

The Importance of Doing It All the Time, Every Day

Parashat Titsaveh

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At the beginning of today's parashah we are introduced to the word *tamid*. The text speaks about the "*ner tamid*," the "eternal light." Actually, although *sometimes* the word "*tamid*" in Hebrew means "eternal," that isn't always the case, and it isn't the case here. Here it means, "regular," or "regularly." But "Regular Light" just doesn't have the same ring to it. So I think we'll stick to the term, "eternal light." It's a "regular" light because it's lit regularly, every evening. It goes out every morning, and is lit again in the evening.

This is not the only place in the parashah where the word appears. It appears later, in chapter 28 (vv. 29 and 30) when the text describes the responsibility of Aaron to wear on his heart the names of the Children of Israel when he goes before the Lord. It appears still later, in talking about the twice daily sacrifice, the "*tamid*" offering. (29:39, 42) Twice a day, during the days of the Tabernacle and, later, during the days of the Temple, the priests would offer a sacrifice of a baby lamb. Twice a day, every day, rain or shine, sleet or hail, a baby lamb would be offered, once at dawn and once at dusk.

Later on in our history, when the Temple no longer stood and it wasn't possible to offer sacrifices, those two *tamid* offerings served as the origin of our practice of reciting morning prayers and late afternoon prayers. What we call the shaharit service corresponds to the morning *tamid* and the minchah service corresponds to the afternoon *tamid* offering. Today we don't offer sheep; we offer words—words of contrition, words of praise, words of thanksgiving, words of petition. We offer prayer in place of burnt offerings. But it all began with those twice-daily offerings.

In the Midrash, there is a curious discussion: what's the most important religiously all-encompassing verse in the Bible? What's the most important mitzvah, commandment, or principle in the Torah?



Ben Zoma, a well-known sage, says, it's the Sh'ma: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One. **You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might.**" That's a good choice. It's very clearly important, spiritual, ethical.

Then, **Ben Nannas**, another sage, answers with what seems like it might be an even *better* verse: "**Love your neighbor as yourself.**" You can't beat that for an all-around feel-good Bible verse.

But then a third sage, **Ben Pazzi**, comes along and says: No. What's the most important verse in the Bible? It's a verse in our parashah, the one that comes toward the end of what we read today; namely, the verse telling us to offer the tamid offering, once at dawn and once at twilight. (Exodus 29:39, 42)

Now, what's that all about? This seems a real downer. Could it have to do with the fact that giving an offering to God is seen as supremely important, worthwhile, sacred? Well, sure, but there are lots of other offerings: offerings to be made on the Sabbath and the holidays; offerings to be made when good things happen to you (thanksgiving or celebratory offerings); offerings you make when you're feeling guilty, or when you are in fact guilty; offerings that you make out of the goodness of your heart (freewill offerings). There are lots and lots of offerings, which we can read about in the book of Leviticus. Why this one?

The answer given by the famous Maharal of Prague, the famous Rabbi Loew of Prague, is intriguing. He says (in *Netivot Olam*) that it has to do with the importance of **consistent commitment and constant engagement**. This offering is so important because it's offered every day. It therefore symbolizes an unwavering consistency of devotion.

Think about it: **Consistency. Constancy.** It doesn't quite have the ring of "**Inspiring**" or "**Spontaneous.**" Why is it so important? What's it all about? What does Rabbi Shimon ben Pazzai mean when he says that this is really, really important?

I think that what he's getting at is this: as human beings, we are rather fickle. Feelings can come and go; they can ebb and flow. It's natural. Even feelings like love: love of God or love of our fellow human being. We might be interested in one thing one day, and another thing another day. That's what it means to be a human being.

But *certain* things require a constant, consistent, regular sense of responsibility.

Human relationships, for example. If you're a mom or a dad, it isn't enough to put breakfast on the table for your kids today and then forget about doing it tomorrow because you're tired; it isn't enough to drop them off at soccer and then fail to pick them up because you got distracted while drinking a cup of coffee.

What if someone said: "You can count on me -- most of the time," or, "I've got your back – unless I don't?"

Responsibilities that pertain to relationships are on-going. They have to be. Otherwise, they don't mean very much.

The same is true of our **ethical responsibilities**:

What if someone told you: "Quite often, I'm very, very honest." You'd wonder: "Are they being honest right now?" What if someone said, "I can be trusted – most of the time." You get the idea.

And the same is true of our **ritual responsibilities**. It's a wonderful thing to get into observance by testing the waters, by trying – as some of us did last Sunday morning – to put on *tefillin*, or trying to see what it's like to keep kosher for a week, as I often suggest when I'm working with prospective converts to Judaism.

But as we know, there's a difference between occasionally eating a kosher meal and keeping kosher. We all know the difference between **occasionally** being faithful to our spouses, or **occasionally** being honest in our business dealings, or **occasionally** being honest, and being **committed** to doing these things; being committed to being that kind of a person all the time.

Actually, sometimes, ironically, it can be easier. Years ago, before I was fully committed to observance, it wasn't easy for me to be free on Friday nights and Shabbat. I wanted to observe Shabbat, but every week, I felt a pull. I remember: when I graduated from law school and was about to begin my first job as a lawyer in a downtown law firm, I realized that if it wasn't a **commitment** for me to be home on Friday nights, I was almost never going to be home on Friday nights. If I wasn't committed to refraining from work on Shabbat, I was going to end up working most Shabbatot. And so I told my firm that I was committed to Shabbat observance; it wasn't something I was interested in doing, it was something I was committed to doing. I found it so much easier than I had anticipated. No one

questioned it: in fact, people shooed me out the door as the sun got low in the sky on Friday afternoons. Of course, I worked every Sunday, but that makes sense: With commitment comes responsibility, and you may have to pay a price for making a commitment. But the fact is, I found that making the commitment brought me to a better, more wholesome place than I would have been in had I merely been interested.

I don't usually speak about the importance of consistency, or constancy in observance. Usually, I focus on getting people to *try* observance: try refraining from nonkosher food, try observing Shabbat, try coming to shul. And for good reason: if it's foreign, it can take a while to get used to it.

But for those who have tried it, I have a different message: try doing it regularly. Try keeping kosher. Try observing Shabbat, try coming to shul *regularly*.

It's funny: when it comes to ethical mitzvot, would we ever suggest to people that they should do them occasionally? Would we ever say: "Try being faithful to your spouse once in a while. See what it feels like!"? No, because we know that when it comes to **character**, we are necessarily looking for **consistency, constancy, commitment**.

Well, if ritual behavior doesn't implicate character, what does?

Religious behavior is like learning a language, or learning a sport. It involves habitual behavior that reinforces itself. My advice is simple: Yes, Ben Zoma knew what he was talking about: Loving God with all our heart, soul and might is very, very important. And yes, Ben Nannas was also right on: Loving our neighbors as ourselves – who would want it any other way?

But Ben Pazi also has something important to teach us. If we want to be fully attuned religiously, let's strive to reinforce our attachments, let's try to reinforce our character through consistent, committed behavior.

Let's try to focus on, and be guided by, the notion of **tamid**.

Shabbat shalom.

NOTES:

See: <http://www.yeshadmot.org.il/shiurContent.asp?shiurNo=220> :

אך המהר"ל (נתיבות עולם נתיב אהבת ריע פרק א) מביא:
"...בחבור עין יעקב בהקדמת הכותב שמצא בחבור מדרש אחד וזה לשונו: בן זומא אומר מצינו פסוק כולל יותר והוא שמע ישראל וגו'. בן ננס אומר מצינו פסוק כולל יותר והוא ואהבת לרעך כמוך. שמעון בן פזי אומר מצינו פסוק כולל יותר והוא את הכבש האחד תעשה בבוקר וגו'. עמד ר' פלוני על רגליו ואמר הלכה כבן פזי דכתיב ככל אשר אני מראה אותך את תבנית המשכן וגו'."
כוונת שמעון בן פזי הינה כמובן לפסוק בפרשתנו העוסק בקרבן התמיד ואומר (במדבר פרק כח פס' ד):

אֶת הַכֶּבֶשׂ אֶחָד תַּעֲשֶׂה בַבֹּקֶר וְאֵת הַכֶּבֶשׂ הַשֵּׁנִי תַעֲשֶׂה בֵּין הָעֶרְבָיִם:
מה כל כך מיוחד בפסוק זה, עד כדי כך שהמדרש מכריע כדעה זו ומסיק שפסוק זה כולל יותר מאותם פסוקים שהובאו ע"י התנאים האחרים ("שמע ישראל" או "ואהבת לרעך כמוך")?
המהר"ל (שם, לאחר שדן בדעות שאר התנאים) כותב:
"ומה שאמר בן פזי את הכבש האחד תעשה בבקר הוא כלל גדול בתורה יותר, רצה לומר מה שהאדם עובד הש"י בתמידות הגמור והוא עבדו, וכמו שהעבד לא סר עבודתו מן אדון שלו רק הוא עובדו תמיד, ולכך אמר את הכבש האחד תעשה בבוקר וגו' שזה נאמר על קרבן תמיד שחר וערב דבר זה הכלל בתורה, שתכלית המכוון שיהיה האדם עבד להקב"ה וכל שאר התורה פירושא שע"י המצות הוא עובד את בוראו לגמרי."