

Pinchas, 5780 – Rabbi Dr. Zev Wiener

I frequently recall the wisdom that was shared with me by a former addict years ago. This person, previously enslaved to the vicious taskmaster called methamphetamine, had succeeded in breaking free against the odds and maintaining a life of sobriety. When I asked him how he managed to avoid the drug that once dominated his every waking thought, he said something that has always stuck with me: "'One day at a time' is a cliché that never really worked for me. But what does work is for me to simply tell myself each morning, 'I've decided I'm not going to use today.'" He explained that while he may not have the fortitude to avoid the drug for the rest of his life, he surely does have the fortitude to avoid it for today. And then when tomorrow rolls around, he makes the same commitment again, and so too every day. Indeed, when time is viewed in large unpunctuated spans, it becomes overwhelming and unmanageable. But when we hone in on the significance that lies in every individual day, we access many hidden blessings in our life.

Of all the Korbanot offered throughout the Jewish calendar, the Korban Tamid carries unique significance. This was the sacrifice, described in this week's Parasha (as well as Parashat Tetzaveh), that was offered by Kohanim in the Beit HaMikdash every day of the year on behalf of every Jew; one lamb every morning, and one lamb every afternoon, rain or shine. The Talmud describes the great revelry that surrounded the offering of this sacrifice each day. Interestingly, in contradistinction to all other Korbanot, the cessation of this Korban is uniquely mourned on Shiva Assar b'Tamuz, which always falls adjacent to Parashat Pinchas.

The inviolable consistency of the Korban Tamid gives rise to a fascinating Talmudic discussion. Halacha mandates that whenever a person's sacrifice is offered in the Beit HaMikdash, the person who commissioned the sacrifice must abstain from work and celebrate the day, because that day is endowed with the status of a "Yom Tov" for him (see Ohr Zarua Hil Aveilus 432, and Mishneh L'Melech Klei HaMikdash 6:10). In light of this requirement, the Talmud Yerushalmi (Pesachim 4:1) poses a tantalizing question: how is a Jew ever allowed to go to work? After all, the Korban Tamid is brought daily on behalf of every Jew in the nation. Shouldn't this sacrifice create the status of a daily Yom Tov, thereby imposing an Issur Melacha -- prohibition of labor -- on every Jew every day of the year? The Talmud answers that although this calculus is technically correct, the Torah provides a Scriptural decree to permit work: when the Torah writes elsewhere "וְאַסַּפְתָּ דגַּגְךָ" -- "and you will gather your grains," it reveals implicitly that Jews must generally be allowed to perform work. Indeed,

no society could survive through natural means if its members were perpetually prohibited from working. As such, the Korban Tamid must constitute an exception to the above rule, and not impose a prohibition of labor on those who commissioned it.

While the conclusion of the Gemarah -- that Jews are indeed permitted to go to work during the week -- may be unsurprising, the ramifications of this Gemarah's question are critical. It appears from this Gemarah that the Korban Tamid may actually establish every day of the year as a Yom Tov. If not for a technical legal exception based on Scriptural decree, labor *would* indeed be prohibited every day. Apparently, in the times of the Beit HaMikdash, there was no such thing as a "mundane" or "secular" day. Every day of life was in essence a Yom Tov, endowed with sanctity, purpose, and the opportunity to connect with the Divine in the most intimate of ways.

This perspective has far-reaching ramifications, even in our times. Although the Korban Tamid is no longer brought in the absence of a Beit HaMikdash, the Talmud teaches that the daily Shacharit prayer on some level takes the place of the morning Korban Tamid, and that the daily Mincha prayer takes the place of the afternoon Korban Tamid (the Maariv prayer relates to something else). As such, we too may consider any day upon which Shacharit and Mincha are davened -- namely, every day -- to be a holy day deserving of our attention and celebration.

So often in life, our preoccupation with pressures and obligations makes time slip by too quickly. We spend so much time worrying about what lies ahead, or regretting what we've done before, that we completely miss the unique blessings inherent in today, which we will never get back again. Ever. Days blend together into weeks and into decades. Sure, we punctuate our year with special times like holidays and anniversaries, but the vast majority of our life is relegated to insignificance. Who remembers (or cares to remember) what he or she did on a random Tuesday last November? Many of us live from vacation to vacation, and can't wait for the days in between to pass so we can experience the times that really matter. The Korban Tamid dispels this mindset. No matter how unremarkable today might seem, never overlook its significance.

As my addicted patient taught me, there is immense benefit that comes from consciously living each day as an individually significant unit. We cease to be overwhelmed by the immensity of the challenges that lie ahead, and rather can exert our full efforts towards smaller, more manageable goals of today. This perspective is especially relevant as this pandemic drags on. While some people

initially found the change from routine manageable and perhaps even relaxing, more and more people seem to be feeling burned out and exhausted from the ongoing duration without a clearly identifiable end, wondering how much longer they will be able to handle this. Although this feeling may be inevitable on some level -- especially for those of us who are living alone in isolation -- this daily consciousness can help us find the strength to continue to persevere. The Korban Tamid reminds us not to overlook each day. Don't pointlessly waste valuable mental energy on concerns related to the future that we cannot change. Focus on the specialness of today. And then tomorrow, focus on tomorrow. Live each day as it comes.

On a deeper level, though, seeing every day as a "Yom Tov" unto itself not only prevents us from being overwhelmed by long time spans, it elevates our lives with profound meaning. As human beings, it is too easy to forget the inestimable value of time. When time seems endless (which it never actually is) and insignificant, what point is there to today? If today is "just" a typical day, who cares how I spend it? Whether I accomplish something or squander the day with meaningless pursuits isn't such a big deal -- I can just do it tomorrow. Time becomes something to "get through" as opposed to something to celebrate. But if today is a unique Yom Tov, one which is to be cherished and never experienced again, I live with a sense of excitement and purpose. Every moment becomes a gem, a singular opportunity to serve the Almighty and improve the lives of others. I become keenly aware of the dictum, *היום קצר והמלאכה מרובה* -- the day is short, and the work is great (Avot 2:15), and cannot possibly feel bored.

As we emerge from mourning the loss of the Korban Tamid on Shiva Assar b'Tamuz, perhaps it is appropriate for each of us to perpetuate its legacy by consciously living its message. Let our Shacharit and Mincha prayers awaken us daily to the sanctity and opportunity inherent in even the most mundane of days, and may we merit to offer the true Korban Tamid speedily in our times.