

"And the Nesiim brought their offering before the Altar." (7:10)

Rashi states that Moshe did not accept the offerings from the *Nesiim* until he was instructed to do so by Hashem. *The Netziv*, *z.l.*, attributes Moshe's reluctance to accept their *korbanos* to the fact that they brought *ketores*, incense, to be offered upon the *Mizbei'ach Ha'Chitzon*, outer altar. As *Rashi* later notes (*pasuk 14*), we find incense offered neither by a *yachid*, individual, nor upon the outer altar, except for this instance. It would seem that a special dispensation was made during the dedication of the *mizbei'ach* in regard to *korbanos* and the usual place where they were to be offered. Why is this ? One would think that the first time *korbanos* were offered it would set the standard for all ensuing *korbanos*, mandating strict compliance with *halacha*.

In expounding on the *korbanos* of the *Nesiim*, *Horav Nissan Alpert*, *z.l.*, develops a profound understanding and appreciation of the uniqueness of the moment and its resounding lesson for the future. The body is composed of various limbs and organs, each essential in their own way, but not all of them life-sustaining in nature. If certain ones are removed from his body, the person will be blemished, his quality of life will be encumbered, but he will nevertheless continue to live. There are, however, organs that constitute the life-force of a human being. If the heart, brain or blood are not in working order, or are missing, the individual will die.

The same holds true for the great body of *Klal Yisrael*. Each individual Jew represents a limb or organ which contributes to the health and welfare of the Jewish people. Each Jew has an obligation and mission to fulfill. Some succeed in devoting their lives to their own personal self-development. They meticulously perform *mitzvos*, scrupulously seeing to it that they follow *Torah* dictate exclusively. Their service to the body of *Klal Yisrael* focuses on themselves. Obviously, these individuals are not the "*klal* people" in the sense that they sustain an entire people. Because their focus of observance is restricted to their individual needs, they clearly do not constitute the heart and lifeblood of *Klal Yisrael*.

There are also community oriented "*klal menchen*" whose entire perspective on life is, "What can I do to sustain *Klal Yisrael* ?" They selflessly put their own needs aside and devote every fiber of their entire being to the continued physical and spiritual sustenance of our people. These individuals are viewed as the "heart" of our people, uniting *Klal Yisrael* in their every endeavor.

The two *mizbachos* symbolize these two disparate attitudes toward serving Hashem. The individual who is self-oriented, whose potential to perform on behalf of the community has not yet been realized, is represented by the outer altar. The inner altar, upon which the *ketores* was offered, alludes to the "*tzibbur mench*," whose desire to live for the community is reflected in his every act.

The *ketores* was offered upon the inner altar because it represented a melding of different spices into one entity, symbolizing the harmony between the various ingredients. Even the *chelbanah*,

which emitted a foul odor, was included in the *ketores*. It was a *korban tzibbur* which reflected **all** Jews, their individual attitudes, personalities, and backgrounds.

Therefore, the *ketores*, the quintessential *korban tzibbur*, was to be brought upon the inner altar, which signifies the ultimate meaning of *achdus*, unity. The service on the inner altar reflected total commitment to *Klal Yisrael* without separating one Jew from another. As *Horav Alpert* notes, this is the meaning behind *Dovid Ha'Melech's* entreaty to Hashem ה'יְהוָה, אֱלֹהֵינוּ (*Tehillim* 141:2). He begged Hashem that his *tefillos*, prayers, should be like *ketores* before Him. In this way, all the needs of *Klal Yisrael* would be before him, and his whole focus should be only on their needs and not his own individual ones.

Tefillah is referred to as *avodas ha'lev*, service of the heart. *Dovid Ha'Melech* appealed to Hashem to view his *tefillos* as a true service of the heart. As the heart does not exist merely for itself, but sustains the entire body, so shall his prayers be "heartlike" in nature. Thus, all the needs of the Jewish people were the center of his concentration.

We now understand the intention of the *Nesiim* who were so spiritually elevated that they desired to offer *ketores* on the outer altar. They sensed that they were not offering a *korban yachid* as an individual, but rather a *korban* representing the entire *Klal Yisrael* as one unit. They had ascended to the apex of spiritual advancement so that they transcended themselves and became unified with the entire Jewish people. To eternalize this unique moment, they sought to obliterate the distinction between the outer and inner altar, between the *yachid* and the *tzibbur*. All of *Klal Yisrael* was bound up as one unit. Moshe asked Hashem to determine whether the *Nesiim* had truly achieved this lofty plateau in which all demarcation dividing them from the rest of *Klal Yisrael* had become nonexistent. Hashem responded in the affirmative. This one time, He permitted all distinction between *yachid* and *tzibbur* to be relaxed.