

## **All the choice parts for Hashem. (3:16)**

Concerning all offerings, all the choicest parts are to be offered to Hashem on the Mizbayach, Altar. Rambam (at the end of Hilchos Isurei Mizbayach) writes that this idea applies to everything across the board: the choicest, the best, is to be designated exclusively for ruchniyos, spirituality. Among the examples that are given is the idea that the shul in which one davens, prays, should be more impressive, fancier than his home. David Hamelech lamented the fact that he lived in a palace made of cedar wood, while the holy Aron, Ark, was ensconced in a tent. It should be of concern to us that the taxes on our homes often exceed the price of the shul that we attend. The furniture certainly does.

The issue is one of priorities. What has greater significance in our eyes: the shul/yeshivah/school; or our personal material possessions? It all boils down to what plays a greater role in his life, what he feels that he cannot live without. Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl, cites the classic tale of a fellow who came to his doctor's office complaining of pain in his lungs. "When does it hurt you?" the doctor asked the patient. "Only when I breathe," the patient replied. "If that is the case, simply do not breathe!" While the physician might have been highly rated in his medical knowledge, he obviously lacked a modicum of seichel, common sense. A person must breathe in order to live.

Rav Galinsky quotes the well-known passage in the Talmud concerning the government's ban on Torah-study. This decree did not prevent Rabbi Akiva from studying and teaching Torah. Papus ben Yehudah met him and asked, "Are you not afraid of the government?" Rabbi Akiva answered with a mashal, analogy. A fox came over to the edge of the river and saw the fish swimming away. He asked the fish, "Why do you flee from the water's edge?" "We fear the fisherman's nets," they replied. "Why do you not come out of

the water, and we will live together as friends?" the fox asked. The fish replied, "They say that you are the most clever of all animals. To us, however, your question indicates that you are a fool. If we are not safe in the water, which happens to be our home and the only place in which we can breathe, how could we survive on dry land where we are unable to breathe?"

"Likewise," Rabbi Akiva explained to Papus ben Yehudah, "if when we learn Torah, which is the source of our life, we are still in mortal danger from our enemies, how would we possibly survive without it? No Torah, no life! It is as simple as that. Make no mistake; merely existing and breathing do not constitute living. Torah is one "quality" of life which is not deferrable. It is the very basis for living without which life really has no purpose. True, there is the mitzvah of chesed, performing acts of kindness, with their many outlets, but, without the direction and guidance of Torah, these very acts of kindness can be misplaced.

Rav Galinsky comments that our generation (I think he refers to a specific time and milieu, because, in the yeshivah world, Torah seems to reign paramount) suffers from the curse that is part of the Ikvesa d'Meshicha, End of Days, time for Moshiach, shru chakimaya l'mihevei k'chazanaya, "The scholars become like cantors." The Bais HaLevi, zl, explains this practically. Certainly, a good voice and the ability to sing beautifully are laudatory qualities, in which a person can take great pride. But, if he is not blessed with a good voice – it is not the end of the world! Nu, nu, so what, so he cannot sing. The problem arises when this is the attitude that is assumed (and accepted) with regard to Torah scholarship. Shidduchim, matrimonial matches, are not – and

should not – be the barometer for determining and defining values, but, sadly, in today's contemporary society, values are regulated by the inane judgments that people make, based upon the misplaced value system which is becoming more and more prevalent with time. If one were to propose a shidduch for a young, talented woman from a prominent family – steeped in wealth and some learning – he would not offer the name of a young man who was physically and/or mentally challenged. What about a distinguished student of a prominent yeshivah, however, who has excelled in all areas of Torah erudition and ethics, but does not have the voice of a chazzan? He certainly would not refrain from proposing this young man's name. Veritably, if he would be a chazzan he could earn a fine livelihood by leading the services during special occasions, but it is not a tragedy if his voice is not his most prominent feature.

There will come a time, however, when "Scholars will become like cantors;" which means that when the shadchan, matchmaker, says that the young man is wonderful, but in the area of Torah scholarship he is deficient. People will (sadly) say, "Nu, so what? If he cannot learn, it is not the end of the world!" In other words, the standard of Torah erudition will be equal to chazanus. It is not the end of the world if he cannot sing, if he cannot learn.

This, explains the Bais HaLevi, will be the curse that will accompany the End of Days, when misplaced values will breed a distorted perspective concerning Torah and everything spiritual. Rav Galinsky concludes that this idea is quite possibly the reason that a city whose roofs of its houses are higher and look down on the roof of the local shul (Shabbos 11b) will be destroyed. A city whose citizenry is more concerned with the physical appearance of their homes than they are about their shul indicates the distortion of their priorities. They care more about their homes than their shul. As I write on a snow day, I wonder if those who walk into shul with their wet boots filled with salt and ice would do the same in their own home.

Kol cheilev l'Hashem. The choicest is to be dedicated toward spirituality. Every mitzvah that we perform should reflect our appreciation of what – and at Whose behest – we are doing it.

Tzedakah, charity, chesed, act of kindness, is not simply a favor or a good deed, it is Hashem's mitzvah, and we should act in a manner becoming such an endeavor. In other words, we give the individual in need our best, our finest – not the torn, dilapidated items for which we no longer have any use. This idea applies as well to foodstuffs. When food pantries ask for cans, boxes and various food to be collected and distributed to the needy, we must remember that the can of peas that expired a few years ago or the frozen leftovers from our son's bar-mitzvah, which we want to finally remove from the freezer so that we have room for the food that we prepared for his sheva brachos, is a mitzvah, similar to putting on Tefillin. We spend over two thousand dollars for Tefillin, but, when it comes to tzedakah, we give away our outdated items. Kol cheilev l'Hashem.

The Gerrer Rebbe, zl, the Imrei Emes, had a collection of sefarim, sets of Chumashim, Mishnayos, etc. which he had put away for his son's bar mitzvah. His son, the future Pnei Menachem, had one thing on his mind: His father was attempting to appease him with the sefarim, because he had given away to a poor man the one item that he had so wanted for his bar mitzvah. The Imrei Emes had in his possession a pair of Tefillin that had been written by Horav Moshe, zl, m'Pshevorsk, the Ohr Pnei Moshe. These Tefillin were obviously unique in their kedushah, sanctity, and, as such, were put away for the bar mitzvah of the Pnei Menachem. His father had told him that if he would be ra'ui, worthy, they would be his. This was not to be, since his father had placed a greater

premium on helping a Jew in need than in giving his son the extraordinary pair of Tefillin.

A poor man had come to him with a heavy heart. His daughter was about to be married, and he had nothing – no money for the dowry, no money to even pay for the wedding. Unless something happened soon, the shidduch would be off and a Jewish girl would be put to shame. The Gerrer Rebbe took out the treasured Tefillin and told the man, “I will have you know that these Tefillin are valued at not less than 2500 gold coins. Do not settle for less.” When queried why he gave his most precious possession to the poor man, the Rebbe said, “Kol cheilev l’Hashem. Tzedakah is also a mitzvah. I must give the choicest possession for this mitzvah.”