

הַמִּצְוָה וְהַדָּבָר הַיָּשׁוּב וְהַיָּשׁוּב THE PATH TO FOLLOW

No 73
TSAV
15 ADAR II 5765
MARCH.26.2005

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Responsible of publication Hanania Soussan

THE IMPORTANCE OF FERVOR IN THE SERVICE OF G-D

(by Rabbi David Hanania Pinto שליט"א)

Concerning the verse that states, "Command Aaron and his sons, saying: 'This is the law of the burnt offering'" (Leviticus 6:2), Rashi says in the name of the Sages that tzav ("command") is a word that is used to encourage the one being addressed, a word that is particularly necessary when there exists the possibility of loss (Torat Kohanim 6:1).

This demands an explanation. How is it conceivable that the Kohen, in sacrificing a burnt offering that will be entirely consumed in honor of the Eternal, can demonstrate such negligence that the Torah is justified in encouraging him? Also, let us not forget that he knows perfectly well that he will receive the portions reserved for the Kohen (Bava Kama 110b). What's more is that the verse concerns Aaron, G-d's chosen one (Bamidbar Rabba 3:2)! It is conceivable that of all people, Aaron would demonstrate some slack in his service in general, and in his sacrifice of the burnt offering in particular? It is unthinkable that a fear of loss is attributed to him.

We will attempt to clarify this point to our complete satisfaction. The evil inclination is accustomed to weakening the fervor of man, especially if he risks a financial loss. The Zohar (III:273b) makes it clear that this test is the most difficult of all, for a man has the status of a close relative in that which concerns him – him and his instincts (Sanhedrin 10a) – particularly when it comes to money, for money is what gives a man grounding in this world (Pesachim 119a). For example, when the hour draws near for Mincha and the store is filled with clients, a battle with the evil inclination begins, for the storekeeper risks losing money and will be tempted to ignore prayer and let the opportunity slip by.

As for a poor person who asks him for charity, he will not be too pleased either, for this implies a loss for him. It can also happen that after having gone to pray, he nevertheless looks at his watch every minute to see when it will end so that he can go and reopen his store and begin to make money again. The question being that of a financial loss, he has the greatest difficulty remembering that at such a moment he is standing before G-d and offering sacrifices to Him, since prayer takes the place of sacrifice (Berachot 26b). Furthermore it is Him, the Eternal, Who grants him money and sustenance.

This is what the Torah itself tells us: "This is the torat [law] of the burnt offering. It is the burnt offering" (Leviticus 6:2). The Torah itself is the burnt offering (olah), a word that indicates the way to elevate oneself (aley) in the service of G-d. In order for a man to elevate himself, he must go "up to the fire that is found on the altar." He must serve G-d with fire, particularly in the study of Torah, which evokes the fire on the altar. In fact the Torah is compared to fire,

given by fire and written with letters of fire – black fire on white fire (Tanhuma Yitro 12). In everything that concerns the study of Torah, which is a burnt offering, a man should literally resemble fire and burn with enthusiasm for the Eternal from morning to night, without paying attention to the loss that this may entail. In fact the evil inclination is extremely powerful in that which concerns the Torah, but we can conquer it by acting like a burnt offering destined to be entirely consumed, for the Zohar affirms that the forces of evil have no power on the sacrifice of the burnt offering and draws no benefit from it (Zohar II:181b).

How then can a man reach this maximum closeness, this enthusiasm without limit in the service of G-d? It is by the fervor that he invests in it. A man is comparable to Aaron. He must show himself eager in thought and in deed at all times that the temptation to neglect Torah presents itself, and he should realize that he is similar to one who offers a sacrifice to G-d. He will therefore gather together his strength, as if it consisted of an arrow which attacks the evil inclination. This idea is alluded to in the word tzav ("command"), for in counting the two letters that make up the word, along with the word's numerical value, we come up with the same numerical value as the word cheitz ("arrow"). Consequently, in the same way that the evil inclination rushes to make a man neglect Torah, a man should for his part counter the evil inclination with study, for study protects and saves him (Sotah 21a). The Torah is also called the "remedy against the evil inclination" (Sukkah 52b), especially when it consists of an eventual loss. When the archer launches his arrow, all will depend on his intensity and the energy that he puts into making the arrow fly even faster, even more powerfully. Similarly, everyone should put all their energy into aiming at the target in order to conquer the evil inclination.

This is the sense of the verse that states, "Command Aaron and his sons" (Leviticus 6:2), which designates all the generations that will come after him, and to which the Torah wishes to teach the way of elevating oneself. This consists of the burnt offering (meaning fervor), for here there is a risk of loss, hence a lack. This risk is present when dealing with the written and oral Torah, for without eagerness and diligence, there will be a lack in one's knowledge of Torah. In fact, the Torah probed deeply into the motivations of the Kohen. It knows that if he is not encouraged in his service, there is reason to fear that he will not carry it out with all the necessary fervor. Even though it consists of a burnt offering entirely consumed for G-d, the Kohen needs encouragement because he is preoccupied with the financial loss implied by the offering. Now it is by means of the burnt offering that abundance descends into

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the world. In this it is similar to the Torah, for it is also through the Torah that abundance and dew come into the world, as it is written in the Midrash concerning Jacob (Bereshith Rabba 66:1). This is why the Kohen should purify his thoughts and perform his service with the greatest diligence.

In the same line of reasoning, the Kohen Gadol does not have the right to marry a widow (Yebamot 59a), as the verse says: "A widow, a divorcee, a desecrated woman, a harlot – he shall not marry these" (Leviticus 21:14). The commentators have explained the reason for this commandment. It is to prevent a situation in which he comes to covet another woman and then, finding himself in the Tent of Meeting, he prays to G-d that her husband die in order to marry her. Yet this is unconceivable, for how could such thoughts come to the Kohen Gadol when he is offering a sacrifice to G-d?

However the Torah understands men even in their most hidden recesses. Here it demonstrates the power of the evil inclination by asserting that even the Kohen Gadol can have the thought of cursing a man in order to marry his widow! This forbidden thought may even follow him into the Holy of Holies, so powerful is the evil inclination. This is why we must fight it with the greatest of diligence, as if we were arrows, and at that moment we will get ahead and conquer it.

This idea is alluded to in the verse that states, "The Kohen shall don his fitted linen tunic" (Leviticus 6:3). The word "shall don" evokes thoughts of holiness, that a man should don and envelope his entire body in order to serve the Eternal, for when he knows before Whom he stands (Berachot 28b), he will perform his Divine service with great attentiveness. These sacred thoughts help a man to remain attached to G-d and to elevate himself more and more. In fact, according to the ladder of Rabbi Pinchas ben Yair (Avodah Zarah 20b), purity of thought leads to the highest levels and performs wonders for man in this world and the world to come.

It is not by chance that fire is mentioned three times in this passage: "The fire of the Altar should be kept aflame on it" (Leviticus 6:2); "The fire on the Altar shall be kept burning on it" (v.5); and "A permanent fire shall remain aflame on the Altar" (v.6). This repetition comes to teach us that only the purity of a man's thoughts consumes all the thorns and thistles within him, and creates in him an absolute fervor for the service of the Eternal, to the point that even if he goes to impure places, the fire of the altar will nevertheless continue to burn in him without going out. A man can merit all this due to the enthusiasm that he succeeds in creating within himself.

THE STORY OF THE WEEK

The Power of the Torah

Rabbi Meir Shapira (the Maharam of Lublin) once recounted to his students what was found in the register of the Lublin Chevra Kadisha. It is a beautiful story concerning our teacher Shlomo Luria (the Maharshah) and it is a mitzvah to relate it.

There once lived a student in Lublin who had no children. After a few years, his wife fell ill and died. Yet even after the mourning period for his wife had ended, the man continued to remain mired in his grief and despair. His friends and acquaintances tried in vain to console and cheer him up, but he continued to be depressed and withdrew into his shell. When the Maharshah learned of this, he made him come by and asked him the meaning of his strange behavior. After having been greatly beseeched to respond, the man recounted in a low tone that some time before his wife's death, he had promised her that he would never remarry. Yet now he realized that he was still young and that he had not accomplished the mitzvah of having children. This is why he bitterly regretted having made that promise to her.

When the Maharshah heard this, he told him with a smiling and loving face: "I allow you to remarry." With these words, the man felt as if a heavy stone had been lifted from his shoulders. He left the house of the Maharshah happy, with the feeling of being a new person. And in fact, not long afterwards, he got married. However it did not take long for the town of Lublin to shudder with fear, for the man suddenly died. When the sad news reached the Maharshah, he asked that the members of the Chevra Kadisha be brought to him immediately. When they presented themselves, he asked them to clean the deceased man's body, as the norm, but to let him know when they were ready to place him in his tomb. They followed his instructions to the letter, and when he was told that everything was ready, the Maharshah

went to the cemetery with all haste and wrote a note with these words: "Celestial Court, I order you, by the power of the Torah, to bring this man back to me." The Maharshah signed his name to the bottom of the note and ordered that it be placed in the hand of the deceased. He also ordered them to leave the man in his tomb without closing it, and that everyone should leave the cemetery.

Not long afterwards, terrified cries were heard in Lublin. From every side hysterical screams and shouts of terror arose at the terrible sight which the inhabitant's eyes beheld: The deceased man had left his tomb and was walking in his burial shroud in the streets, as if nothing had happened. The people of the city took a long time to get over this incident. Once the freight had subsided a little, they began to realize the immense significance of what had happened, and everyone began to speak of the holiness of their great Rav, the Maharshah.

However the story was not yet over, for even though resurrected, the man still could not find a woman who accepted to marry him. His wife was afraid to come back to him, and other women also feared a man who had risen from the dead. Was it a simple thing to marry a man who had died, someone who had already passed by way of the grave? When the Maharshah understood that he couldn't help the man in a natural way, he once again ordered, by the power of the Torah, that the angel charged with forgetfulness should reign over the inhabitants of Lublin and remove all memory of this event. And so it was. After a few days the entire story was forgotten and the man was once again regarded as normal. He then married a woman from a good family and had children and grandchildren that devoted themselves to Torah and mitzvot.

IN MEMORY OF THE TSADIKIM RABBI NAPHTALI AMSTERDAM

The sixth of Adar is the Hilloula of Rabbi Naphtali Amsterdam Zatzal. He was born in 5592 (1832) in Salant, and his father was Rabbi Shlomo Zatzal. During his youth, he was extremely diligent in study, to the point that everyone called him “Naphtali the matmid.” He was among the great students of our teacher Rabbi Israel Salanter Zatzal. He took on the role of Rabbi in the cities of Helsinki and Novogrod, where he did much to elevate the level of Torah observance and the fear of Heaven. Next, he returned to Kovno where he settled down to study. To sustain his family, his wife ran a bakery, and to better their income Rabbi Naphtali accepted the rabbinate of Yaswerin and Elkost. After a certain time, he gave up all public responsibility in order to devote himself uniquely to the study of Torah. In 5666 (1906), he went to live in Jerusalem, settling down in the Strauss district next to his friend Rav Yitzchak Blazer Zatzal. He left this world in 5716 (1916).

Rabbi Naphtali spent all his life spreading Torah and the fear of Heaven. When it was not in an official capacity, he gave Mussar courses in his home, in the Beit Hamussar of Kovno, and in the Slabodka Yeshiva. He attributed great importance to the power of speech, encouraging everyone to verbally express his thoughts and ideas on Torah and the fear of Heaven. One day he said, “The power of speech, made in the depths of the soul, is such that it has a greater impact than deeds.”

When he wanted to emphasize the prime importance of speech, Rabbi Naphtali relied on the opinions expressed by certain researchers concerning the fact that speech is lacking in babies. “It is not that they cannot speak, since nothing is lacking for this, but that they do not yet have the necessary intelligence to do so.”

This consists of the intelligence that man was endowed with, and which is at the root of speech. This is its very essence, the instrument that allows man to actualize his thoughts by means of words. When the source of speech is intelligence, everything can be found therein, given that it is used judiciously.

Rabbi Naphtali gave an example to explain the importance of actualizing what we have in mind. When we ask ourselves what is preferable, the bread that we eat or the gold we accumulate, everyone will agree that gold is worth more than bread, because it allows a person to purchase everything that he needs, including bread.

Yet when someone is lost in the desert, if he possesses a certain amount of gold but nothing to eat, he will die. However if he had bread he would survive. That which is more important is therefore not the potential, but that which is tangibly present. Therein lay the interest to capitalize on man’s intellectual strength. That is, furthermore, the role of man, said Rabbi Naphtali: “The entire goal of Creation was to make man descend into the world of action to perform concrete mitzvot, for example in taking the skin of an animal to make Tefillin, or taking linen and wool to make Tzitzit.”

The same idea applies to the words of Torah and the fear of Heaven. Rabbi Naphtali Amsterdam Zatzal ends by saying that even though we can also accomplish the study of Torah by simple reflection, “the one who wants the Torah’s fruit to be born in him, not to be forgotten or removed, should practice it verbally.”

THE PATH OF THE JUST HUMILITY - PART II

Man is charged with instilling humility in his relationships with other people and in his commercial transactions, over and above what is demanded by the law. His conduct in society should be modest and pleasant. The foundation of modesty consists of abasing himself before those lower than him, for example his servants, his family, and poor people who depend on him, those that he does not need or fear. The person who acquiesces to widows and converts by patiently supporting the worries and problems that they have, and who silently endures insults, gives proof of his flawless modesty.

There exists another type of modesty that is very laudable, that of a man that submits himself before his teacher, before the sages, and before the righteous that walk along straight paths. Considering them as beloved servants of Hashem, he bows before and honors them. It is also useful to think, “I will bow before the sages in order to attach myself to and learn from them, to be graced by their rebukes and to benefit from their counsel.”

Another form of modesty that is very commendable is the ability to be humble before one’s students and to explain every obscure topic to them in accordance with their level of comprehension. The teacher should expound the topic of study and repeat his explanations until his students have understood, all while maintaining a friendly face. He should explain the subject calmly, several times if needed. The reward that Rabbi Pereda received for having repeated the same subject to his student 400 times is well known (Eruvin 54b).

One type of humility that is also of great worth is the ability to learn from people at lower levels than oneself, and to question them on things that one is not aware of. Concerning this subject, the verse states, “From all my teachers I grew wise” (Psalms 119:99). And our Sages teach: “Be of an exceedingly humble spirit” (Perkei Avoth 4:4). It is not only before prominent people that one should be humble, but also before ordinary people. The person who does this will lead others to good, for having found grace in the eyes of others, his actions and decisions will be universally accepted. Men will praise that person and wish to act like him. Everyone will wish his son to resemble him, and in such a way that person sanctifies G-d’s Name. Yet a proud man profanes G-d’s Name and leads others to sin.

THE MORAL OF THE STORY

From the Maguid of Dubno

It is written, “This is the law of the feast peace-offering that one will offer to the L-RD: If he shall offer it for a thanksgiving offering...” (Leviticus 7:11-12).

The Midrash says: “This is what the verse states: ‘Whoever offers the sacrifice of thanksgiving honors Me’ [Psalms 50:23]. It is not written, ‘Whoever offers the sacrifice of a guilt-offering’ or ‘Whoever offers the sacrifice of atonement’, but rather, ‘Whoever offers the sacrifice of thanksgiving.’ Why? The guilt-offering, as well as the sacrifice of atonement, come as a result of sin, whereas this is not the case with the sacrifice of thanksgiving.” And further on, “Rabbi Pinchas, Rabbi Levi, and Rabbi Yochanan said, ‘In the future, all sacrifices will be annulled, but the sacrifice of thanksgiving will never be annulled, as it is said, “There will again be heard in this place ... the sound of joy and the sound of gladness, the sound of groom and the sound of bride, the sound of people saying, ‘Praise the L-RD, Master of Legions, for the L-RD is good, for His mercy is forever’ bringing thanksgiving offerings to the Temple of the L-RD” [Jeremiah 33:10-11].’”

To clarify these passages, let us begin by explaining the following verse: “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light. ... You exalted the nation; You did not [read ??, not ??] increase the joy” (Isaiah 9:1-2). I think that this text should be compared with what we have written elsewhere concerning the verse that states, “Then the redeemed of the L-RD will return ... with eternal gladness on their heads. They will attain joy and gladness, and sadness and sighing will flee” (Isaiah 35:10).

There are two types of joys: Positive ones that bring with their appearance a new element to life, and negative ones that come as a result of having avoided problems. Sometimes we rejoice in having acquired things, or as a result of a birth, a marriage, a successful business venture, and so on. Sometimes happiness comes only through the absence of ills, as for example when one survives a sickness that is considered terminal. Situations such as these are also joyous, sometimes even more than the first type, since one experienced a brush with death and yet was saved. The difference is that the first type of joy surprises no one because the reason for it is clear and visible for all to see, whereas with the second type, if one is unaware

of the distress that preceded it, the expression of great joy without apparent reason seems strange. It is under this category that the joy for Jerusalem falls. The city was once besieged by the Assyrians, and when they fell in combat, the joy of having escaped harm was immense. From this comes the cry: “The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light” (Isaiah 9:1). It was as if the prophet was saying, “I don’t fear recounting Hashem’s great kindness, for the people were suffering from the darkness, and when they were saved, they saw a great light.” Further on, in the same verse it is written, “Those who dwelled in the land of the shadow of death, light has shone upon them.” And yet in reality, “You did not [read ??, not ??] increase the joy” (Isaiah 9:2), since it was only normal for the people to be joyous. In a general way, when we ask our neighbor to share in our joy (for example, at a wedding or the birth of a child), there is an exchange of blessings. We say to our guests, “May Hashem grant that you also rejoice in the same way,” and they respond by similar wishes: “May you also have grandchildren and great-grandchildren.” This is not the case for one who rejoices in having been healed from a severe illness. When that person’s friends come to visit him following his illness, does he tell them, “May you have the merit of being gravely ill, of being brought to death’s door, and being healed”? Or do they exclaim, “May you merit such luck every so often”? Obviously not, for in reality he experiences a joy that really can’t be classified as one. What the prophet promises for the future belongs to the first category of joy that we discussed: “Then the redeemed of the L-RD will return ... with eternal gladness on their heads” (Isaiah 35:10). This signifies a joy whose nature is such that the entire world desires and asks for it: “They will attain joy and gladness, and sadness and sighing will flee” (ibid.). It is a joy that consists of the happiness of obtaining new things and successes every day, for pain and sighing will have fled and they will no longer exist in the world.

This is also the teaching of the verse that states, “Then will they declare among the nations, ‘The L-RD has done greatly with these.’ The L-RD had done greatly with us; we were gladdened” (Psalms 126:3).