

טעמו וראו

A taste of the
Rebbe's teachings

Parshat Vayikra

>>

How Many Times Could You Ask?

During the central prayer in Jewish tradition, the Amidah, we ask G-d for health, wealth and happiness. But why is it recited three times a day? Can't I suffice with once a day? And what if I lack nothing—what am I praying for?

In loving memory of
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Dedicated by his family

Preface:

This week's lesson focuses on the meaning of the Korban Olah, the Burnt Offering, and the Korban Tamid—and what it could teach us about their parallel, the daily prayers of Shacharis, Mincha (and Maariv).

The concept of prayer is usually seen as an opportunity to make requests of G-d. This raises the question: Why are we nudging so much? Why can't we suffice with making the requests once a month?

In this Sich'a, the Rebbe explains that the true meaning of prayer is about connecting with G-d. Prayer is not about a sum-total of benefits. It's about elevating oneself to a more spiritual plane.

The lesson begins with some background about the sacrifices and their modern-day parallels, and continues with the Rebbe's Sich'a, which focuses specifically on the Korban Olah and Tamid.

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In the first section, we present an overview of the various types of sacrifices in the Temple. There was the Korban Olah, the Burnt Offering (source 1), and its most common form was the Korban Tamid which was offered each morning and evening (source 2). There was also a Peace Offering (source 3) and a Sin Offering (source 4).

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In our day, we don't have a Temple or sacrifices. How do we thank G-d or atone for our sins? Each sacrifice has a counterpart in Jewish ritual. Thanksgiving feasts represent the Peace Offering (source 5) and charity represents the Sin Offering (source 6). Likewise, the Burnt Offering is represented by daily prayer (source 7). However, there seems to be a disconnect: prayer is about making requests for our own life, while the Burnt Offering was a sacrifice that was burned entirely on the altar.

The Rebbe's talk dwells on the true meaning of prayer, and thereby answers the question. Prayer is actually about becoming closer to G-d. It's not about what we can get out of our relationship with G-d—even if we do get quite a lot; prayer is really about connection.

In Source 8, Maimonides expresses this very point in a succinct way—truly righteous people serve G-d for the sake of cleaving to him, not for any side benefit.

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In the final segment of the Sicha, the Rebbe explains the connection further. Just as the Tamid was offered in the morning and in the evening, so too, our altruistic connection to G-d cannot be only in the “morning,” when times are good. Even in the “evening,” when life is hard, we must still seek that connection.

In closing, a story from Reb Shmuel Munkes drives the point home.

Opening

Anyone that pays close attention to the Torah readings throughout the year will notice the centrality of the Temple and its service to Jewish life. A few weeks ago, G-d commanded Moses to build him a home, a sanctuary where His presence would rest and where we would have the opportunity to connect with Him.

The main service in the Temple revolved around the sacrificial offerings, which are introduced in this week's Parsha. We find stories about sacrifices in earlier parts of the Torah, but in this week's portion—and in much of Leviticus—the Torah provides us with the specific rules and regulations for the sacrifices in the Temple.

There were communal offerings and personal offerings, holiday offerings and daily offerings. Just as Judaism today has a prayer for every occasion, there was a sacrifice for every occasion, as well. This system remained in place for over one thousand years.

If sacrifices were so central to our connection to G-d, how do we connect to G-d in our day?

Today's lesson focuses on these concepts. What were the offerings? Why were they meaningful? And where do we find their replacement in our day?

A. The Sacrifices: An Overview

Source 1 Leviticus 1:1-3, 9

The opening verses speak of the Korban Olah, the Burnt Offering.

G-d called to Moses, speaking to him from the Tent of Meeting. He said: Speak to the Israelites and tell them the following: When one of you brings an offering to G-d, the sacrifice must be taken from the cattle, sheep or goats. If the sacrifice is a Burnt Offering taken from the cattle, it must be an unblemished male. One must bring it of his own free will to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, before G-d.

The priest shall thus burn the entire animal on the altar as a completely burnt offering to G-d, an appeasing fragrance.

וַיִּקְרָא אֱלֹהִים מִשָּׁה וַיְדַבֵּר ה'
אֵלָיו מֵאֵהָל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר:
דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ
אֲלֵהֶם אָדָם כִּי־יִקְרִיב מִכֶּם
קֹרְבָן לַה' מִזֵּבְהֵהָמָה מִן־
הַבְּקָר וּמִן־הַצֹּאן תִּקְרִיבוּ
אֶת־קֹרְבַנְכֶם: אִם־עֹלָה
קֹרְבָנוּ מִזֵּבְהֵבְקָר זָכָר תָּמִים
יִקְרִיבוּ אֶל־פֶּתַח אֵהָל מוֹעֵד
יִקְרִיב אֹתוֹ לְרִצְנוֹ לְפָנַי ה':

וְהִקְטִיר הַכֹּהֵן אֶת־הַכֹּל
הַמִּזְבֵּחַ עָלָה אִשָּׁה רִיח־
נִיחֹחַ לַה':

The Burnt Offering was—as expressed in its name—totally consumed by the fire on the Altar (unlike other sacrifices, as we will soon explain).

Source 2 Numbers 28:2-4

The most common Burnt Offering was the Korban Tamid, the offering brought each morning and evening in the name of the entire People of Israel, as G-d commands us in the following verses.

Instruct the Israelites and tell them: Be careful to offer My fire-offering food sacrifice to Me in its proper time as My appeasing fragrance. Tell them that the fire offering that they must offer to G-d shall consist of two yearling sheep

צוֹ אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ
אֲלֵהֶם אֶת־קֹרְבָנִי לְחֹמֵי
לְאִשֵּׁי רִיח־נִיחֹחַ תִּשְׁמְרוּ
לְהִקְרִיב לִי בְּמוֹעֵדוֹ: וְאָמַרְתָּ
לָהֶם זֶה הָאִשָּׁה אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרִיבוּ
לַה' כִּבְשִׂים בְּנֵי־שָׁנָה תָּמִימִם

without blemish each day as a regular daily Burnt Offering. Offer one sheep in the morning, and the second sheep in the evening.

שְׁנַיִם לַיּוֹם עֲלֵה תָמִיד: אֶת־
הַכֶּבֶשׂ אֶחָד תַּעֲשֶׂה בַבֹּקֶר
וְאֶת הַכֶּבֶשׂ הַשֵּׁנִי תַעֲשֶׂה בַיּוֹם
הָעֶרְבִים:

The Tamid was considered a very significant sacrifice. It opened the day's service as well as closed it. Unlike sacrifices brought by individuals, these offerings represented the entire People of Israel before G-d. Even in times of strife and hunger, Jews went to great lengths to ensure that this sacrifice be offered on the altar. During the siege of Jerusalem, it was offered until the 17th of Tamuz, when the necessary lambs were no longer available. Its cessation was considered so devastating that it is one of the reasons we fast on that day.

Source 3 Leviticus 3:1

A second form of sacrifice was the Shelamim, the Peace Offering, as expressed in this verse.

If one's sacrifice is a Peace Offering and it is from the cattle, he may offer either an unblemished male or an unblemished female before G-d.

וְאִם זָבַח שְׁלָמִים קָרְבָּנוֹ אִם מִן
הַבָּקָר הוּא מִקְרִיב אִם זָכָר אִם
נְקֵבָה תָּמִים יִקְרִיבוּ לִפְנֵי ה'.

A common form of this offering was brought as a thanksgiving to G-d. If you experienced a miracle, won the lottery, recovered from illness or if your team won the championship, you would bring a sacrifice to the Temple. However, only a small portion of the animal would be brought onto the altar. Some would go to the priests, and some would go back to the owner, who would share it at a thanksgiving party in Jerusalem.

Source 4 Leviticus 4:1-2

The third form of sacrifice is the Sin Offering, the Chatat and Asham. These also are mentioned in our Torah portion:

G-d spoke to Moses saying: Speak to the Israelites and tell them: If an individual commits an inadvertent sin by violating certain prohibitory commandments of G-d...

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר. דַּבֵּר
אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר נִפְשׁ
כִּי תַחֲטָא בְשִׁגְגָה מִכֹּל מִצְוֹת
ה' אֲשֶׁר לֹא תַעֲשִׂינָהּ וַעֲשֶׂה
מֵאַחַת מֵהֵנָּה.

These offerings were not taken home, but nor were they completely offered on the altar—a portion would be left with the priests. These were forgiveness offerings that one would bring if he inadvertently sinned. As part of his penance, the meat of the sacrifice would go to feed someone else instead of himself. Therefore, it was given to the priests.

B. The Sacrifices of Our Day

In our day, we no longer have a Holy Temple or the ability to offer sacrifices. However, these sacrifices were a central component of Judaism and a key part of G-d's connection with the People of Israel. How can we gain the same connection without bringing sacrifices?

The answer is that there are a variety of Jewish customs which were enacted in memory—and as a representative—of those sacrifices. The following two sources are examples of how we can reenact the Peace Offering and the Sin Offering.

Source 5 Piskei Teshuvos 219

As explained in the following source, it is a Jewish tradition to hold thanksgiving feasts whenever we are granted a specific blessing. This harkens back to the Peace Offering, which Jews would bring as an offering of thanksgiving. Like the Peace Offering, we hold large parties and share the joy with all.

Halachic authorities in recent generations have written that when someone experiences a miracle, he should recite Torah's passage about the thanksgiving offering; it is also customary to hold a feast with friends, relatives, Torah scholars and the poor, to tell over the miracle and to thank G-d for his kindness. As the verse states, "I thank G-d with all my heart in the presence of the upright congregation."

כתבו האחרונים מי שנעשה
לו נס... וראוי לומר פרשת
תודה... ונוהגים לעשות
סעודה לאוהביו ומקורביו
ולתלמידי חכמים ועניים
בני טובים, ולספר הנס
ולהודות להשי"ת בשעת
הסעודה על חסדיו... ונאמר
אודה ה' בכל לבב בסוד
ישרים ועדה.

Source 6 Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Tanya chap. 34

When a person sins, he can no longer present a Sin Offering in the Temple, but he could give charity. As Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar, “Redeem your sin with charity.” In this segment, the Alter Rebbe compares charity directly to sacrifices.

Throughout the day, when you are engaged in business, you can be an abode for G-d by giving charity from the proceeds of your labor...Even if you donate only one fifth of your earnings, it elevates all the other four parts as well. As our sages famously taught, charity is equivalent to offering all the sacrifices. In sacrifices too, all living creatures were elevated to G-d through the offering of one animal, and so on.

גם שָׁאָר הַיּוֹם כּוֹלוֹ, שְׁעוֹסֵק
בְּמִשְׁאָא וּמְתוֹ, יְהִיָּה מְכוּן לְשִׁבְתוֹ
יְתַבְרַךְ, בְּנִתְיִנֵּת הַצְדָּקָה שִׁיתוֹ
מִיִּגְיֵעוּ...וְאֵף שְׂאִינוֹ נוֹתֵן אֶלָּא
חוּמְשׁ, הֲרֵי הַחוּמְשׁ מְעַלָּה עִמּוֹ
כָּל הָאֲרָבַע יְדוֹת לְהָ, לְהִיּוֹת
מְכוּן לְשִׁבְתוֹ יְתַבְרַךְ כְּנוֹדָע
מֵאֲמַר רַבּוֹתֵינוּ זְכוּרֵנוֹם לְבִרְכָה
שְׂמִצָּנוֹת צְדָקָה שְׂקוּלָה כְּנִגְדֵּךְ כָּל
הַקְּרִבָּנוֹת, וּבְקִרְבָּנוֹת הִיא כָּל
הַחֵי עוֹלָה לְהָ עַל יְדֵי בְהֵמָה
אַחַת, וְכָל הַצּוֹמֵחַ עַל יְדֵי
עֶשְׂרוֹן סֵלֶת אֶחָד בְּלוּל בְּשִׁמּוֹן
כו'.

We might add that charity has a striking similarity to the Sin Offering: Unlike thanksgiving feasts and sacrifices where the person participates, charity is about giving money to others without direct benefit for yourself, just as the Sin Offering was fed to the priests, not to the owner.

Source 7 Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 89:1

And finally, the first sacrifice mentioned in our Torah portion, the Burnt Offering. Instead of that offering—and more specifically, the daily Tamid offering, we have our daily prayers.

The Men of the Great Assembly enacted the three daily prayers of the Amidah which were established by our forefathers. Two were obligatory: The morning and afternoon prayers,

אַנְשֵׁי כְּנֶסֶת הַגְּדוּלָה תִּיקְנוּ
לְהַתְּפַלֵּל בְּכָל יוֹם שְׁלֹשָׁה
תְּפִלוֹת שֶׁל י"ח בְּרֻכּוֹת
שֶׁהַתְּפִלָּלוֹ הָאֲבוֹת* וְקִבְעוּ
שְׁתֵּי מֵהֶן חוֹבָה שֶׁהֵן שַׁחֲרִית

* ברכות כו, ב. ועי' פס"ד צ"צ שמא, ב אם התפללו האבות בכל יום, ואם עיקר התקנה ע"י האבות או כנגד הקרבנות. וראה העו"ב ריא ע' יב.

corresponding with the two Tamid offerings. The evening service was optional and represented the burning of the leftover sacrifices on the altar all night long. However, in our day, the evening service has been accepted by the entire Jewish people as an obligatory service.

ומנחה כנגד ב' תמידין שהן חובה בכל יום ושל ערבית תקנו רשות כנגד איברים ופדרים שאם לא נתעכלו מבעוד יום הם קרבים והולכים כל הלילה אבל עכשיו כבר קבלוהו כל ישראל עליהם לחובה כמו שיתבאר במקומה.

>> The Rebbe

True Prayer is About Connection

All the above leads us to the Rebbe's talk. The first two sacrifices seem quite similar to their corresponding custom, but what connection is there between prayer and the Burnt Sacrifice? Prayers are all about requesting our needs from G-d, while the Burnt Offering left nothing for the owner. The two themes seem to be the exact opposite of each other.

The Rebbe's talk answers this question. Prayer is about connecting to G-d—for the purpose of that connection itself. We don't talk to our children because we are in need of something. We talk to them because we have an inherent connection with them. Likewise, we need to search for a connection with G-d. Instead of showing up to pray whenever we are in need, we need to reach out on a regular basis, elevating ourselves and cleaving to something higher.

Our sages said: "Prayers were established in the place of sacrifices." In the absence of the Holy Temple, when we cannot—and must not—offer sacrifices, the sages enacted prayer services to replace the offerings of the Temple. The morning prayers represent the *Tamid* offering of the morning, and the afternoon prayers represent the *Tamid* of the afternoon.

Accordingly, there must be a correlation between the meaning of sacrifices and the meaning of prayer. The Hebrew word for sacrifices, *korban*, comes from the word *kiruv*, which means closeness. The offering draws the person closer to G-d. This is also the idea of prayer. Although we ask G-d to provide us with our needs, such as wisdom, health, and sustenance, the true purpose of

אמרו חז"ל: "תפלות כנגד תמידין תקנום", כלומר, בזמן שאין בית-המקדש קיים, שאז אי-אפשר ואסור להקריב קרבנות - תיקנו את ענין התפלה כנגד תמידין, תפלת שחרית כנגד תמיד של שחר, ותפלת מנחה כנגד תמיד של בין הערביים.

ומזה מובן, שיש קשר ושייכות בין תוכן ענין הקרבן לתוכן ענין התפלה: "קרבן" הוא מלשון קירוב, היינו, קירוב האדם להקב"ה. וזהו גם תוכן ענין התפלה - שמלבד הענין דבקשת צרכיו, "חננו מאתך חכמה בינה ודעת", "רפאנו כו'", "ברך עלינו כו'", הרי תכליתה ועיקרה של התפלה - שעל ידה מתקרב האדם להקב"ה

prayer is to develop a closer relationship with G-d than we had a day earlier.

The *Tamid* offering (which corresponds with the daily prayers) was a Burnt Offering; the entire animal was burned on the altar. This teaches us that true closeness to G-d is only possible when we approach Him not for personal gain but for the sake of cleaving to Him, just as in the Burnt Offering, where the owners didn't receive a portion for themselves and didn't even have the benefit of giving a portion to the priests. Instead, the entire sacrifice was offered to G-d.

By way of example: if you invest in a relationship for certain benefits, whether money, honor, and so on, it is not a genuine relationship. You are concerned only with your own welfare, and moreover—you are exploiting the other person for your own goals. A true bond is only possible when it is not about your personal benefit but about a genuine desire to be close to the individual. For example, a parent's relationship with a child isn't about earning the child's respect or ensuring his support during the parent's old age. The connection is innate; it's a connection of love.

The same is true of our spiritual worship that is modeled after the *Tamid* offering. Our connection to G-d must be like a Burnt Offering. It's not about the benefit we will receive from observing Torah and its commandments. Rather, it is an expression of our innate desire to cleave to G-d.

באופן נעלה יותר מכמו שהיה לפני כן (על ידי התפלה דאתמול).

והנה, קרבן התמיד (וכן התפלות שתיקנו כנגדו) הוא קרבן עולה, כולו לה': קירוב אמיתי להקב"ה שייך כאשר העבודה היא "שלא על מנת לקבל פרס", כי אם כדי להתקרב להקב"ה - בדוגמת קרבן עולה, שאין לבעלים חלק באכילת הקרבן, וגם לא לכהנים - שאז יש לבעלים טובת-הנאה, שכן, על-ידם זכה הכהן באכילת הקרבן, אלא כולו לה'.

דוגמא לדבר: קירוב בין אדם-לחבירו כדי שתצמח לו תועלת מסויימת, בעניני ממון, כבוד, וכיוצא-בזה - אין זה קירוב אמיתי, שהרי כוונתו לטובת עצמו, ולא עוד אלא שמנצל את חבירו (להתקרב אליו כו') עבור התועלת שלו. קירוב אמיתי שייך, איפוא, כאשר אינו חושב אודות התועלת האישית שתצמח לו מכך, כי אם שחפץ להתקרב אליו, כמו: קירוב האב לבן, שאין זה כדי שהבן יכבד אותו, או כדי שיתמוך בו ויפרנס אותו כאשר יהי' בן 119 שנה... כי אם קירוב עצמי, שאוהבו כנפשו!

ועל דרך זה מובן בנוגע לעבודה הרוחנית דקרבן תמיד - שהקירוב להקב"ה צריך להיות באופן של קרבן עולה, היינו, שאינו חושב אודות התועלת שתצמח לו כתוצאה מקיום התורה והמצוות, אלא הוא חפץ ומשתוקק להתקרב להקב"ה בקירוב עצמי.

True, through prayer we channel G-d's blessings for all our needs. Nonetheless, we approach the prayer itself as an opportunity to become closer to G-d—to be like a Burnt Offering, wholly for G-d.

אמנם, על ידי התפלה נמשכת ברכתו של הקב"ה בכל המצטרך לו, אבל אף-על-פי-כן, עצם התפלה להקב"ה אינה אלא מפני שחפץ להתקרב להקב"ה, בדוגמת קרבן עולה - כולו לה'.

Source 8 Maimonides, Laws of Repentance 10:4

The following segment from Maimonides sums up the concept—not only regarding prayer but regarding all elements of worshipping G-d—quite succinctly:

The early sages declared: Should one say: "I will study Torah to become wealthy, to be called Rabbi, or to receive reward in the world-to-come"? The Torah states that the commandments are "to love G-d." Everything you do should be out of love.

The Sages also told us to desire His commandments and not the reward for His commandments.

Similarly, the great sages would tell their brightest students, "Do not be like servants who serve their master for the reward. Rather, since He is the Master, it is worthy to serve Him," i.e., serve Him out of love.

אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים הָרַאשׁוֹנִים
שָׁמַא תֵּאמַר הָרִינִי לְמִד תּוֹרָה
בְּשִׁבִיל שְׂאֵהֶיָּה עֲשִׂיר בְּשִׁבִיל
שְׂאֵקְרָא רַבִּי בְּשִׁבִיל שְׂאֵקְבִיל
שְׂכָר בְּעוֹלָם הַבָּא. תְּלַמּוּד
לוֹמַר (דְּבָרִים י"א יג) "לְאַהֲבָה
אֶת ה'". כָּל מֵה שְׂאֵתָם עוֹשִׂים
לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ אֶלָּא מֵאַהֲבָה.

וְעוֹד אָמְרוּ חֲכָמִים בְּמִצְוֹתָיו
חִפְּץ מְאֹד וְלֹא בְּשִׂכָר מִצְוֹתָיו.

וְכֵן הָיוּ גְדוּלֵי הַחֲכָמִים
מִצְוִים לְנַבּוֹנֵי תְּלִמְדֵיהֶם
וּמְשִׁכְלֵיהֶם בְּיַחּוּד אֵל תְּהִיו
כְּעַבְדִּים הַמְשֻׁמְשִׁים אֶת הָרַב
וְכו' אֶלָּא מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהוּא הָרַב
רְאוּי לְשֻׁמְשׁוֹ כְּלוֹמַר עֲבָדוּ
מֵאַהֲבָה:

C. In Darkness and in Light

>> The Rebbe

It Is Relevant During Hardship as Well

Some people see a profound connection with G-d as an act of luxury. "After I make enough money, sort out all my affairs, finish my physical training and do yoga, I will also have the luxury of seeking out a connection with G-d." In this next section, the Rebbe rejects this notion. A connection with G-d is a staple of life, in good times and in bad.

Torah states regarding the *Tamid*, "Offer one sheep in the morning, and the second sheep in the evening."

You might assume that being a Burnt Offering—serving G-d in the most altruistic form—is only possible in the "morning," when you in a state of illumination, i.e., when you are spiritually content, living according to Torah and its commandments, and when you are materially content, free of concerns and definitely free of hardship. At that stage, you will be able to make the decision to cleave to G-d and be like a Burnt Offering.

However, during the "evening," when you feel that your situation is not as good as it should be—and that may indeed be the case—how could you pray to G-d as a Burnt Offering, ignoring your personal benefit for the sake of cleaving to G-d? Your first responsibility is to provide for

"את הכבש אחד תעשה בבוקר ואת הכבש השני תעשה בין הערביים":

יהודי יכול לחשוב שהעבודה דקרבן עולה, להתקרב להקב"ה באופן דכולו לה' - שייכת רק "בבוקר", כאשר נמצא במעמד ומצב של אור, הן ברוחניות - "נר מצוה ותורה אור", והן בגשמיות - שחייו הם באופן של אור, מפני שאין לו דאגות, ועל-אחת-כמה-וכמה שאין לו צער חס-ושלום, ולכן, במעמד ומצב כזה יכול הוא להחליט - מתוך ישוב הדעת, שמחה וטוב לבב - להתקרב להקב"ה, עד לקירוב בדוגמת קרבן עולה, שכולו לה'.

אמנם, כאשר נמצא במעמד ומצב ד"בין הערביים", היינו, שנדמה לו שמצבו אינו באופן של אור (כפי שצריך להיות), ויתכן שכן הוא באמת - כיצד יכול להתפלל להקב"ה באופן של קרבן עולה, שלא על מנת לקבל פרס, כי אם כדי להתקרב להקב"ה, הרי קודם כל עליו לדאוג לעצמו, לאשתו וילדיו, לספק להם את צרכיהם,

yourself, your wife and children; only then will you have the freedom to worship G-d in an altruistic fashion.

This is the lesson from these verses—the *Tamid* offering must be offered both in the morning and at night. “Offer one sheep in the morning, and the second sheep in the evening.” The word *tamid* means constant; this must be our constant pursuit no matter our situation, whether in times of morning and illumination, or times of evening and darkness.

12 Tammuz 1984

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ורק אח"כ יוכל להתפנות כדי לחשוב
(מתוך ישוב הדעת) אודות הקירוב
להקב"ה.

הנה על זה באה ההוראה והלימוד
מפרשת היום - שהחיוב דקרבת
תמיד הוא הן בבוקר והן בין
הערביים: "את הכבש אחד תעשה
בבוקר ואת הכבש השני תעשה בין
הערביים", כלומר, עבודה זו צריכה
להיות באופן תמידי, "עולת תמיד",
בכל מעמד ומצב, הן במצב של בוקר
ואור, והן במצב של בין הערביים כו'.

A Story

In conclusion, a famous story of Rabbi Shmuel Munkes. When he ended up in a small town on his way to the Alter Rebbe, he taught the local Jews about the deeper meaning of prayer.

The chassid Rabbi Shmuel Munkes was traveling to spend Rosh Hashanah with his Rebbe, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, when he was stranded in a small shtetl over Shabbat.

Soon after Shabbat was over, the village retired to an early bed. Several minutes before midnight, the shamash began making his rounds with a lantern in one hand and a wooden mallet in the other, pounding on the shutters of each home and calling, “Wake up! Wake up! Wake up to the service of the Creator!” The entire village climbed out of bed, dressed swiftly, and hurried to the brightly lit synagogue for Selichot, the solemn prayer that opens the High Holiday season.

In the home of Rabbi Shmuel's host there was much confusion. The entire family had dressed and gathered at the door, prayerbooks in hand, ready to depart for the synagogue; but their prestigious guest had yet to emerge from his room. Finally, the villager knocked softly on Rabbi Shmuel's door. No response. Slowly he entered the room. To his amazement, he found the chassid sound asleep.

"Reb Shmuel, Reb Shmuel," he urged, shaking his guest awake. "Come quickly. Selichot."

Rabbi Shmuel's only response was to burrow even more deeply under the covers.

"Hurry, Reb Shmuel," his host persisted. "They're about to begin in the synagogue any moment now."

"Begin what?" asked Rabbi Shmuel, quite obviously annoyed. "It's the middle of the night. Why are you waking me in the middle of the night?"

"What's the matter with you?" cried the villager. "Tonight is Selichot! A fine Jew you are! Why, if I hadn't woken you, you would have slept through the entire Selichot!"

"Selichot?" asked Rabbi Shmuel. "What is Selichot?"

Rabbi Shmuel's host was beside himself with incredulity. "Are you making a mockery of me? Don't you know that today was the Shabbat before Rosh Hashanah? Every man, woman and child of the village is now in the synagogue, trembling with trepidation. Soon the baal tefillah will begin chanting the Selichot prayers and the entire community will burst into tears, praying and begging G-d to bless them with a good year..."

"So that's what this commotion is all about?" asked Rabbi Shmuel. "You're going to the synagogue to pray? What's so urgent that can't keep until morning? What are you praying for?"

"There's so much to pray for, Reb Shmuel," sighed the villager. "I pray that the cow should give enough milk to keep my children healthy. I

pray that the oats should fetch a good price on the market this year, for soon I shall have a daughter to marry off. I pray that my horse should not break a leg, G-d forbid, as happened the year before last..."

"I don't understand," interrupted Rabbi Shmuel. "Since when do grown men wake up in the middle of the night to ask for a bit of milk?"

Prayer ought to be more than just asking that the cow give milk. For grown men and women, prayer should be a spiritual opportunity, a time for meaningful connection that goes beyond our material and physical needs and wants. This story teaches us that prayer should focus on spiritual growth, not just material needs.

However, this leaves us with a question: Why indeed, is the text of the prayer all about requesting our needs?

The Rebbe explained this on many occasions (and at length on Rosh Hashanah 5736, in regards to the prayer of Chana), and it is beyond the scope of this class. The main point of his explanation is that the ultimate goal of our relationship with G-d is to bring G-dliness into the world and into our material lives. Therefore, our material well-being is still an integral part of our relationship with G-d.

The point of this talk, however, is that our focus should be on the main point, our spiritual connection, and not on the material elements, which are more of a side note.

