

WILLINGNESS TO SELF-NEGATE IS THE PREREQUISITE OF PEACE

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Tzav

Willingness To Self-Negate Is The Prerequisite of Peace

The Medrash Tanchuma at the beginning of Parshas Tzav states: The nations of the world said to Bilaam, "Why did the Almighty command Israel to offer sacrifices and He did not give us any such commandment?" Bilaam responded: "The sacrifices are all about peace and the nation that accepted Torah is allowed to bring the sacrifices written in the Torah. You, nations of the world, rejected the Torah. Now you wish to offer sacrifices? No. Only the nation that accepted Torah can offer sacrifices!"

The Medrash is stating more than just the fact that sacrifices are part of the 613 commandments and therefore are part of a package deal - only a nation that accepts the commandments brings sacrifices. The Medrash makes two points. First it states that the sacrifices represent peace. Then it adds a second point - the Jews accepted Torah, the nations of the world rejected Torah, therefore only the Jews can offer sacrifices. Moreover the Medrash seems to indicate that the key factor is not whether or not any particular nation follows the Torah now or not. The key factor depends on whether the nation originally accepted Torah or not!

I saw an explanation of this Medrash in a Sefer called Meir Derech. I believe that this explanation has application in our times, despite the fact that we no longer have the opportunity to bring sacrifices.

There is a well known teaching of Chazal that when the Almighty came to the nations of the world and asked them if they wanted to accept Torah, they responded: "What is written therein?" (Mah Kasuv bah?) When He made the same offer to Israel, they responded: "We will do and we will hear" (Na'aseh v'nishma). This is a fundamental difference between our approach and the approach of the nations of the world.

"Mah Kasuv bah?" is not merely a question indicating "I am curious to know what it says". "Mah Kasuv bah?" indicates that I am unwilling to accept Your dominion over me on a "no ifs, ands, or buts basis". "Mah Kasuv bah?" means I am not willing to give up on my own rights, my own self, my own desires.

"Na'aseh v'nishma," on the other hand, is a blank check. "Whatever You are going to fill in the check, I

am going to accept." This is an attitude. It indicates that I am willing to nullify my ego, my independence, my rights, and my self.

The Ramba"n explains that bringing a Korbon [Sacrifice] is an act of subjugation. The slaughter and offering on the altar of the animal or bird evokes the message: G-d, this is what is supposed to happen to me. I am willing to accept the idea that I have done wrong. In reality, I should find myself on that altar. Korbonos make peace between the Almighty and His people. One can only come to this level of self-nullification if one has the attitude of Na'aseh v'Nishma. Shalom can only come when a person is willing to negate himself and relinquish certain rights and desires.

This is the meaning of the Medrash quoted above. Jews can achieve this level of peace with their Maker, through self-negation. How do we know they can do it? Because they did it already once before - they said "Na'aseh v'nishma." The nations of the world cannot reach this level of peace with their maker. Why not? Because they were not at the spiritual level of accepting the Torah with the words "Na'aseh v'nishma". They demanded to know "Mah Kasuv bah?" which indicated that they were not willing to give up on their own desires.

Many times, we are called upon to "make shalom". This may involve peace between husband and wife or peace with neighbors or friends. Sometimes it involves making peace between ourselves and our children or ourselves and our parents. In order to make shalom, there has to be a willingness on the part of the people to say "okay, I am willing to give up on that which I think I am right about!" When there is an insistence that "it has to be my way," when I persist in digging in my heels, then Shalom can not happen.

The lesson of shalom is that a person has to be willing to give up on some part of himself to achieve peace. This is difficult but necessary component of making shalom.

There is an interesting Medrash Tanchuma that actually appears in Parshas Shmini, but relates back to a pasuk in this week's parsha. At the end of Tzav, the pasuk says: "You shall not leave the entrance of the Tent of Meeting for seven days, until the day when your days of inauguration are completed; for you shall be inaugurated for a seven day period." [Vayikra 8:32].

Parshas Tzav deals in great detail with the Shivas Yemei ha'Milu'im [Seven Days of Consecration], the week long period during which various offerings were brought to dedicate the Mishkan. Parshas Shmini begins with the words "And it was on the eighth day" [Vayikra 9:1]. This refers to the eighth day following the Shivas Yemei ha'Milu'im.

For the duration of the Shivas Yemei ha'Milu'im, Aharon and his sons were forbidden to walk out the of Mishkan compound. They were confined to the Mishkan [Tabernacle] area for the entire week of the dedication ceremony.

Listen to an enigmatic Medrash at the beginning of Parshas Shmini that refers to this pasuk.

"One who guards a mitzvah will know no evil (shomer mitzvah lo yeidah davar rah)." [Koheles 8:5].

According to the Medrash, this refers to Aharon, concerning whom it is written "You shall not leave the entrance of the Tent of Meeting for seven days." Moshe was telling him "Observe the seven day mourning period (PRIOR to the death of his two sons). Basically, according to the Medrash, the purpose of this seven day period of confinement was so that Aharon and his (surviving) sons could sit Shiva for the two sons of Aharon, who were destined to die on the Eighth Day of the dedication ceremony!

The insight the Medrash puts on the pasuk in Koheles is the following: One observes a mitzvah (shomer mitzvah) without knowing why he was keeping the mitzvah (lo yeidah davar rah) - this refers to Aharon and his sons, who did not realize why they were confined to the Mishkan for seven days. They were really keeping the mitzvah of shiva (before the fatalities took place).

How are we to understand this strange idea? Why sit shiva before it happens?

I saw the following interpretation in the Sefer, Shemen haTov. It could be that G-d sometimes does us a favor. Nadav and Avihu died right after the Mishkan started to operate. Imagine, if on the very first day of the opening of a new shul [synagogue], immediately after the "Grand Opening", someone gets killed in the shul! It spoils the whole joy of the occasion. G-d knew that they were going to die, so He said, as it were, "Let them sit shiva now." In this way, the joy of the dedication of the Mishkan will not be destroyed. The Aveilus [mourning] occurred before the event took place!

The Talmud states [Shabbos 130a] that one never finds a Kesubah [marriage contract] being written without at least some dispute (among the families). One who has ever married off a child does not have to be explained the meaning of this Gemara. Such weighty decisions as how many courses should be served at the smorgasbord, and the like, can ruin a simcha!

The bright side of this idea is that if there is destined to be some contention or dispute inherent in a marriage, let it happen before hand! Perhaps we are not deserving of an unadulterated simcha. There has to be some fight or dispute that prevents a totally perfect event from taking place. Just as during the Shivas Yemei ha'Milu'im, the shiva came before the simcha, let's get the un-pleasantries over with.

This is what happens with a marriage. There is no marriage (kesubah) that is not preceded by some amount of bickering and unpleasantness between the families involved. Better that it should happen before the official ceremony and not spoil the event, than to mar the simcha by taking place during or immediately afterwards.

This could be the meaning of this enigmatic Medrash. I welcome other suggestions.

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