

He shall not distinguish between good and bad and he shall not substitute for it, and if he does substitute for it, then it and its substitute shall be holy. (27:33)

The Torah addresses the laws of *maaser beheimah*, tithing of animals. Unlike other offerings, for which it is most appropriate to select the choicest animal, the tithe is left purely to chance. Even if the tenth animal to be selected is blemished and thus disqualified from being offered on the Altar, it remains *maaser*. It is consecrated and may be used only for food. One may neither work with it, nor shear its wool. If, however, he does substitute it (*temurah*) for another animal, it and its substitute are both holy. Once sanctified, it remains so.

Horav Tzvi Hirsch Ferber, zl (Kerem HaTzvi), renders this *pasuk* homiletically. The gentile world has attempted throughout the millennia to subvert our religious commitment and to provoke us to renege our allegiance to Hashem and His Torah. The other nations would have us commit to the folly of their beliefs. They do not know that Hashem pledged His loyalty to us. *Ki lo me'astim v'lo ga'altim... l'hafeir Bristi itam*, "I will not have been revolted by them, nor will have rejected them... to annul My covenant with them" (26:44). Hashem will not turn against us. [This does not mean that He will not punish us. Once we repent and seek to return, however, He will embrace us.] There will be – and there have been – circumstances in which we turn away (so to speak), substituted with another faith (which, for the most part, was only superficial to appease our oppressors). The *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, works overtime to sway us away from Hashem. At times, he is assisted by the anti-Semites who vilify us because we represent the truth. As long as we endure in our belief, we remain a standing testament that their religion is as true as the visions they have of their god rising from the grave. (Indeed, if they can believe in an immaculate conception, they can be made to believe anything.) The mere fact that we totally ignore (and debunk) their beliefs undermines and impugns their faith. They adhere to the idea that, if you are losing the debate, get rid of the other party – which is what they have attempted to do for two thousand years.

We might falter, as did numbers of *anusim, conversos* (Marranos), during the Spanish Inquisition, but in the end, we will return to Hashem's embrace. Every substitution is irrelevant. The *neshamah*, soul, of a Jew remains pure. When it is able to push off the dross that covers it, it will emerge in its original brilliance.

V'hayah hu u'terumaso yihiyeh kodesh, "It, with its substitute, will remain holy." Even after the Jewish heart has turned away – it remains kodesh, holy, to Hashem. How many conversos superficially acted like *goyim*, while covertly adhering to *mitzvos*? They did not even tell their children for fear of exposure. But, despite everything, they remained *kodesh*. It was only at the very end, when they lay on their deathbed, that they revealed the truth about their lives. A well-known story from the Inquisition underscores this idea. A distinguished converso was laying on his deathbed. His family wanted him to have the last rites of the church. They called the priest who sat alone with the man. The converso said, "I have lived a lie. I believe only in Hashem. I want nothing

from the church. I just want to recite *Shema Yisrael* before I die.” The priest replied, “I, too, am a hidden Jew, and together we will recite *Shema Yisrael*.”

How many of our brothers and sisters, who have been victims of the secular movements which attempt to water down Judaism, have rejected the religion for which their ancestors martyred themselves? Too many. The spark of *Yiddishkeit* remains within them, however, burning brightly, waiting for the moment that it can ignite the rest of the person.

What is it about the Jew that, despite his distance from Hashem, he is able to return, feel and be accepted as if he had never left? Perhaps the following vignette will shed some light on this anomaly. A large family, whose eldest child caused them heartache, was having great difficulty with her digression from religious observance. On one hand, if they pushed too hard, they could lose her altogether; on the other hand, they could not just let her do as she pleased. They had to consider the impact she was having on her siblings – some of whom were too young to understand the issues with which she was dealing. The *Rav* instructed them not to lay down the law, but instead speak to their children and explain to them that she was going through a difficult phase and, with Hashem's help, would return. He did say that they must insist on one rule: She must be home by midnight, or the door would be locked, with her on the outside.

It worked for a few days. She would return “about” midnight, and the parents looked the other way. When midnight became 2:00 a.m., however, the father put his foot down and said, “If you come home past midnight, you will be locked out.” The next night when midnight came around with no daughter in sight, her father locked the door. He felt guilty, but what could he do? Their daughter returned at 1:30 a.m. to a locked door. She knocked quietly and then began to bang. Finally, she gave up and sat down on the threshold tired, angry and disgusted. Suddenly, the door opened, and her father stood in front of her. In his hands, he had a tray of food, water and a *Gemora*. He said, “We were forced to lock the door. You are our child, however, and probably hungry. Since I will not unlock the door until the morning, I am keeping you company. I have my *Gemora* which I will study instead of sleeping.” Her father sat next to her all night learning. She put her head on his shoulder and fell asleep. In the morning, he opened the door and let her in, while he went to *daven Shacharis*.

In the afternoon, after a refreshing sleep, the girl said to her parents, “I see how much you care, and I realize that no friends will ever show such non-judgmental love to me. I am coming back.”

Our Father in Heaven never forgets His children. He always leaves the light on for us to return to His embrace. This is why, regardless how far we have strayed, how miserable we have acted, we still have a home to return to – and a Father waiting patiently for our return.