

Kayin brought an offering to Hashem of the fruit of the ground, and as for Hevel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and from their choicest. And Hashem turned to Hevel and to his offering, but to Kayin and his offering He did not turn. (4:3-5)

There is a fundamental Halachah that is derived from the seemingly unceremonious depiction of the first murder in history. While Kayin was the innovator of the idea of offering a korban, sacrifice, to Hashem, it was Hevel who followed him with a korban of his own, but his was of a different nature. Kayin brought his offering from the inferior portion of his crop, while Hevel brought from the finest of his flock of sheep. We derive from here the concept of hiddur mitzvah, the obligation to beautify and enhance the performance of a mitzvah, as befits the king to whom we are paying homage. Kayin's sacrifice lacked the hiddur, and it was reflected in its rejection by Hashem.

The idea of hiddur mitzvah is derived primarily from the pasuk in the Shiras HaYam, Zeh Keili v'anveihu, "This is my G-d and I will glorify Him" (Shemos 15:2). Chazal glean from this statement that one should glorify Hashem by beautifying the performance of mitzvos. Chazal explain that the word v'anveihu means "be like Him." Thus, we are to emulate Hashem. Just as He is benevolent and kind, so should we follow in His ways. Rashi adds that the word v'anveihu is a conjunction of two words – ani, v'hu, I, and Him, meaning that a Jew should strive to emulate Hashem's attributes. The Maharsha posits that glorifying Hashem by emulating His attributes includes hiddur mitzvah in interpersonal relationships.

Horav Avraham Pam, zl, in the sefer Noam Avraham, an anthology of the Rosh HaYeshivah's ethical discourses written by Rabbi Sholom Smith, cites the Rambam in Hilchos Isurei Mizbayach 7:11 who says that what one does for the honor of Hashem should be derived from one's best and

most beautiful. If one builds a shul, it should be more beautiful than his home. Upon feeding the poor and the hungry, one should feed them from the sweetest and the best food at his table. If he clothes the poor, it should be from his finest clothing.

Rav Pam emphasizes that when one does “spring cleaning” and gives away some of the clutter in his closet, he should carefully consider what he is giving away. To give a poor man a shmatteh, rag, a torn, worn-out suit, is to humiliate him. When people participate in a used clothing drive, they should demonstrate thoughtfulness by cleaning and folding the clothes. The clothing should be of a current style, or else their good intentions will backfire as it will only make the needy person feel worse about his situation. We seem to have money for ourselves when it comes to performing mitzvos. At times, we spend large sums of money to purchase an Esrog, Sukah, or do other mitzvos. While these are certainly opportunities for the expression of hiddur mitzvah, let us not ignore our interpersonal relations, which are equally as important.

I have cited this Torah thought, not because of its penetrating analysis or its profound logic, but rather because of its simplicity. It is something to which Rav Pam was prepared to devote a shmuess, ethical discourse. It was the common things, the things we rarely think about, that he never forgot. A great person thinks even about the little things – making them great. A man who exemplified truth and yashrus, uprightness, at their zenith, Rav Pam never forgot those areas which we commonly tend to neglect. Indeed, it was his focus on what many of us consider the “little things” that distinguished him.