

Firstly I would like to express the deepest gratitude to the whole YICC community who have shown tremendous care, compassion and support to me and my family during the most difficult of times. The number of emails, messages, phone calls and the hundreds of 'visitors' to the Zoom shiva house demonstrated to us in the most tangible of ways, how lucky we are to be part of such a wonderful community. Every message, conversation and text of consolation was greatly appreciated and continues to give us strength. Being so far from our family at this time is a very difficult reality to bear but, as I said to a number of people throughout the last week, we have never felt less alone and for that we will be forever grateful. We look forward to happier times when we are free from this plague that grips the world and when we can all share in s'machot together.

This week's parasha begins with the command to Aharon and his sons "צַו אֶת־אַהֲרֹן וְאֶת־בָּנָיו לֵאמֹר זֹאת תּוֹרַת הָעֹלָה" "This is the law of the burnt offering". The Korban Olah, the burnt offering, was different to the other offerings. The Kohanim had to attend to the burning all night long and they were not allowed to eat or benefit from it at all. This the Rabbis teach, cited by Rashi, is the underlying reason for the Torah's use of the word "Tzav" meaning command. "Tzav" is a word seldom used and one which connotes a strength of expression, a stern command. The unique nature of the Korban Olah was that it involved a loss for the Kohen, he had to give up considerable time to attend to it yet tangibly got nothing out of it. This could lead the Kohen to become careless and neglectful of his duty, therefore the Torah instructs him "Tzav", as a compelling command to treat it with the utmost respect.

Our religion is often defined by actions which are difficult to observe, expensive to honor and deemed unexplainable by the onlooker. However it is just as often those mitzvot in which we take the most pride, the most care and put in the most effort. Something which has no effort attached to it and no cost involved is rarely appreciated and respected by those involved with it. This was the concern regarding the Kohen and the Burnt Offering. With seemingly no benefit to him, perhaps his attitude towards it would become lax.

A classic example of this is the power of 'keeping Shabbat' as the famous saying of Ahad Ha'am goes "More than the Jewish People have kept Shabbat, Shabbat has kept the Jews." It is the mitzvah of Shabbat that takes so much effort to observe and honor, that throughout the generations it has kept the Jewish Nation so strong.

We can also appreciate the truth of this principle as we approach Pesach. No Yom Tov or mitzvah involves as much effort, expense or 'trouble', yet it is honored in varying degrees more than any other chag in the calendar. According to research 97% of Israeli

Jews have a seder while over 70% of American Jews also mark the holiday in some way. When we sit at the seder table, we can see before our eyes the products of our labor. All the weeks of preparation have led to the climatic evening which binds together with our ancestors before us and generations to come.

With this idea together with my recent experience, my thoughts have turned to the mitzvah of Nichum Aveilim, comforting a mourner. While there can be little to no benefit to those who extend condolences or offer support to one who is grieving, we see in the Jewish community unprecedented levels of effort, care and travail in the carrying out of this important mitzvah. Like that of the Burnt Offering, we could be forgiven for thinking that there might be a degree of negligence or laxity when it comes to comforting others as there is 'nothing in it for me'. Yet my experience has been the polar opposite, as it seems that no effort has been spared to offer consolation and extend a hand of support to us following the sudden loss of my father.

Pesach begins the story of Am Yisrael, the birth of a nation, the emergence of a community. It is the effort extended to care for one another when there is no tangible benefit that sustains the community and ensures that our Nation endures. May we as a Nation and a community, no longer need the support of others as we grieve but this Pesach should mark the end of all sorrow and usher in the geulah shelaima.