

And the fire of the Altar should be kept aflame on it. (6:2)

Chazal (*Menachos* 97a) teach, “When the *Mizbayach*, Altar, was extant, it would atone for man's sins (he would offer his *korban* upon it). Now that we no longer have the *Mizbayach*, a person's *shulchan*, table, atones for him.” *Rashi* explains that this refers to the piece of bread that he gives to guests. In other words, the *tzedakah*, material outreach, be it food or material support, that we render, protects us from Heavenly reciprocity for our less-than-noble behavior. The comparison between Altar and table requires elucidation – the time in which one places the meat and blood of a *korban* on the *Mizbayach*, the *halachah* is specific. It must be placed on the Altar. On the other hand, the alms we give to one in need has no restriction that demands one to place the alms on his table. Furthermore, the optimum manner of giving *tzedakah* is anonymously, so that the poor person does not feel like a *shnorrer*, beggar. We do everything possible to preserve the poor man's self-esteem.

Horav Sholom Schwadron, zl, explains that the answer lies in the word *nosein*, he gives, in which *Rashi* underscores the relationship between the one who gives money and the one who gives a *korban*. It is not where one gives it; it is the act of giving that is defining. We now have a penetrating insight into the power of atonement evinced by *korbanos*. We think that it is the fire on the *Mizbayach* accompanied by the singing of the *Leviim*, the sound of the trumpets, that effects the *kaparah*, atonement. We bring the *korban*, close our eyes in deep meditation, and voila! Hashem forgives us!

Rav Sholom explains that it goes much deeper. It is the fact that he opens his wallet and purchases a *korban*, from which he personally will have no tangible benefit – but others will. This is *tzedakah*. This is giving at its apex. Likewise, today, when we no longer have the opportunity to bring *korbanos*, our table represents the *tzedakah* we give to others. Thus, it is our atonement.

The *Maggid* takes this further. *Chazal* (*Yoma* 5a) teach that, if no “blood” appears (from the slaughtered *korban* which is sprinkled on the *Mizbayach*), no atonement occurs. The *zerikas ha'dam*, sprinkling of the blood, is the primary aspect of the *korban*, and, hence, the atonement. Why is it necessary to have the *Kohanim* partake of the *korban*? Indeed, *Chazal* say (*Menachos* 73a) the *Kohanim* eat and (as a result) the owner who brought the *korban* achieves atonement. Furthermore, if for some reason no meat is present for the *Kohanim* to eat – no *zerikas ha'dam* occurs. Why does the *Kohanim's* eating play such a critical role in the atonement?

An anecdote from the *Baalei Mussar*, Ethicists, explains this: “A person is prepared to give one thousand gold coins to benefit Heaven; yet, the thought of his fellow receiving even one gold coin troubles him. Sadly, we note a critical disconnect between the values of spiritual giving and the demands of interpersonal responsibility. One may generously support a *yeshivah* or a *shul*; yet, when it comes to sharing with someone who directly benefits from his possessions or resources, he hesitates or feels resentful.

This is the *koach ha'nesinah*, power of giving. Seeing to it that the Altar has blood sprinkled on it is insufficient. It is incumbent that the *Kohanim* partake of the meat, that they are satiated. Only then is he "giving." He is now worthy of atonement.

Thus, when one shares his table with others, when he shows that it is not all about giving to large "exotic" causes and institutions, but also about caring for the individual in need, whether it is material support or emotional support, this shows that he is able to "give." One must open his heart, as well as his hand, in support of both the large and small, the well-known and the hidden. This reflects the complete fulfillment of Torah values.