

AVODAH: The Jewish Service Corps
Torah Portion: *Aharei Mot*

The Meaning of Well-Being

וְכִי תִזְבְּחוּ זֶבַח שְׁלָמִים לַיהוָה לְרִצְוֹנְכֶם תִּזְבְּחֶהוּ: בַּיּוֹם זִבְחֵכֶם יֹאכַל וּמִמָּחֳרָת וְהַנּוֹתֵר עַד-יִוְסֶה שְׁלִישִׁי בְּאֵשׁ יִשָּׂרֶף:

וּבְקִצְרְכֶם אֶת-קִצִּיר אֲרָצְכֶם לֹא תִכְלֶה פֶּאֶת שְׂדֵךְ לְקִצֵּר וּלְקִט קִצִּירֶךָ לֹא תִלְקֹט: וְכִרְמֶךָ לֹא תַעֲוִלֵּל וּפְרֹט כְּרִמֶּךָ לֹא תִלְקֹט לְעֵנִי וְלִגֵּר תִּיעָזֵב אֹתָם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

When you sacrifice an offering of well-being to the Lord, sacrifice it so it might be accepted on your behalf. It shall be eaten on the day you sacrifice it, or on the day following; but what is left on the third day must be consumed in fire...When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap the edges of your field, nor gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not pick your vineyards bare, or gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I the Lord am your God. [Leviticus 19: 5-6, 9-10]

AVODAH COMMENTARY: The verses above appear in the midst of a larger teaching known by biblical scholars as the Holiness Code. The Holiness Code parallels the Ten Commandments in its tersely stated prohibitions of idolatry, stealing, false oaths and commands to honor parents and keep shabbat. Unlike the Ten Commandments, however, the Holiness Code contains explicit teachings on the sacrificial system as well as on interpersonal ethics, including care for the poor and the stranger, the timely payment of a worker’s wages, honest business dealings, and even the command to “love one’s neighbor as oneself.”

What is the possible connection between the sacrificial system and the ethical treatment of one’s neighbor, the poor, and the stranger? What is the connection between a sacrifice of well-being and the poor in one’s midst? Abraham Ibn Ezra, a medieval Torah scholar from Spain, offers the following answer:

After the sacrifice of well-being, when you bring an animal as an offering to God, give the edges of your field – in honor of God – to the poor and the stranger.
[Commentary on the Torah, *Leviticus 19:9*]

In other words, after we have the privilege of offering our sacrifices of well-being to God, in return, we must act in God’s honor, so to speak, by helping the poor and the strangers in our midst.

Although we no longer offer sacrifices, many have upheld the connection between the privilege of finding oneself happy before God and the obligation to give *tzedakah*. Whether through putting coins in a *pushke* (charity box) before lighting Shabbat candles, donating a percentage of the cost of a wedding celebration to provide food for the hungry, or asking friends to contribute money in honor of a promotion, a graduation, or engagement, we uphold the idea that a central way in which we express gratitude for good fortune is to extend that good fortune to others.

QUESTION: What are other means by which communal celebrations and personal victories might become opportunities for *tzedakah* and social engagement?