

הַמִּצְוֹת THE PATH TO FOLLOW

No 67 TERUMAH 3 ADAR I 5765 FEB.12.2005

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OFFERING BRING ONE CLOSER TO G-D

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

The offerings presented by the Children of Israel for the construction of the Sanctuary present a certain number of questions. We have resolved a few of these in previous articles, but there still remain some that require explanation.

Does G-d lack silver or gold that He had to ask the Children of Israel to offer Him some? Silver and gold belong to G-d, and the whole world is filled with His glory (Isaiah 6:3). Certainly it was because He wanted to give the Children of Israel the opportunity to help cover the expenses incurred by the construction of the Sanctuary. But if so, why did G-d tell them, "Speak to the Children of Israel ve'yikhu li [and they shall take for Me] a portion. From every man whose heart motivates him, you shall take My portion" (Exodus 25:2)? All G-d had to do was to command the Children of Israel to bring Him an offering. After all, don't we oblige the sick to take their medication? Why then does the verse not write ve'yaviu li ("and they shall bring to Me") or ve'yitnu li ("and they shall give to Me") instead of ve'yikhu li?

The answer is that a man should observe all the commandments ordained by G-d, putting them into practice and walking in His ways, and he should cleave to Him (Deuteronomy 11:22). In line with the given spiritual level that a man has attained, he should, as it were, offer himself to G-d (ve'yikhu li).

A man arrives at such a state by participating in the construction of the Sanctuary, or in other words by elevating himself in his Divine service. The Eternal will receive the offering of each person according to the fervor with which that person gives it to Him. As it is written, "They shall make a Sanctuary for Me – so that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8).

G-d asks us to "take ourselves," in other words to attach ourselves to the Tzaddik in order to imbue ourselves with his spirit of holiness and reach ever-higher levels. We will then be like the crown placed on the head of the Holy One, blessed be He. G-d asks us to offer Him this portion, a portion that attached us to the Garden of Eden before our soul's descent into this world. We will then, as it were, resemble Him. We will cleave to Him by the study of Torah and the performance of mitzvot and good deeds, instead of attaching this portion to the vain pursuits that the evil inclination encourages us to chase after. Let us emulate the righteous of the generation; let us push ourselves to behave like them and their students (Vayikra Rabba 25:3). We will then

reach lofty spiritual levels and the Divine Presence will reside within us. Let us distance ourselves from the "pleasures" of this world. Above all, let us be sure to make the first step, and G-d will help us (Pesikta Rabba 15:6).

That which G-d asks a Jew is not to covet silver or gold, but to labor in the performance of the mitzvot. G-d desires that a person's money helps those who study Torah, for "it is a tree of life to those who grasp it" (Proverbs 3:18). The Midrash teaches that the profits which Zubulun made with his commerce served to maintain the yeshivas of Issachar (Zohar I: 241b), for it is the ones who study Torah that build the Temple (see Megillah 29a).

All money should go for Torah and mitzvot. A Jew who wants to attach himself to G-d should contribute financially to the construction of religious schools, yeshivas, mikvehs, etc. – the Sanctuary of our day. One should not rely on miracles. Generosity contributes to bringing down a spiritual bounty into this world. The Eternal certainly helps us in the material domain – with daily sustenance, health, etc. – but in the spiritual domain and the fear of Heaven, everything depends on man. This is why G-d did not obligate the Children of Israel to bring their offerings. He counted on the goodness of their heart, on their fear of Heaven, and on their desire to elevate themselves in the service of G-d. As it is written, "All those with generous hearts brought burnt-offerings [ohlot – from aliah: 'elevation']" (II Chronicles 29:31).

At this point we can understand the connection between the two weekly sections (Terumah and Tetzaveh).

The first Parsha teaches us to distance ourselves from the pleasures of this world (above all from greed), and to instead come closer to G-d. The Shechinah will then encourage us, in proportion to our fervor, to serve G-d. The Parsha also teaches us to contribute financially to the construction of places of worship and Torah establishments, and to attach ourselves to the Tzaddik of the generation, a person who himself is connected directly to the Eternal.

In the verse that states, "Now you shall command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure, pressed olive oil" (Exodus 27:20), G-d commands Moses – whose soul is propagated and present in every generation (Tikkun Zohar 69: 112a) – to impregnate the Children of Israel with his holiness.

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They would thereby get closer to him. He then commanded that they purify their body and soul and acquire virtues such as modesty. “You, the Tzaddik of the generation, bring your brothers closer to you in order to illuminate and purify their soul like oil.” We should note the similarity of the letters in the words shemen (“oil”) and neshama (“soul”). For the virtues that you will make them acquire, you will grind and completely subdue (katit) their body and soul to My service. Then “anyone with whom his fellowmen are pleased, G-d is pleased with him” (Perkei Avoth 3:10[13]). Thanks to the Torah, this light that makes men take to the right path (Yerushalmi Hagigah 1:7) will make them acquire good traits.

As we have seen, the terumah (offering) meromemet (elevates) man, as it is written: “Rabbi Meir said, ‘Whoever occupies himself with the [study of] Torah for its own sake merits many things. Furthermore, he is worthy that the whole world shall have been created because of him’ ” (Perkei Avoth 6:1). The term li (“for myself”), having the numerical value of 40, means that by the study of Torah, which was given after 40 days, one can connect oneself to the Name of G-d – li lishmi. Moreover, the number of beams in the Sanctuary alludes to the 48 virtues by which Torah is acquired (Perkei Avoth 6:6). What’s more, even the term kerashim alludes to the kesharim – to the interactions that the man who studies Torah has with G-d – and shekarim means that without Torah, the world is but a massive lie.

Nevertheless, before trying to get closer to G-d, a man should probe and better himself. “Nadav and Avihu each took his fire pan.... A fire came forth from before the L-RD and consumed them, and they died before the L-RD” (Leviticus 10:1-2). Why? They had most certainly acquired the 48 virtues by which the Torah is acquired. Otherwise, the passage would not have testified concerning them that “I will be sanctified through those who are nearest Me” and “the entire House of Israel shall bewail the conflagration that the L-RD ignited” (Leviticus 10:3,6).

They were certainly great people, but since they realized that the Sanctuary aimed at bringing Israel closer to its Creator, they wanted to connect themselves to the Holy One, blessed be He, even before the construction of the Sanctuary, as it is written, “They saw G-d, and they ate and they drank” (Exodus 24:11). The Midrash explains that they had delighted in the vision of the Divine Presence, just as one delights in food. However G-d, Who did not want to disturb the celebration, punished them when they offered a strange fire (Vayikra Rabba 20:7).

Nadav and Avihu perished because they wanted to see too much; they wanted to come too close to the Holy One, blessed be He. This was contrary to Moses, who hid his face before the Divine Presence (Exodus 3:6). However, since in the final analysis they only wanted to sanctify the Name of G-d, the place where they perished was also sanctified, and all the people understood the importance of it.

Woe to the person, therefore, who thinks he is perfect and who does not constantly watch to ensure that his mitzvot are performed in compliance with the Divine will and only for the sake of Heaven. It is not proper that the servant should look directly into his master’s face. Nadav and Avihu, who were fundamentally pure and holy, should have covered their faces instead of looking directly at the Divine Presence on the day when the Sanctuary was erected.

If we perform all our mitzvot solely for the sake of G-d’s Name, the Eternal yishkan (will dwell in us). We will in this way come closer to Him, and He will be, as it were, our neighbor.

“And they shall make [ve’assu] for Me a Sanctuary” (Exodus 25:8). A man should essentially aim at rectifying this world of Asiyah (action) that was tarnished first by the sin of Adam and then by the sin of the golden calf. With regards to this, let us note the similarity between the numerical values of the terms ve’assu (along with its letters) and Asiyah (with the kollel – i.e., plus one). By the performance of the mitzvot and the diligent study of Torah, a man will succeed in transforming this world into a sanctuary for G-d.

“Just as I make my Divine Presence reign over the entirety of the Jewish people,” says the Eternal, “I can make it reign individually over each of My children, who are a world in miniature” (Zohar III:257b). In the same way, a man should not neglect the least of the mitzvot, since they make shefa (abundance) come down into this world.

G-d desires that we be sincerely connected to Him. Let us not act like those who try to deceive Him with their mouths and lie to Him with their tongues (Psalms 78:36). Their hearts are not whole with Him, they are not faithful to His covenant (v.37), and they transgress the Divine commandments. One cannot, however, approach or really know Him and become imbued with the Divine Presence unless one radically distances oneself from the vain pleasures of this world and believe simply in Him.

May G-d grant our hearts the necessary intelligence and wisdom to attach ourselves to Him forever. Amen!

THE PATH OF THE JUST PRIDE - PART XI

Everything that we have seen concerning the subject of the evil inclination is but a drop in the ocean compared to the distrust we should have of it. In everything that we do, in all our actions, with every character trait, the evil inclination intervenes to ruin and destroy.

Pride born from the acquisition of wisdom is commendable, as it is written, “For only with this may one glorify himself – contemplating and knowing Me” (Jeremiah 9:23). The wise man thanks the Creator with all his heart, and prays profusely to acquire knowledge, intelligence, and good character traits. For example, he prays, “I thank You for having placed me among those who sit in the house of study, not in the market,” or “How happy we are! How good is our lot and how desirable our fate!” Concerning this subject, it is said: “His heart grows in the ways of Hashem” (Divrei Hayamim II 17:6). A man can be proud and ambitious concerning that which leads to the world to come, but not concerning that which is presented to him, or concerning his knowledge or the wisdom he acquires. He should downplay, in his own eyes, all his good deeds and push himself to continuously strive ever higher. He should castigate himself for not sufficiently devoting his soul to the service of Hashem. This type of pride does not harm one’s modesty; quite the opposite, it contributes to it. It acts in such a way that a man rejoices in all his character traits, is happy of his friends’ successes, and concerns himself with their honor.

IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM RABBI ITSHAK BEN WALID

The renowned Gaon, Rabbi Itshak Ben Walid, the Rabbi of Tetouan, was one of the most glorious personalities among the Gaonim of Morocco. Rabbi Itshak was born in 5557 (1796) and continued the magnificent line of the illustrious Ben Walid family. His entire life was devoted to elevating himself in the study of Torah and the Divine service. His invaluable book, *Vayomer Itshak*, a compilation of questions and responses, lends dignity to the libraries of the great Poskim, who come to draw from the source of his Torah, and who are guided in their every step by the judicial decisions of his work.

Rabbi Yechayia Ben Naim was one of Rabbi Itshak's students. He was the father of the Gaon Rabbi Raphael Haim Moshe Ben Naim, well-known in all middle-eastern countries under the name of the HaRahaman (the merciful one).

The story goes that for many years Rabbi Yechayia Ben Naim (Rabbi Itshak's student) did not have a son. His teacher advised him to make undertake a pilgrimage to the tomb of the renowned Rabbi Amram Ben Diwan in Wazan in order that, by the merit of the Tzaddik, he could have a son. Rabbi Yechayia followed this advice, and soon afterwards a son was born that Rabbi Yechayia named Moshe. Later on, when the child fell ill, the name Raphael Haim was added to him.

Rabbi Haim Shemuel Convarti, the Chief Rabbi of the city of Tiberius, was the teacher of Rabbi Raphael Haim Ben Naim. Rabbi Shemuel gave his approbation for Rabbi Itshak Ben Walid's book *Vayomer Itshak*, and he showered praise on the author, describing his greatness in Torah as miraculous. Among other things, Rabbi Shemuel described him as, "One of the last of the Great Assembly, the supreme and great Rabbi, a fortress and stronghold, a father of justice."

Rabbi Itshak Ben Walid was known as a holy man who performed miracles. During the month of Adar, on the day of his Hilloula, many Jews come out at night to reflect and pray on his tomb in Tetouan.

Up to our days, the Jews of Morocco continue to venerate the name of Rabbi Itshak Ben Walid, and in Israel many institutions of learning bear the title *Vayomer Itshak*, named after Rabbi Itshak Ben Walid.

THE STORY OF THE WEEK

The Satan's Ultimate Trap

Rav M. Schwadron recounts that he once read a story that had appeared in the book *Berit Olam*. It is told by the Tzaddik Rabbi Akiva Yossef, the son-in-law of Rabbi Hillel of Kolomai, the disciple of the Chatam Sofer, who himself had heard it from his Rav, the Chatam Sofer.

During the time of the Maharsha, a man who was known for his piety died. At the time that his body was being prepared for burial, one yeshiva student passed in front of the body, approached it, and struck its nose. All the workers began to laugh. The night following the burial, the dead man came and found the young student in a dream and told him that he was being summoned before the Heavenly Court for having desecrated his body. In the morning, the young man awoke panic-stricken, telling everything to his father who consoled and calmed him. Yet the same thing happened for several nights: The dead man came to find him in his dream and told him that he absolutely had to come before the Heavenly Court to undergo the Torah's punishment for having desecrated his body. Having lost hope because of the dream's constant recurrence, the young man fell ill, to the point that his state became critical.

The Maharsha was thus advised and told of the whole story. He immediately ordered that the young man be brought to his home. When he arrived, the Maharsha said that he should be immediately notified when the young man would wake up at night. This is precisely what happened. In the middle of the night, the young man began to scream from fear, and the Maharsha was immediately informed. Once in front of the young man's bed, the Maharsha asked the dead man, "What do you want from him?" The dead man replied, "He desecrated my body." The Maharsha told him, "Were you not a notorious ungodly man during your life? Do you not deserve all this?" The dead man responded, "No! I was never a wicked man! Once I saw a Jew, a Talmid Chacham, who had fallen into a river and was drowning. I immediately jumped into the river and saved his life, and afterwards we became close friends. I began to help him financially, and I continued to do so for the rest of my life. When I arrived in the upper world, I was greeted with great honor as a Talmid Chacham, and none of my sins were recalled, for the one who saves the life of a single Jew is as if he has saved an entire world, and that goes without mentioning the fact that I allowed a Talmid Chacham to live without financial worries. I therefore share a great deal in his Torah; I have the status of a Talmid Chacham. That is why I am accusing this young man of having committed an offence against a Talmid Chacham."

Having heard this entire story, the Maharsha responded as follows: "Listen, in reality you have a great deal of sins, but it is impossible to accuse you because the good deeds that you performed have raised a thick partition between you and your accusers. Nevertheless, you must understand that your sins have not been erased. Now the Satan wants to lay a trap for you, for if you provoke this young man's death, he will be able to act with you measure for measure. It is true that you saved a Talmid Chacham, but now you want to provoke the death of a Talmid Chacham, and this will cause the partition that protects you to collapse, so well in fact that you will be in a position to be accused of your sins. Therefore don't be foolish. Leave him alone and forgive him!"

THE MORAL OF THE STORY

From the Maggid of Dubno

The Midrash states: “Why was Parsha Terumah given after Mishpatim? It is because it is written, ‘I practiced justice and righteousness’ [Psalms 119:121].”

Let us first take a look at what the Midrash says about Mishpatim: “It is written, ‘Mighty is the King, Who loves justice’ [Psalms 99:4]. Strength belongs to Hashem. He loves justice, and He gave it to the Jewish people, who cherish it.” The meaning of “You founded fairness” (ibid.) is: You established equity for those that love You (thanks to the just statutes that You gave them). The Sages want us to understand why Hashem scorned the peoples by refusing to give them laws. In fact it is written, “These are the laws that you shall place before them” (Exodus 21:1), meaning them, not idolaters.

Let us make the idea easier to understand with a parable.

A rich man had taken a home tutor to teach his children the basics of proper etiquette: How to eat properly, to drink properly, to walk about properly, and to sleep properly. One day, an uncultivated young man came to see the rich man, for he wanted to understand all these rules of etiquette. At that moment the rich man’s children were being taught the etiquette of meals.

The students wanted to kick the young man out, but he begged them, “How does it affect you if I come and listen to these wonderful lessons?” He implored them so well (and for so long) that they accepted, and the tutor continued to present the laws in question to them. “Firstly, one should not go to an event

when presented with an invitation sent by only a single messenger. There has to be at least two or three. Secondly, one should not seat oneself in a place of honor. Thirdly, one should not be the first person to begin eating, just as one does not hold one’s plate with one’s hands.” The students were taken aback by the concentration of the young man and began to make fun of him. “Tell us a bit about how all this is going to help you. Has anyone ever invited you to dinner? Have you ever had a plate and cutlery put before you? Aren’t you more likely to eat the leftovers of guests? Why then are you studying all this, things that are completely foreign to you?”

This parable is easy to understand. The meaning of “He did not do so for any other nation; such judgments – they know them not. Halleluyah!” (Psalms 147:20) is that we should thank Hashem for His goodness in having differentiated us from the other peoples by giving us our heritage directly from Him, as a father to his children. This is what the Midrash says, namely: “You founded fairness. The justice and righteousness of Jacob, You have made” (Psalms 99:4). What does “You founded fairness” mean? It means, “You made it possible for those who love You to be upright, which is a heritage that You gave them directly. On the foundation of this uprightness, it is completely logical to instruct justice and generosity to them, while it would be useless to give these to another people who do not possess this foundation of integrity.”