

AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps
Torah Portion – Tzav

THE SPIRITUAL CONSEQUENCES OF INJUSTICE

נֶפֶשׁ כִּי תַחֲטֶא וּמַעַלָּה מַעַל בִּיהוָה וְכַחַשׁ בְּעֵמִיתוֹ בְּפִקְדוֹן אִוֵּב־שׁוֹמֵת יָד אִוֵּ בְגָזֵל אִוֵּ
עֲשָׂק אֶת־עַמִּיתוֹ: כִּב אִוֵּ־מִצָּא אֲבִדָּה וְכַחַשׁ בָּהּ וְנִשְׁבַּע עַל־שֶׁקֶר עַל־אֲחֹת מְכַל אֲשֶׁר־יַעֲשֶׂה
הָאָדָם לַחֲטָא בְהִנָּה: כִּג וְהָיָה כִּי־יַחֲטֶא וְאָשֵׁם וְהִשִּׁיב אֶת־הַגְּזֵלָה אֲשֶׁר גָּזַל אִוֵּ אֶת־הָעֲשָׂק
אֲשֶׁר עֲשָׂק אִוֵּ אֶת־הַפִּקְדוֹן אֲשֶׁר הִפְקִד אִתּוֹ אִוֵּ אֶת־הָאֲבִדָּה אֲשֶׁר מִצָּא:

וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: ב צו אֶת־אַהֲרֹן וְאֶת־בָּנָיו לֵאמֹר זֹאת תֹּרַת הַעֲלֵה הוּא
הַעֲלֵה עַל מוֹקְדָה עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ כָּל־הַלֵּילָה עַד־הַבֶּקֶר וְאִשׁ הַמִּזְבֵּחַ תִּיָּקַד בּוֹ:

When a person sins and commits a trespass against the Lord by dealing deceitfully with another person regarding a deposit or a pledge, or through robbery, or by defrauding another person, or by finding something lost and lying about it...that person shall repay the principal amount and add a one-fifth penalty on top of that. This the person shall pay to the one he stole from, once he realizes his guilt...

...God spoke to Moses saying, Command Aaron and his children thus: This is the ritual of the burnt offering (olah): The burnt offering shall remain where it is burnt upon the altar all night until morning, while the fire on the altar is kept going on it... (Leviticus 5:21-24, 6:1-2)

COMMENTARY: The rabbis of the Talmud, looking to squeeze every bit of meaning out of the Torah, often wonder why the Torah places certain subjects right next to one another. Their assumption is that two subjects in close proximity must inform one another somehow, and it is up to us to discover the ways in which they relate.

Last week's Torah portion, *Vayikra*, ended with instructions for a sacrifice brought to atone for an act of robbery, exploitation, or other monetary deceit. This week's portion, *Tzav*, begins with instructions for the burnt offering, a twice-daily sacrifice that was offered on behalf of the entire community. The following midrash attempt to explain the link between these two subjects, which follow one right after the other:

Said the Holy Blessed One: Look and see that robbery is the subject of the passage immediately preceding the ritual for the burnt offering – what sort of connection does it have to burnt offerings? [Here is a verse that explains the connection:] *I the Lord love justice, I hate robbery for a burnt offering* (Isaiah 61:8).

This teaches that anyone who wants to make an offering to God must first be free of any responsibility for robbery, [otherwise, God will not accept the offering]. This is what King David said in Psalm 24: *Who shall ascend the mountain of God, and who shall stand in God's holy place? One with clean hands and a pure heart.* [Tanbuma Buber, Tzav #2]

QUESTION: What is this midrash saying about the way that injustice affects our spiritual life as individuals? As a community?