



GROWTH

At The SHABBAT TABLE

PARSHAT PINCHAS

Freedom in the Dungeon

Many years ago, deep in Soviet Russia, there lived a devoted Torah teacher named R' Eliezer. Despite enormous danger, he dedicated his life to teaching Jewish children - risking everything to keep the flame of Torah alive. The children adored him, but everyone knew the risk. Torah education was strictly forbidden, and one day, the inevitable happened: the authorities found him and whisked him away. He was taken away without warning, subjected to a sham trial, and sentenced on the spot. His punishment? Eighteen months of solitary confinement.

Any prison term would have been brutal, but this was a Siberian gulag - a place synonymous with cold, cruelty, and despair. And solitary confinement there? It was considered a living death.

For eighteen months, he disappeared from the world. But then, to everyone's astonishment, he returned. He walked into the synagogue like a lion, took an aliya to the Torah, and recited Birkat HaGomel, the blessing of gratitude for surviving danger. People stared in disbelief. "How did you survive?" they asked. "How did you keep your mind intact, alone in that cell?"

Rabbi Eliezer shared his secret: "They locked me in a tiny box of a cell, no bigger than nine feet by nine feet. I was inside for 23 hours and 45 minutes a day, with just 15 minutes of yard time. But from the moment I entered that cell, I made a decision: they will not dictate who I am or what I become.

"In the corner of my cell was a single floor tile. I made a rule for myself: I will never step on that tile. That tile became my declaration of freedom. Every day, by choosing where I would or would not step, I reminded myself that I was still in control. When they let me out for 15 minutes, I would return after 14 minutes and 30 seconds. I made sure that I chose when I would come and go - not them. That's how I survived, by reminding myself every single day that I was still a free man. Free to choose. Free to think. Free to decide who I am."

At times, we find ourselves imprisoned by the yetzer hara, bound in chains of temptation and desire. Yet true freedom begins the moment we resolve, with unwavering determination, to take control. When we choose to govern our actions, regardless of the struggle, we reclaim our inner strength. In that space - where we become the master over even one area of our lives—we unlock the power to endure, to rise above, and to withstand whatever challenges life brings.

(Shared by R' Yechiel Spero)

"Focus on Hashem's ability, not your inability."

Are You a Morning Person?

Every relationship has two basic alternate forms. Whether it be with one's spouse, friends, parents, or even with G-d, a person can either be motivated by selfishness or selflessness. Do you only love (fill in the blank) because you love yourself, or is it because of pure unconditional devotion to the beloved?

This week's Parsha discusses various communal sacrifices offered on different occasions, including the daily *tamid*, which was brought every morning and evening. Generally, *korbanot* are categorized into those which are partially eaten by the donors and/or *kohanim* (e.g. *korban shelamim*) and those which are totally burnt on the altar with no human consumption. The *tamid*, being a *korban olah*, is the latter.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe gave an astounding interpretation behind the deep spiritual significance of this phenomenon. Each type of *korban* alludes to a form of service to the Creator - those which we can eat resembling a relationship forged through some personal motive (be it reward, satisfaction, fear, etc.) and those which we can't signifying purely selfless dedication. In the commandment of offering the *olah* every morning and evening, the Torah points to a crucial and groundbreaking message.

It may be easy to serve G-d wholeheartedly in the 'mornings' of life - when everything feels perfect and dandy. In moments of happiness and bliss, who wouldn't want to channel Divine energy?

However, things get hazier as the sun sets and 'evening' takes over. Suddenly, it becomes much more challenging to hold onto the relationship when times get tough or when we're not feeling the same level of clarity - when we're not soaring as we were in the 'morning.' If one's "religious life" is only inspired by some personal gain (resembling a *korban* from which humans partake), then indeed - in such moments, the natural response is to let go.

In introducing the concept of the *korban tamid*, G-d gives us the secret sauce of strong and lasting relationships. Just as this *olah* - signifying the ultimate bliss of a selflessly-motivated relationship and full devotion to the Creator - is offered every single day, both in the morning and evening, the Torah implores us to strive for that same consistency in being fully present and committed no matter what life throws our way, be it 'mornings' or 'evenings.' If things are amazing or life is an absolute wreck, it doesn't alter the relationship if it's founded on the beloved and not on oneself. The same is true of interpersonal relationships - to build one that endures and thrives, we need to incorporate this timeless message of the *korban tamid*.

(Based on a d'var Torah shared by R' YY Jacobson)