

PARSHAS PINCHAS - WHO'S TAMID?

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

Who's Tamid?¹

My food for My fires, My satisfying aroma, you [plural] shall be scrupulous to offer to Me in its appointed time...The one lamb shall you [singular] make in the morning...[2]

Determining the subject linked to the verb in each pasuk here is not just an exercise in proper grammar. It makes all the difference in the world. The task seems hopeless, since the verbs in the two verses are in complete disagreement. One is plural, while the other is singular.

Had the Torah only ordered the daily tamid with a singular verb, we would understand that this twice-daily korban is supposed to be offered by a single person on behalf of the entire nation. This is, of course, correct. We would further understand the Torah's intent as asking each day that we pay our dues, so to speak, as a united people. We could easily mislead ourselves - as have so many adherents to other faiths - that by making the strong, symbolic declaration of devotion through a sacrifice, we have fulfilled our obligation to our Creator. For many people, such a statement is all the religious sophistication that they can deal with. To them, G-d is a mysterious Power who demands recognition - no more and no less. Paying Him off through regularly paying Him tribute is all the religion they can tolerate - and all that their god would possibly demand.

Had the Torah used a plural verb, however, the implications might not have been any more attractive. It could imply that every person was obligated or invited to offer a tamid each day. Enlarging the tamid to include everybody would also leave room for as many religions as there are people. Each individual would be left free to relate to the commandment in his or her own way. No one would have a monopoly on religious understanding or expression; religious devotion would be individualistic; every brand and variety would be as valid as any other.

The Torah uses both verbs, which leaves us with a problem. Our mesorah, however, describes the exquisite way in which the two truths conveyed by these verbs act synergistically. The tamid is both a singular entity, the product of the Jewish collective, but it also demands the involvement of everyone in Klal Yisrael as individuals.

Each year, half-shekels were collected for the purpose of funding community korbanos. There was a definite "fiscal year" in the beis hamikdosh. Old funds left over from a previous year could not be used for the current year's korbanos. (The message of the tamid in particular is the constancy of devotion to Hashem. This message must be ever-fresh; it cannot be allowed to become stale.

People's contributions towards it must be vital with newness.) Each day, morning and evening, the kohen would offer one animal as a collective offering. He would act on behalf of the entire people. The singular verb is entirely appropriate.

The gemara in Taanis asks a crucial question, meant entirely rhetorically: "Can a person's korban be offered without his being there?"[3] We might ask if there is an alternative. Can the entire nation gather twice a day in the beis hamikdosh? The gemara would have us answer affirmatively. There are two ways in which the people do indeed participate in the offering of the standard korbanos.

The first is through the rotation of the mishmaros. Corresponding to the 24 divisions of the kohanim (which rotated a week of service in the beis hamikdosh at a time), the nation as a whole was divided into an equal number of groups. For each mishmar of kohanim, one group of ordinary people would attend at the offering of the korbanos, and they served as the agents of everyone else who could not attend. The members of the mishmar were thus symbolic representatives of the larger population.

A second institution allowed for even greater participation. As the members of the lay mishmar stood in the beis hamikdosh, their neighbors gathered in their home towns. Although separated geographically, they attached themselves to the offering of the korban by fasting and reading from the Torah in what is called ma'amad. Standing - at least in spirit - shoulder-to-shoulder with their brethren at the beis hamikdosh, they too joined their show of devotion to Hashem to the offering of the tamid.

We thus see two distinct aspects of the tamid working together. On the one hand, there is unity and fixity, allowing no variance. It brings the entire community together, emphasizing that the focus of our avodah is constant and unswerving. Our connection to G-d is predicated upon, and proceeds from, a single place and a single belief: the Torah that rests in the Aron of the Kodosh Kodashim, protected by the outstretched wings of the cheruvim. There is no room for change or substitution.

On the other hand, the national declaration of loyalty to Hashem has no meaning if it is not taken up in the minds, hearts and lips of each and every Jew. The declaration-by-korban must become a declaration in each Jew's soul, without exception. Each person must possess a portion of the korban, and then take possession of its message, each day anew.

The Tzadokim/ Sadducees were horrified by this system. They insisted that the daily temidim come from private donations, and not be paid for by community funds. Service of G-d, to them, was both personal and intuitive. Each person had access to proper service on his own, through his own comprehension. Torah could be read, digested, and readily understood without any external help. They could not bear the thought that all people would have to bow to a central authority in order to properly relate to G-d, that the Torah could not be understood without reference to a commonly accepted standard in the Oral Law. The Tzadokim mounted great opposition to bringing the tamid in the manner prescribed by Chazal. When they lost their battle, the victory for our mesorah was

significant enough that it became a national day of celebration.[4]

The destruction of the beis hamikdosh did not bring an end to this daily drama. There is no korban tamid, and there has not been one for close to two thousand years. Yet, for that same period of time, every place that there are Jews faithful to the message of Torah despite the exile, the time of day associated with offering the tamid when the Temple stood still inspires us to look towards that hill top in Yerushalayim. To it, we direct our hearts at Shacharis and Mincha, still declaring our loyalty and devotion to Torah. We have become, in essence, one global ma'amad.

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1. Based on the Hirsch Chumash, Bamidbar 28:2
 2. Bamidbar 28:2,4
 3. Taanis 26A
 4. Menachos 65A
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