



MISHNAS CHAYIM

משנת חיים

MISHNAH ON THE PARSHAH

פרשת ויקרא תשס"ט • Parshas Vayikra 5769

TIPPING THE SCALES

Sefer Vayikra introduces the vast topic of *korbanos* (sacrificial offerings). One particular aspect associated with this sacred service is the requirement to add salt to the *korban*, as recorded in this week's *parshah* (*Vayikra* 2:13).

Of course, the main imperative to fulfill this mitzvah – like all *mitzvos* – is the simple fact that it is Hashem's will and command, regardless of whether or not we understand a rationale behind it. Nevertheless, the commentators do attempt to uncover some of the valuable underlying lessons that the *mitzvos* impart.

R' Moshe Shternbuch (*Ta'am V'da'as, Vayikra, ibid.*) offers a thoughtful explanation of the mitzvah of adding salt to *korbanos*. He maintains that the Torah is hinting to an essential quality of one's *avodas* Hashem in general. Simply put, salt adds flavor to an otherwise dull-tasting dish. By requiring one who offers a *korban* to apply salt, the Torah is encouraging an individual to "spruce-up" his mitzvah deeds. Instead of half-hearted, mindless acts of habit, one's performance of *mitzvos* should be with freshness and enthusiasm.

This notion is more than just a "nice idea." As we shall see, it could actually mean the difference between life... and death.

WHAT HAPPENS IMMEDIATELY AFTER A PERSON PASSES AWAY

Although the subject of the afterlife remains largely concealed from mortal man, Chazal have supplied us with various glimpses into the goings-on of that realm.

The Mishnah in Avos (4:13) sets the background for the judgment scene that awaits each individual upon his passing:

העושה מצוה אחת, קונה לו פרקליט אחד. והעובר
עברה אחת, קונה לו קטיגור אחד.

"When a person fulfills a mitzvah, he acquires an advocating angel. And whenever he commits a sin, he acquires a prosecuting angel."

It is the existence of these celestial beings – created by a person's deeds – that is the determining factor of one's ultimate fate. Quoting the Vilna Gaon, the Chofetz Chaim (*Shem Olam, Sha'ar Shemiras Hashabbos, ch. 3, end of third footnote*) completes the picture with a fairly detailed description:

One of the first things a person sees upon departing this world is the likeness of a scale. With this scale, his fate will be determined: will his merits outweigh his sins or – *chas v'shalom* – will the opposite be true?

A *bas kol* (heavenly voice) rings out. It proclaims: "All of the *mitzvos* performed by this individual throughout his lifetime should gather and assume their place." This announcement is addressed to all of the advocating angels that had been created by this Jew's good deeds. They respond and congregate on the right side of the scale, which tips – at this point – to the side of eternal life.

The *bas kol* sounds out a second time, this time summoning the transgressions committed by this person during his sojourn on earth. And this is where the real problems begin. Immediately, hordes and hordes of formidable, menacing spirits appear, the results of the numerous sins perpetrated during his lifetime.

One of the tragic aspects of this episode is that – all too often – the magnitude of one's deeds is unequal. *Davening* was performed by rote, without much concentration or effort. Devotion to Torah study left what to be desired, and charity was often given with reluctance. Overall, the person's *avodas* Hashem was perfunctory in nature, lacking both in joy and in attention to detail.

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רחל בת מורנו הרב ישעיה הלוי ע"ה
by Mr. and Mrs. Yehoshua Pinter, New York, NY

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The transgressions, on the other hand, were performed with gusto. When this individual had a juicy piece of *lashon hara* to share with his cronies, he did so with relish. The greater the rise he got out of his friends (by verbally burying another), the more enjoyment he felt. When succumbing to anger, all 248 limbs and 365 sinews of his body were engaged in the experience. In general, when submitting to temptation, he adopted a zest and eagerness that were sorely lacking from his mitzvah observance.

The result of this unfortunate state of affairs is predictable. The angels created by his half-hearted *mitzvos* are likewise weak in their constitution. The prosecuting angels, on the other hand, are robust and "healthy." They far outweigh the advocates in both strength and numbers as the scale careens toward the other side...

Of course, this is not the way things are *supposed* to be; nor, in fact, need they turn out like this. With the proper ingredients, the trend *can* be reversed.

ADD SALT AND TRIM THE FAT

The addition of salt to the *korbanos* points us in the right direction, as R' Shternbuch expounds. By being mindful of the particular *halachos* of each mitzvah and fulfilling them with a purposefulness and "geshmak" (enjoyment), the whole tenor of our *avodos* Hashem will be different. Our good deeds will be more "flavorful," and the advocating angels produced will likewise be more powerful.

Improving our mitzvah observance adds weight to our angelic advocates. There is an additional stratagem we can employ to tip the scales even farther in our favor: weakening the prosecuting angels that are the by-products of our failings. The Chofetz Chaim (*Toras Habayis, ch. 13, first footnote*) demonstrates a relatively simple way in which this can be accomplished.

The idea is to duplicate the very strategy that the Yetzer Hara uses to diminish our merits. Why do we produce "sub-standard" advocating angels? When we fulfill a mitzvah, the Yetzer Hara gets involved and dilutes our meritorious act by afflicting us with a sense of laziness at this crucial moment. Even if we do perform the deed, it is often characterized by a lack of interest.

Yet, this very tactic can be turned against the forces of evil. (Obviously, it is best to avoid sinning altogether. We speak here of someone who, unfortunately, has already succumbed to transgressing a particular sin; even at that point, it is still possible to mitigate the negative effects by removing the sense of enthusiasm and enjoyment from the misdeed.) For instance, if someone did not resist the temptation to talk in *shul*, he should immediately catch himself, and emit a (sincere) sigh of regret. In this way, the adversarial angel created by this violation will likewise be less vigorous and "weighty."

By so doing, our merits may far outweigh our misdeeds.

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