



PARSHAS TETZAVEH – MR SIMCHA HANDLEY

The Torah reading for this week deals, among other things, with the twice daily Tamid offering: chapter 29, verses 38-41.

This offering appears in our text immediately after the offerings dedicating Aharon and his sons to be Cohanim, in order to teach us that the process of dedication is complete only when the community as a whole is using the Mizbeach.

There is some discussion among our commentators whether we brought the Tamid on a regular basis in the desert, or after settling the land of Israel. The question is asked by Ibn Ezra and others, where would we have got that many sheep and that much olive oil in the desert? However, given that we left Egypt with our flocks and herds and the wealth of Egypt and were not far from trade routes, it seems possible we could have bought them.

There are various reasons given for the purpose of this offering. According to Malbim, it was to uproot idolatry, in particular sun worship. Other commentators see it as significant that it was offered at the time of day one would normally eat, that is to say first thing in the morning before setting out for work and towards evening when returning home. It is thus an expression of gratitude for life and livelihood, and recognition of the mastery of G-d.

According to the Gemara (Tamid, 31b) the Tamid was not completely tied up before being offered. Instead, it was bound hind leg to foreleg, in remembrance of the binding of Yitzhak Avinu. The Rambam goes further (Hilchot Tamidim uMusafim, 1:10) and says it was not bound at all, but held down by hand. Both these sources state that we were going out of our way not to imitate the heathen. This gives us an insight into the essence of Divine service: neither coercion nor passive submission, but engagement of the whole person with G-d.

I haven't found the source for this story, but I heard once of someone who asked his Rabbi what was his favourite passage of Scripture. The Rabbi answered that he probably did not have one, but if pushed, he would choose the verses dealing with the Tamid. Why is that? Because, on principle, it is a greater source of merit to do something because you are commanded to, than to do it voluntarily. It is human nature to resist orders. Here we are reading of an offering to G-d that was ordered to be done twice each day, no matter what the circumstances. How much merit we must have earned by bringing the offering!

Postscript: In connection with Pesach preparations, my attention has been drawn to a product known as chometz powder. You sprinkle it on your carpet, wait a few hours, and then Hoover it up. All the chometz on your carpet sticks to it, thus leaving you with a chometz free surface. It has been endorsed by the rabbinate of Chelm. Please contact me for further details.