

Being Thankful

When do we pray to G-d? Often we pray when we are in need of assistance. However, wouldn't it make sense to pray for the bounty of blessings that we have? In our new weekday Siddur, the Koren Ani Tefilah, Sir Rabbi Jonathan Sacks comments on the phrase יעמס לנו—he burdens us (With his blessings) “Yet how many of us focus on the things we don't have instead? Think of all of the good things in your life that others do not have. They would look at us and say that we are burdened with blessings. We need to recognize it to. What do I have that many others do not?”¹

One of the five types of sacrifice mentioned in Parshat VaYikra and reiterated this week in Parshat Tzav is the Zevah Shlamim, the sacrifice of well-being. This is the only one of the five sacrifices which is optional, brought by one who is appreciative of his/her bounty to thank G-d for all that s/he has. The sacrifice contains within it the word for שלום, or peace. Growing up, I often thought that peace meant no conflict, an end to arguments and fighting. Now, I recognize that a better

¹ Rabbi Jonathan Sacks comment in The Koren Ani Tefila Siddur, Iyun Tefila, p. 249.

definition of peace, of שלום, is the word שלמות, a sense of wholeness; that every aspect of your life is at peace, aligned and well. When you have an inner peace, you are aware of the bounty that you have and there is reason to rejoice, giving some of the best of what you have to G-d and having a festive meal where you eat the rest.

We acknowledge our gratitude at morning minyan through reciting מזמור לתודה, a psalm of thanksgiving.² In that psalm we proclaim עבדו את יהוה בשמחה, באו לפניו ברנה, “Let us serve G-d with joy, let us come before Him with singing.”³ Every day we are supposed to show our gratitude to G-d for creating us, for giving us a unique destiny and mission in life. We do so by being joyous, going through our day bursting with passion and enthusiasm for being alive and for being able to make a difference in the world.

It is no accident that we read Parshat Tzav most years on Shabbat HaGadol, the Sabbath immediately preceding Passover. On Passover we demonstrate our joy for all that we have, especially at the beginning of

² Psalm 100

³ Psalm 100:2

the מגיד section, where we tell the story of Passover. We hold up the Matza with our front door open and say כל דכפין ייתי ויכול, כל דצריך ייתי all who are hungry, come and eat, all who are in need, let them come and celebrate Passover.” This message was written in Aramaic, the spoken language of the commoner, precisely to indicate that no matter what one’s education, knowledge or background is, they are welcomed in as a royal guest for this festive meal.

Parshat Tzav is a portion about command, as the word Tzav is a short form of Mitzvah. However, it can also be used in the sense of instructing others, which is why it has been chosen for Educators Shabbat. Educators have the blessing of instructing others, not only imparting knowledge but also teaching them about themselves and the world in which we live. Often this involves teachers learning from their students as well. After all, Rebbi said in the Talmud הרבה תורה למדתי מכולן; “I have learned a lot of Torah from everyone;” ומרבתי, ומחבירי יותר מהם, ומתלמידי יותר מכולן

from my teachers and from my peers more than them, but most of all from my students.”⁴

Today we show gratitude to our educators for the difference they have made in our lives and how they have spiritually touched us through their passion and enthusiasm for their craft. Think back to the best teacher you’ve ever had. What made that person so great? I imagine the content that was taught has a secondary role to how that person made us feel and/or how s/he brought the subject to life. Our educators work hard hours trying to personally connect with each student and often don’t realize the impact they’ve made until decades later if that student calls them up and lets them know or comes back to visit.

To our educators-thank you for what you do each and every day to inspire us as well as the next generations to be people of ethics, of value and mentschim. May we continue to celebrate your successes and emulate the example you have set for us.

⁴ Babylonian Talmud Makkot 10a