

# Parsha Ponders

Vayikra / Zachor | March 15, 2019 | 8 Adar II 5779

## *Developing love for Hashem<sup>1</sup>*

דבר אל-בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם אדם כי-יקריב מכם קרבן ליקוק וגו'

Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: "A person, when they [want to] bring an offering to Hashem..."<sup>2</sup>

We find many *mitzvos* that aren't outright obligations. Instead, the Torah left it up to the volunteering of the individual. For example, with the donations to the *Mishkan*, the Torah specified<sup>3</sup> for each person to give as much as they wanted. We also see this by voluntary offerings, such as with the *Olah* (elevation), *Shelamim* (peace), or *Menachos* (flour) offerings. There's no absolute obligation to bring these offerings, but they're available for those who want to take advantage. How much *terumah* a person wants to give to the Kohen is essentially their choice. These types of *mitzvos* require clarification. If they are part of our Divine service, why weren't their performance made obligatory, and their quality and quantity well-defined? If they are not part of our Divine service, why are they even taught in the Torah?

However, it would appear that voluntary service for the sake of Heaven, doing that which isn't completely obligatory, is a unique and special form of serving Hashem. In fact, it's a fundamental ingredient in achieving love of Hashem<sup>4</sup>. At first it seems difficult to understand how the Torah can obligate an emotion, which wouldn't seem to be within a person's control. However, the very fact that each of us are commanded to love Hashem<sup>5</sup> shows that it is something within our ability to attain. How can a person who doesn't have this emotional connection to their creator ignite this feeling deep within themselves?

Our Rabbis from long ago already taught us various strategies to develop this emotion. The Rambam suggests<sup>6</sup> contemplating the genius of Hashem seen in His world and creations, which would engender a great desire to know Him<sup>7</sup>. The Chovos HaLevovos says<sup>8</sup> to contemplate all the good things that Hashem has done for us throughout our lives. However, these strategies don't always work for everyone. For some people, intellectual contemplation isn't enough. As hard as they try, the feelings of love don't develop. What can they do?

Nevertheless, a well-known principle<sup>9</sup> is that just like inner feelings can have an impact on our outer performance, so too outer actions can affect inner emotions. Love towards Hashem is no different. Someone who loves another is inspired to give to them generously. They don't seek to simply do the absolute minimum in their relationship. They constantly strive to come up with ways to give to the one they love<sup>10</sup>. The same is true with one's service of Hashem. Someone who truly loves Hashem will never

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Birkas Peretz to *parshas Vayikra*

<sup>2</sup> Leviticus 1:2

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 25:2

<sup>4</sup> The Steipler adds and fear of Hashem

<sup>5</sup> Deuteronomy 6:5

<sup>6</sup> Mishneh Torah *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* 2:2

<sup>7</sup> The Steipler summarizes this for some reason as "contemplating His loftiness"

<sup>8</sup> Chovos HaLevovos *Sha'ar Ahavas Hashem* Chapter 2

<sup>9</sup> Made famous by the Mesillas Yesharim at the end of Chapter 7. However, he was preceded by the Sefer HaChinuch, whose thesis behind many *mitzvos* is that they are actions whose aim is to engrain an idea in the Jewish people's minds (see for example, § 16). Rambam to Avos 3:15 is an even earlier source for this principle

<sup>10</sup> See Mesillas Yesharim Chapter 18

be settled with doing only that which is obligatory. At the same time, someone else who is lacking this emotion shouldn't feel that all is lost. If they act with the same level of generosity, those feelings of love will eventually develop<sup>11</sup>. If they do more than the absolute minimum in their *mitzvah* observance, their love for Hashem will only increase. Every level of additional voluntary service creates the same degree of emotion. Whether it be increased diligence in Torah learning, devotion in prayer, exactness with *halacha*, or benefiting the community, everything helps.

Perhaps it was with this in mind that the Torah introduced the concept of voluntary offerings, as well as other voluntary *mitzvos*. Each one is an opportunity to increase in one's love for Hashem. If they were all obligatory, they wouldn't be as effective in generating this emotion. Their performance wouldn't necessarily be effort to get closer to Hashem. They could simply be viewed as paying off a debt. Now that they are voluntary, there's no doubt that their performance will create this connection<sup>12</sup>.

Good Shabbos

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<sup>11</sup> In general, several sources say that giving creates love, such as: Derech Eretz Zutah 2:9; Vayikra Rabbah 34:8; Rus Rabbah 5:9; Orchos Tzaddikim Sha'ar HaAhavah; Sichos Mussar § 6; Michtav MeEliyahu I p. 35-39

<sup>12</sup> The Steipler ends his piece by pointing out that converts and *Ba'alei Teshuva* have an advantage in this regard, as their *entire* observance was voluntary, and not something they related to as obligatory from birth