



Sermon Tidbits

MARCH 23, 2015

Parashat Tzav – Shabbat HaGadol

Through His Pocketbook

Command Aaron (Leviticus 6:2)

צו את אהרן (ויקרא ו:ב)

Let's say you want to get to know someone well; not what movies they like or their favorite colors, but what really makes them tick. What's important to them? What do they really value? The Talmud (Eiruvim 65) offers three keys to get beyond the external and unlock a person's true personality, "Said Rabbi Ilai: Through three things a person is recognized: *b'koso*—through his cup; *b'kiso*—through his pocket; *u'bek'aso*— and through his anger." *B'koso*—"In his cup"—what's he like when inebriated? Is he loud, offensive and indifferent, or quiet, pensive and thoughtful? *B'ka'aso*—"In his anger"—what makes them angry? A foolish, meaningless slight or a terrible injustice? *B'kiso*—"In his pocket"—on what does he spend his money? Does he invest it wisely and give to the poor, or waste it foolishly or even maliciously, using his money to harm others? If we want to really know a person's values, we need to look at how they spend their money.

Parashat Tzav highlights this very same idea. Moses is told, "Command Aaron and his sons saying this is the law of the burnt offering..." (6:2) While Moses is usually given a commandment without special fanfare, here he is specifically told to "command" Aaron. Why the special emphasis? Rashi (on verse 2) explains that the extra emphasis is, "the language of alacrity for now and for future generations." Why do burnt offerings require a special language of alacrity not found elsewhere? Rashi continues, "Said Rabbi Shimon: Scripture must always encourage alacrity where there is monetary expense." No one ate the meat of the animal or the meal-offering; the priests burnt it completely on the altar of the Temple. It would be easy to wonder why one was commanded to watch his hard earned money go up in smoke. For this reason the biblical text specifically emphasizes the importance of this commandment. Precisely because we find it hard to spend our money, we are commanded to do so in this case with alacrity, without delay.

How we spend our money speaks volumes about our values, both good and bad. And, what's true for us as individuals applies as well to groups, and even countries. No country has extra money. Governments—even ours—constantly juggle between pressing needs and the funds available to meet those needs. And yet, despite this constant struggle, as American citizens, we take great pride in our nation's willingness to invest in freedom and democracy around the world. While [American foreign aid](#) represents a very small percentage of the overall budget—just one cent on the dollar—foreign aid funding provides economic development, disaster relief aid, vaccinations, humanitarian missions like preventing HIV/AIDS and numerous other projects that bringing development to third-world countries.

Israel also [sets aside money for others in need](#), providing disaster relief and assistance across the globe. After the devastating Haiti earthquake, Israel set up an emergency hospital to treat victims. The Jewish state has given emergency medical aid and transferred medics into Gaza to assist a population suffering under the iron fist of Hamas terrorists. How do Palestinians spend their money? They make very different choices. While they can't even afford to pay their own employees, the *Algemeiner Journal* [reported](#) that, "The Palestinian Authority Ministry of Finance announced...its intention to pay the families of martyrs and [the] wounded 100% of their monthly stipends, despite the financial hardship experienced by the PA." Regular employees took a forty percent pay cut while terrorists and their family members still received their full, regular payments. Rabbi Ilai's dictum reminds us that the choices a government makes reveal its true colors and speak volumes about its essential, underlying values—for better, and sometimes, for much, much worse. ■

Asking Elijah's Questions – Shabbat Hagadol

הנה אנכי שלח לכם את אליה הנביא (מלאכי ג:כג) Behold I will send you Elijah the Prophet (Malachi 3:23)

The world is full of unanswerable questions: After they make Styrofoam, what do they ship it in? Before they invented drawing boards, what did they go back to? How can you tell when sour cream goes bad? If the number 2 pencil is the most popular, why is it still number 2? What's the answer to these questions? We might say that they have no answer, or that there's no correct answer.

But, if this were a page in the Talmud, the Sages would offer a different answer. Whenever the Talmud poses a question to which there is no apparent answer, the Talmud offers a reassuring response: *Teiku*. While colloquially the word means, "There is no answer," *Teiku* is an acrostic for a saying: *Tishbi yetaretz kushiyot v'abayot*—"Elijah (of Tishbi) will answer questions and conundrums." We may not have the answer now, but one day, when Elijah the Prophet returns to this world, he will have the answers. Fascinatingly, despite the fact that the editors of the Talmud knew that many questions had no answer, they still included the questions for study. Sometimes, the question itself is important, even when you know that there is no ready answer at hand.

Over the next four days, we will mention Elijah the Prophet twice: once today, on Shabbat Hagadol, and again on the night of the Seder, when we fill the fifth "Cup of Elijah" and welcome the prophet into our homes. Yet, what is Elijah coming for? What role does the ancient prophet play during the Passover season? The Sages debated this exact question in the Mishnah. (Eduyot 8:7) While some suggest that Elijah will address issues of lineage, Maimonides ruled according to the position of the Sages that, "[Elijah's arrival will come] not to bring close or distance [families in Israel], but instead to make peace in the world, as it is written, 'Behold, I will send you Elijah the Prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers...'" (Malachi 3:23-24) Ra'avad, in his commentary on Maimonides writes that Elijah will bring peace "between Israel and the nations [of the world]..."

The world is faced with seemingly unanswerable problems, so many of which revolve around the Jewish people and the state of Israel. We struggle with so many difficult problems: How can Israel make peace with neighbors, especially when several of those neighbors have been overridden by terrorist groups bent on its destruction? How can a Jewish state negotiate with the Palestinian Authority, which now officially maintains a unity arrangement with Hamas, whose charter calls for Israel's destruction? How can a Jewish state which has, for years, taken steps to reach a peace agreement, be expected to want peace when no one will sit at the negotiating table, and that partner instead takes unilateral steps against Israel in international fora such as the United Nations? While no deal with Iran is surely better than a bad deal, how then does the world stop Iran from building a nuclear weapon?

Passover is a night of questions. It's an educational event we share with family and friends, where we study, recite and learn. But we also ask. The Seder is specifically designed to encourage participants to ask questions related to the challenging issues of freedom and slavery—of persecution, anti-Semitism, and Jewish redemption.

Perhaps these questions, to which we cannot see the clear answers, will be the first questions Elijah addresses upon his return. He will bring peace by answering these great questions that perplex the world. That does not allow us to sit back and wait for Elijah to come down and solve our problems. Just as the Sages in the Talmud continued to ask questions, the lack of clear answers to these very real questions doesn't excuse us from asking them. We must continue to not only ask, but to work towards finding answers, even if we cannot readily see an answer. When we ask these challenging questions and work hard to answer them, we too bring peace to the world. We must, and we will continue to seek the elusive answers to the questions that threaten our very survival. ■

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