

THE PITFALL OF CONSISTENCY: BEEN THERE; DONE THAT

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Pinchas

The Pitfall of Consistency: Been There; Done That

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #201, Fasting on Tisha B'Av: Is It For Everyone? Good Shabbos!

Parshas Pinchas contains a long list of sacrifices that are brought on various occasions. The first offering that the Torah discusses is the Korban Tamid - the Daily Sacrifice. When the Basi HaMikdash [Temple] is standing, there is a Biblical command to offer a Tamid Offering, every single day: "One Lamb is to be offered in the morning and one Lamb is to be brought toward the evening" [Bamidbar 28:4]. This offering is brought every day of the year, even on Shabbos, even on Yom Kippur.

There is something beautiful about consistency. But consistency does have one major pitfall. This pitfall is hinted to, by an incongruous pasuk [verse] in the middle of the chapter of the Daily Sacrifice. For no apparent reason, the Torah inserts a pasuk into the middle of the description of the Korban Tamid: "The continual Burnt Offering, which was made at Mt. Sinai for a pleasant aroma, a Fire Offering, before HaShem [Bamidbar 28:6]."

What does the Olah that was brought on Mt. Sinai have to do with this section about the Daily Sacrifice? That which happened on Mt. Sinai is history! Why is it mentioned in the middle of the section of the Korban Tamid?

The Sifrei and the Talmud [Chagiga 6b], the Tanaaim are all bothered by the question, "What is this pasuk teaching us?" One opinion states that the Olah on Mt. Sinai needed accompanying libations; one says it did not need libations; one says they did not offer the Daily offering at Mt. Sinai and that it only started later on. They are all troubled by the presence of this pasuk over here.

Rav Yosef Salant says that although the Rabbis of the Talmud are arguing about a halachic issue, there is also a very important hashkafic point that we derive from the presence this pasuk. That hashkafic point relates to this pitfall of consistency.

When something is done day in day out, as wonderful as it may be, it eventually becomes done by

rote. It becomes stale. It becomes automatic, without thought.

On any ordinary day, we might arrive at Shachris late and quickly put on our Tefillin in the time between Yishtabach and Borchu [names of specific prayers] and still have time to answer 'Yehei Shmei Rabba'. That is the amount of time it takes us to put on Tefillin!

However, a person only needs to have the nachas of seeing a son put on Tefillin for the first time, to recall a very different process. Watch a Bar Mitzvah boy put on Tefillin, making sure they are straight and making sure they are tight enough and that every strap is in order. What is the difference? The difference is that we may have been putting on Tefillin for forty years. On the one hand that is great - it is 'Tamid'. We can look back and say, we never missed a day! But that 'Tamid' becomes 'old hat' and sometimes lacks the true meaning of the Mitzvah. That is the pitfall of Tamid.

Therefore, the Torah inserts, "The Continuous Burnt Offering that was offered on Mt. Sinai for a pleasant Aroma, a Fire Offering before HaShem," in the middle of the parsha of the Korban Tamid that applies for all generations.

Remember that first Tamid! Remember that the Tamid that was brought on Har Sinai with tremendous enthusiasm, newness and excitement. Remember that! There should always be a little of that Tamid in the Tamid that is brought every single day.

That is the way it should be with our Tefillin and with our Kerias Shemah and with our Shmoneh Esreis [names of specific prayers]. We cannot lose the whole benefit of consistency by letting that very benefit become a pitfall.

Dovid HaMelech [King David] says in Tehillim, "I asked one thing from G-d, that is my request; to dwell in the House of G-d all the days of my life, and to visit His Palace." [Tehillim 27:4] The commentaries all ask what Dovid HaMelech is saying. First he asks to dwell in G-d's House his entire life, and then he asks to be a visitor? Which is it -- a Resident or a Visitor? Is he a "shivti b'veis HaShem"-nik or is he a "L'vaker b'Heicholo"-nik?

Dovid's request is to have it both ways. He wants to be one who dwells everyday in G-d's house, but he wants to feel as if he is only a visitor. He always wants it to feel special and new.

This is a difficult request, because these two qualities are almost mutually exclusive. When one has 'Tamid' he does not have 'Chiddush' and when one has 'Chiddush' he does not have 'Tamid'.

But this is the goal and this is the lesson of the Korban Tamid. It needs to be "One every morning and one every evening" but it also must be "like the first one which was ever offered, on Mt. Sinai."

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