The Secret of Consistency

The Mishna1 tells us of the five tragedies we commemorate on 17 Tammuz. We remember the breaking of the luchot, the walls of Jerusalem being breached, an idol being placed in the Heichal, and a heathen king publicly burning a Sefer Torah. The final event recorded is that this was the day the Korban Tamid stopped. This pair of korbanot bracketed all other korbanot. It was the first and last one brought each day. Why did Chazal consider this event on a par with all the other heinous crimes? All korbanot are special and have deep symbolism. What is unique about this pair?

There is a fascinating question discussed in Zevachim (90b). The Mishna states the well known halachic principle that תָּדִיר וְשֶׁאֵינוֹ תָּדִיר תָּדִיר קְדֵם. When there are two obligations to fulfill, the more common one takes precedence. The Mishna also states that when there are two korbanot to offer, the more holy one takes precedence. The Gemara’s question is what if תָּדִיר וְשֶׁאֵינוֹ תָּדִיר. When there are two korbanot to offer, the more common one takes precedence. The Gemara does not reach a conclusion, and thus Rambam (Temidim 9:2) codifies that one has either option available.

How can the Gemara even entertain that common beats holy? Isn’t holy the ultimate factor? What’s so significant about being common and performed more often, that it could even balance out with holy?

Ein Yaakov quotes a much-discussed Midrash, as to what is the most inclusive and comprehensive verse in the Torah. After citing the opinion of Rav Steinsaltz, and that of Rabbi Akeidat Yitzchak, the Midrash quotes the peculiar third opinion, the verse describing the Korban Tamid – וְהַכֹּל לְפִי רֹב הַמַּעֲשֶׂה. How does this verse keep company with the first two, more obvious suggestions? The commentaries explain that the secret of the tamid is consistency. Serving and working every day, day in, day out, not missing or skipping any opportunity. That’s the secret to a successful religious life and lifestyle. It’s not about the one-time major mitzvah, but the day-to-day service, the yomi obligations, the Torah, chesed, and tefillah, that fill our daily lives.

Rav Steinsaltz (Chayei Olam) notes the contrast between Vayeira – filled with earth-shattering events, meetings with angels, towns being destroyed by Heaven, the elderly having children, and of course, Akeidat Yitzchak – immediately followed by Chayei Sarah, containing very mundane, earthly topics; burial of a loved one, as well as finding a wife for a son. How should we understand this contrast? Rav Steinsaltz suggests that yes, there are various Vayeira moments in our lives, but what really makes a difference are the Chayei Sarah days, where the mundane daily service needs to be sanctified and uplifted.

What is so crucial and defining about this part of our life? Why is this, the common, at least comparable to קָדוֹשׁ, the holy? Maybe the answer is embedded in Mishna Avot (3:15): הֲדֹלֶל לִפְפוֹרֵךְ וְהָעָשֶׂה – All is according to the action. What does this mean? Rambam explains that if one has 1,000 shekels to give to charity, he should give less to more recipients rather than more to fewer recipients. Why? Because the more we do, the more actions we perform, the more it shapes who we are. As the Sefer HaChinuch writes constantly, תורה מקטע ראשון werden die heiligen Tugenden – our hearts are drawn after our actions. We are influenced by what we do. And the more we do it, the more it conditions us to the value being expressed by that action.

This then, is the greatness of יום ידיע, the more common, and the significance of the Korban Tamid. This korban was a microcosm of our entire avodah. Day in, day out. Serving G-d each and every day of our lives. Chazal understood that once this symbol was taken away from us – along with all the other tragic events of the day – it was worthy of fasting.

Our job, in this dark time of the year, is to reinvigorate our day-to-day activities, to recognize that G-d loves the tamid, the common, and to persevere in our daily avodah. Davening each day, performing chesed for those in need, carving out time to learn Torah each and every day – these are the actions that will shape our hearts. Let it be His will that we not only learn the message of the Korban Tamid, but merit to actually offer it in the Third Mikdash, may it come speedily in our days.

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1  Ta’anit 26b.