



The Value of Consistency

What happened with a pig in the Temple during the Jewish civil war, and what does it say about us today?

The Fast

It's interesting how we often take minor inconveniences too seriously. When we reflect on it, it's a testament to our good fortune in living in a free and democratic society that we have the luxury to complain about relatively trivial matters.

We grumble if we have to walk too far from the parking lot to the shopping mall or if the service at a fast-food restaurant isn't quick enough.

But are these issues truly significant? Instead of stressing over the small stuff, we should be grateful for the major blessings we enjoy today.

This brings us to the upcoming Tuesday, which marks Shiva Asar b'Tammuz, the 17th day of the Hebrew month of Tammuz. This is a fast day that begins "the Three Weeks," a period of mourning for several tragedies in Jewish history.

According to the Mishnah (Tractate Taanis 4:6), five major calamities befell our ancestors on this day. These include the breaking of the Luchos (the Two Tablets) and the breaching of Jerusalem's walls during a siege in the Second Temple period.

The Civil War

In addition to these events, the Mishnah connects this day to this week's Torah portion.

In Parshas Pinchas, which we read today, we learn about the Korbanos, the sacrifices regularly brought in the Beis Hamikdash, the Holy Temple.

The first sacrifice mentioned is the Tamid, the Continuous Sacrifice. The Torah (Bamidbar 28:3-4) states, "This is the fire offering which you shall offer to the Lord: two unblemished lambs in their first year each day as a continual burnt offering. One lamb you shall offer up in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer up in the afternoon."

This means the Jewish Nation was required to bring a daily sacrifice each morning before any other sacrifice and a second sacrifice each afternoon after all other sacrifices.

This mitzvah only applies when the Temple is standing in Jerusalem, so it is not practiced today.

At the end of Tractate Sotah, the Talmud describes a civil war involving Jerusalem about 200 years before the destruction of the Second Temple. This conflict was between two Hasmonean brothers, both vying for kingship.

We are all familiar with the Chanukah story and the heroic Judah Maccabee, who led the Hasmonean clan in overthrowing the Greek Empire and reestablishing Jewish sovereignty. He became the king of the Jewish Nation, and his descendants followed suit.

Tragically, the civil war erupted between his grandsons, Hurkinus and Aristobolus. Hurkinus laid siege to Jerusalem, where Aristobolus was holed up. Hurkinus even enlisted Roman soldiers to help overpower his brother and the Jewish army inside the city.

Despite the turmoil, the Beis Hamikdash staff and the city's inhabitants continued to bring the Korban Tamid. Although lambs were scarce due to the siege, the Talmud recounts that the soldiers inside Jerusalem would lower a basket of money over the wall and bring up lambs in exchange.

Amidst the chaos, economic activity persisted—the group inside the city handed over cash, and the group outside provided two live sheep in return.

An elderly Jewish man inside the city told the Romans that as long as the Jews brought the Tamid every day, the city would not fall.

The next day, as usual, the Jews inside lowered the basket with money. However, instead of sheep, the forces outside sent up animals that are non-kosher and unfit for sacrifice in the Beis Hamikdash. They sent live pigs.

Why Was It So Important

You may ask: What's so catastrophic about missing the Korban Tamid just once, that it ranks alongside the shattering of the Luchos and the destruction of Jerusalem?

For starters, the Tamid holds a unique significance.

In the Temple, many sacrifices were brought, each requiring substantial funds. To support this enormous operation—essentially a giant factory—funds had to be raised, much like today. The Beis Hamikdash sold the honors and rights of funding various sacrifices to wealthy families. For instance, the Smith family of Jerusalem—well, they didn't have names like Smith back then, but you get the point—might donate the costs of the firewood used by the Temple for a year, while the Jones family might sponsor the wine and oil, and so on.

However, the Korban Tamid was distinct from all other contributions. This sacrifice was funded by the annual tax collected from every Jew in those ancient times: the "Machtzis HaShekel," the half-shekel silver coin that every Jew had to donate to the Beis Hamikdash once a year.

Regarding the Machtzis HaShekel, the Torah states, "The rich shall not increase and the poor shall not decrease"—and it was from this money that the Korban Tamid was funded.

In other words, this sacrifice embodied the unity and equality of the Jewish people—every Jew had equal "ownership" of the Korban Tamid.

On A Deeper Level

But there's something deeper going on here.

Ask an average Jew which Torah verse best expresses their entire belief system, and you'll likely hear "Shma Yisrael..."—"Hear O Israel, the L-rd is our G-d, the L-rd is One." Other Jews might say, "Bereishis bara Elokim..."—"In the beginning, G-d created the heaven and the earth."

Interestingly, the Talmud itself debates this very question.

In the Talmud Yerushalmi (Tractate Nedarim 9:4), Rabbi Akiva states, "'And you shall love your neighbor as yourself': this is a major principle in the Torah." However, Shimon ben Pazi offers a different perspective, citing, "The one lamb you shall offer up in the morning, (referring to the Korban Tamid)." Rabbi So-and-so then stands up and

declares, “The law is according to ben Pazi.”

At first glance, this seems perplexing. Debating whether “Love your neighbor as yourself” or “Shma Yisroel” is the most significant verse is understandable. But the Korban Tamid? What’s so important about that?

The Korban Tamid symbolized much more than just daily service to G-d or even the unity of the Jewish Nation. Unlike all other sacrifices, the Korban Tamid was unchanging.

Some sacrifices were brought only on certain holidays. Some were for atonement of specific sins. But the Korban Tamid was offered every day, regardless of the time of year: in the middle of winter, during holidays, even on Yom Kippur; in hot weather, cold weather, peacetime, and wartime. The Korban Tamid was brought tamid—constantly, consistently.

Thus, the Korban Tamid symbolizes the concept of consistency.

This, my friends, is the secret of Jewish survival.

The secret of Jewish survival isn’t found in the joyous holidays or the special days, but in the daily, seemingly mundane observance of the same mitzvah day in and day out. It might not bring excitement or passion, but it provides consistency and discipline. It is this steadfastness in performing our daily mitzvos, regardless of circumstances, that the Korban Tamid represents.

For instance, consider a family that doesn’t describe itself as “religious,” “Orthodox,” or “Chabad,” but has the custom of lighting Shabbos candles every Friday evening before dark.

Imagine they’re on vacation in Orlando at Disney World, and late Friday afternoon, they’re stuck in a long line for a popular ride. (I know someone who once waited 2.5 hours at Disneyland in California for the Space Tours ride, which lasts about five minutes.)

The sun is setting, and the parents know the kids won’t be thrilled about leaving the line to rush back to the hotel to light Shabbos candles. But a commitment is a commitment, so the parents drag the kids back to their hotel suite just in time to light Shabbos candles.

What just happened here? Lighting Shabbos candles is an ordinary mitzvah. It’s not lighting Chanukah candles or preparing for Yom Kippur. It’s an ordinary Friday. Despite the inconvenience, the parents

insist, "We light Shabbos candles every Friday afternoon, and we're not making an exception this time."

So they stop everything to light Shabbos candles. And that, my friends, is their Korban Tamid.

Such behavior, the Rebbe says, brings G-d the greatest pride and joy.