

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Emor
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How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

Emor – The surprising connection between Korbanot and Tzedakah

This week we read Parashat Emor. The first part of the Parasha deals with special laws pertaining to the Kohanim. The second part of the Parasha describes the festivals in the Jewish calendar and the accompanying service that was performed in the Bet Hamikdash. This includes the Shalosh Regalim when the nation would gather together in Yerushalayim. These are special times when we can feel particularly close to Hashem.

After discussing Pesach and Shavuot, and before moving on to Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur and Sukkot, the Torah interrupts its description of the festivals with the following short passage that seems to be out of place:

When you reap the harvest of your Land you shall not completely remove the corner of your field during your harvesting, and you shall not gather up the gleanings of your harvest. Rather, you shall leave these for the poor person and for the stranger. I am Hashem, your G-d. (Vayikra 23:22).

This passage refers to some of the agricultural gifts that we are commanded to leave for the poor. When harvesting, we must leave a corner of the field untouched (called פאה) for the poor to gather. Similarly, any produce that falls to the ground during the harvesting process (called לקט) must also be left for the poor.¹ Caring for the poor and sharing our wealth with those that are less fortunate is certainly a fundamental principal of major importance. But why was this passage placed here right in the middle of the discussion of the festivals?

As is well known, the Jewish festivals follow the agricultural cycle. Pesach is the time of the barley harvest. Shavuot is the time of the wheat harvest. And Sukkot is the time when all of the produce from the previous year is brought inside before the rainy season begins.² Perhaps that is why the Torah needs to remind us here of these important agricultural laws, while describing the annual cycle of the festivals.

However, Rashi provides us with another, somewhat surprising explanation:

*To teach you that whoever gives לקט, שכחה, and פאה to the poor in the appropriate manner, is deemed as if he had **built** the Bet Hamikdash and **offered up sacrifices within it**.*³

We have been given prayer service as a substitute for offering korbanot on the Bet Hamikdash.⁴ As the pasuk states, “and let us substitute [for] bulls [the offering of] our lips”.⁵ The Gemara also teaches

¹ In practice, the poskim have ruled that these halachot do not generally apply these days since poor people do not come to fields to collect produce and they give up on them.

² See Darchai Noam for Parashat Noach 5775 where we discussed the parallels between the spiritual reality of the Jewish calendar and the physical reality of the annual agricultural cycle.

³ Rashi’s commentary to Vayikra 23:22, based on the Midrash (Torat Kohanim 23:175). Rashi includes in his list another gift to the poor that is not mentioned in this pasuk – shich’cha (שכחה). As noted above, these agricultural halachot do not generally apply today for practical reasons (see Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah Siman 332). Of course, we still have an obligation to take care of the poor by giving them tzedakah and so on.

⁴ See Brachot 26b.

⁵ Hosea 14:3.

that learning and reciting the Torah portions that deal with the korbanot also functions as a substitute and provides us with atonement as if we had actually offered those korbanot.⁶ Rashi's explanation quoted above suggests that giving to the poor is another effective substitute for offering korbanot.

We might have presumed that the best way to recapture the full experience of the festivals in the times of the Bet Hamikdash was to learn about the rituals that were performed then, or to learn about the Bet Hamikdash more generally. Or perhaps to visit Yerushalayim.

(There is a relatively new attraction in the Old City of Jerusalem called "A Look into the Past". This is a virtual reality experience that takes one back to the time of Bet Hamikdash and gives us a real sense of what the Bet Hamikdash was like in all its glory. In a building overlooking the Kotel plaza you sit in special chairs and don VR goggles and have an amazing immersive experience. Of course, it's incomparable to the real thing. But these days, it's probably the closest that we can get. Maybe that would be a good way to recapture the excitement of going to the Bet Hamikdash during the festivals.)

But the Torah teaches us that we can gain the experience and holiness of offering korbanot (and even the merit of having built the Bet Hamikdash!) by simply giving tzedakah to the poor! This is very surprising. Offering korbanot is a mitzvah ben adam l'makom (a mitzvah between man and Hashem), whereas tzedakah is a mitzva ben adam l'chavero (a mitzva between man and man). Simply giving tzedakah doesn't seem to be related to building the Bet Hamikdash and offering korbanot.

We could suggest that korbanot and giving gifts to the poor are similar in that they both involve giving up part of our possessions. Giving tzedakah to the poor is an act of kindness to others in need, just like the parts of the korbanot that were given to the Kohanim. In both an act of tzedakah and the offering of a korban, we are "sacrificing" some of our produce because Hashem wants us to do so. When we offer a korban to Hashem, it is clear that we are giving to Him. But when we give to the poor, it is not as clear that this too is an act for Hashem. So the Torah reminds us (at the end of the pasuk quoted above) that "I am Hashem, your G-d" – that we are also giving to and pleasing Hashem in this case of giving to the poor. Hashem is the Father of us all and is happy when we share with His children, our brothers and sisters. As any parent knows, when an act of kindness is done for their child, the parent feels personally grateful and happy.

The Hebrew word for "korban" shares the same root with the word "karov" which means to come close. By offering a korban we are coming close to Hashem. Similarly, by giving tzedakah to the poor we are emulating Hashem, fulfilling His will, and taking care of his children. In that way we are also coming close to Hashem, just like when we bring a korban. Furthermore, in both cases, giving away part of our possessions for a higher purpose requires us to have emunah that what we have left will still be enough to meet our needs and if not, that Hashem will replace what we gave away.

Let's try something this week:

1. The next time we give tzedakah, remember that we are not just giving to the recipient, it is also comparable to offering a korban to Hashem and drawing closer to Him.
2. Remember that when we give Tzedakah to a poor person who is in need, we are probably getting more out of the transaction than the recipient.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

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⁶ Taanit 27b.