mitzvah the same way. Two actions can be identical to each other, but by virtue of the difference between the two people, the timing, and the setting within which the mitzvah is being done, the two actions differ from each other. Every person brings their own world into each mitzvah, and therefore, before G-d, each mitzvah is unique and never superfluous.

Another thing you might have noticed from last week's parsha is that all the tribes were represented except for one: Levi. The tribe of Levi had been excluded from the special princely offerings, and one has to wonder why. Aharon HaKohen certainly did, and as Rashi points out at the beginning of this week's parsha, he thought that the exclusion was Divine retribution for having been the one who built the golden calf. Even though he had acted for the sake of Heaven, still, he had been involved, and maybe G-d still held him responsible on some level.

However, says Rashi, he had been wrong. On the contrary, Aharon and his tribe had been excluded not to deny them participation in the inauguration ceremony, but to make them stand out, as the Torah says:

*When Aharon saw the dedication of the princes, he became distraught because he was not included with them, neither he nor his tribe. The Holy One, Blessed is He said, "By your life! Yours will be greater than theirs since you will light and prepare the menorah." (Rashi)*

From Rashi, it appears as if the mitzvah to light the menorah was consolation to Aharon for having been excluded from the free-will offerings brought by the princes. But how was that consolation, asks the Ramban? The princes brought free-will offerings, while Aharon was obligated to light the menorah, whether he wanted to or not. Isn't it nicer when you do something without being asked to do it, and when it is not expected of you? Couldn't Aharon have complained that he was being

denied a chance to serve G-d the way HE wanted to?

On the contrary, lighting the menorah indeed was Aharon's consolation. For, through it, Aharon taught the most powerful lesson of all: Free Will offerings are nice, but greater is the gift of the heart given THROUGH the command of G-d. This is what the Talmud says:

Greater is the one who is commanded than the one who is not commanded. (Kiddushin 32a)  
Why is this so? Because the point of doing mitzvos is not merely to prove our loyalty to G-d, but to make us into "messengers" of G-d. However, when I do an act because it is what I want to do and **feel** like doing, then I am acting on my **own** behalf, not necessarily on behalf of G-D-I am my own messenger, not G-d's.

However, when the thought to do something originates from elsewhere, in this case the Torah, and I fulfill that intention, then I constitute a shaliach of G-d, and as we learn from Pinchas later on, that is the **highest** level one can attain, a level specifically associated with kohanim:

*G-d told Moshe, "Pinchas, the son Elazar, the son Aharon HaKohen, turned away **my** anger from the Jewish people, and was zealous with **my** jealousy in the midst of them, so that I shouldn't destroy the children of Israel. Therefore, I give to him **my** covenant of peace; he and his descendants after him will have the covenant of the priesthood forever ... (BaMidbar 25:10)*

Thus, the lighting of the menorah is a symbol of one's willingness to be a vehicle for the will of G-d in this world, a priestly thing to be. And given that we are all called a "Kingdom of Priests," we can see that it is a mission that devolves upon every Jew, be he a Kohen, Levi, or Yisroel, Male or Female. On such a level, G-d's Name is sanctified, and miracles abound.

One might still ask, "Where is the individualism in all that?"

The Torah answers, BeHa'alosecha! When you light the candles, make sure you do so until the flame rises on its own. In other words, the igniting of the candle is not complete until the flame can stand on its own, and will not become extinguished (Rashi).

This idea is alluded to in the olive oil that was used. An unpickled olive does not taste very pleasant, to say the least! If one didn't know better, he might think that the olive serves little, if any, purpose at all. However, by squeezing the olive, clear, yellow oil is produced that can be ignited to bring brilliant, warm light to darkness.

The same is true of the body and the soul. The body is like the olive, and the soul is like the oil hidden mysteriously within it. "Squeeze" the body, and the soul emerges to bring light to darkness, spirituality to physicality. Even the words ha-shemen (the oil) and neshama (soul) share the same letters!

And what "squeezes" the body better than a mitzvah. Doing what the body **feels** like doing doesn't result in very much resistance from the body, and therefore, it does not demand much in the way of willpower to do it. However, doing a mitzvah, which often runs contrary to what the body wants or feels like doing, does result in resistance (the amount of resistance depends upon the type of mitzvah being performed, and **how** it is performed). It takes willpower to do what you **want** to do, especially when you don't **feel** like doing it!

In other words, mitzvos draw out the soul of a person, and that is the true source of independence and self. That is why people tend to feel more "whole" after doing a good deed, even when their body screamed at them, **"I don't feel like doing this!"**

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Another important lesson learned from this week's parsha is the idea of how one mitzvah leads to another mitzvah.

In this week's parsha we learn about second chances. Judaism advocates tshuva (repentance) until the day a person dies, but rarely do you find the Torah giving a person a second chance at the same mitzvah. However, the Korban Pesach of Pesach Sheni (Passover Offering on the Second Passover on the 14th day of Iyar) was just that.

The Torah teaches that, anyone who was prevented for certain reasons from being able to participate in the offering of the first Pesach sacrifice on the fourteenth of Nissan (when we celebrate Pesach), should bring one a month later. For the most part, the Torah says the laws governing the Pesach Sheni are the same as those governing the first Pesach offering, except that Pesach then only lasts one day, and there is no mitzvah to get rid of the chometz from your house.

However, what is unusual about this mitzvah in the Torah is that the idea for this mitzvah did not originate with Moshe Rabbeinu. Usually, a mitzvah originated with G-d, then it went to Moshe, who then instructed the people. However, with the Pesach Sheni, the need for the mitzvah originated with others who had become spiritually defiled, and who had been unable to take part in the first Pesach offering:

*There were men who were unclean by the dead body of a man (i.e., they were involved in the burial of a person who had died, and thereby required seven days for the ritual purification necessary to be able to offer the Pesach offering), and therefore could not bring the Pesach lamb on that day (the fourteenth of Nissan). They came before Moshe and Aharon on that day, and they said to him, "We are unclean by the dead body of man; why should we be prevented from offering an offering to G-d at its appointed time with the rest of the people?" Moshe told them, "Wait here, and I will hear from G-d will command concerning you ..."*  
(BaMidbar 9:6)

*This section, in fact, ought to have been taught by Moshe, just as all other sections of the Torah, but these men were privileged to do so because "meritorious deeds are brought about by worthy men." (Rashi)*

It wasn't that Moshe had become unworthy of teaching this law; it was that others had become worthy of being the vehicles for it! What an incredible merit!

Who were these men, and what had they done to merit such an eternal privilege?

Those men were ... Mishael and Elzafan, who had been the ones to bury Nadav and Avihu (after they had died by bringing an unauthorized offering; see VaYikrah 10:1). (Sukkah 25b)

Obviously there is a connection between the three mitzvos, the burying of Nadav and Avihu, the Pesach Sheni offering, and the teaching of Torah. After all, why didn't other such mitzvos lead to countless others earning the right to initiate the teaching of a Torah law? What do they all have in common?

What they have in common is patience. Nadav and Avihu had the right drive, but at the wrong time. The Pesach Offering of Pesach Sheni was the right sacrifice, at a later time. Teaching Torah also requires good timing, for the right idea at the wrong time can lead to disastrous results, since it can be misconstrued and even abused. This is why the Talmud states:

*Hillel the Elder said: At a time that the scholars are not spreading Torah to their students, you should teach students; when the Scholars are teaching Torah, you should refrain. (Brochos 63a)*

Just like Aharon learned at the beginning of this parsha, there is a time and a place for every mitzvah in the Torah, though that time is not always apparent to us. The thing is to have the patience and know that G-d runs the world, and when the time comes, the opportunity will present itself to us, and we'll use it. The trick, however, is to not despair in the meantime, and to be prepared. It is this that lets G-d know He can count on us, and which results in our being able to accomplish big things in a big way.

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I would be remiss if I didn't say something about Moshe Rabbeinu, since this week's parsha ends off by recounting just how great he was. The is **no greater compliment**, I repeat, than G-d Himself saying that you are humble, trustworthy, and the greatest prophet that ever will exist. We spend a lot of time trying to please others, but the **one** we should try to please the most is G-d Himself.

The Talmud tells us that from birth Moshe had been unique:

*When Moshe was born, he filled the house with light. It says here, "And she [Yocheved] saw that he was **good**" (Shemos 2:2), and there it says [by the creation of the light of creation], "G-d saw the light, that it was **good**..." (Bereishis 1:3). (Sota 12a)*

From the moment Moshe entered the world, he shone with the supernal light of creation. However, let us look at one trait specifically that made Moshe "shine," so-to-speak.

Even though Moshe, was not specifically associated with the trait of chesed (kindness), chesed nevertheless played a major role in his development as redeemer and teacher of the Jewish people. Moshe's fulfillment of each task assigned to him was only possible because of his superhuman capacity to do chesed.

However, of all the great and miraculous acts Moshe performed, one goes quite unnoticed. The Talmud states that when the Jewish nation was busy collecting spoils from the Egyptian people just prior to the exodus, Moshe was elsewhere, involved in another mitzvah. While others were enriching themselves, Moshe was busy taking care of the need of another.

According to the Torah, when Yosef was about to die in Egypt, he foretold of the future redemption from Egypt. He also made the people promise that when the time came to leave Egypt, they would take his bones with them for reburial in Canaan. One hundred and forty-three years later, the redemption Yosef spoke about was at hand, and Moshe sought to fulfill that promise. Recovering Yosef's coffin, however, was not an easy task. The Egyptians had hidden it in the Nile river, and nobody remained from that generation to reveal its whereabouts. Nobody, that is, except for Serach, the daughter of Asher. After she showed Moshe the location of Yosef's bones, Moshe successfully surfaced the coffin, which traveled with the nation the entire forty years in the desert until burial in Shechem.

Moshe's fulfillment of Yosef's last request is called chesed shel emes-true-kindness, because it was done for a deceased person, and as the benefactor, Moshe could expect no compensation. Is there a greater proof of one's selflessness and concern for others than this? For performing such a high level of chesed, Moshe merited burial by G-d Himself at the end of the Chumash; for being an embodiment of the trait of chesed, Moshe fulfilled the purpose of creation and shined with its supernal light, even brighter than he was born.

We can't be a Moshe, but we can aspire to discover and reveal our own selflessness and concern for others, and merit to "shine" and earn such adulation from G-d Himself.

Have a great Shabbos,

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