

Parsha Story

Stories and Parables from
the famed Maggid of Dubno

by Rabbi Chanan Morrison

The Pauper's Present

Vayikra

Once an important minister arrived at a certain city. Thousands of local residents came to greet the high-ranking visitor. Many brought gifts. So many, in fact, that the minister appointed a secretary to receive all of the gifts.

Among the crowds there was a destitute man carrying a small present. He refused to hand his gift to the secretary, insisting that he must deliver it to the minister in person. With great effort and perseverance, he succeeded in obtaining a brief appointment with the minister.

The minister met with the poor man and graciously accepted his gift. But when he opened the wrapping, the minister saw that there was nothing particularly special or expensive about it. The minister was puzzled.

"Tell me, why did you insist on delivering this present personally? You could have just handed it to my

secretary, who handles these matters in a very responsible fashion?"

The poor man explained:

"You see, your honor, my present is a very small gift - especially for a great man like you. I knew that only if you would see the person who gave it - only when you met me and realized how truly poor I am - that you would be able to properly appreciate my gift. Therefore I had no choice but to come here and present my gift to you in person, so that you would value my humble gift like the expensive gifts of the rich and wealthy."

The Meal Offering

So often we get caught up with quantity - how big, how much, how expensive - and forget about quality. This is true even in our service of God. We look at how much money a neighbor donated, how long he stood in prayer, and so on. But the Sages taught: "The amount is not important, but whether one directs his heart to heaven" (Menachot 110a).

"A person [nefesh] who brings a meal offering..." (Vayikra 2:1)

Of all of the Temple offerings, only regarding the mincha offering of flour does the Torah describe the one bringing it as a nefesh, a soul.

"Who usually donates a meal-offering? A poor man [because flour is less expensive than birds or animals]. Therefore the Holy One says: "I account it for him as if he has sacrificed his very soul!" (Menachot 104 b)

The Midrash expands this idea by quoting the verse, "For [God] did not despise nor abhor the cry of the poor" (T'hilim 22:25). The Midrash clarifies: "Just as God did not despise [the poor man's] prayer, so too He did not despise his offering. As it is written, "A soul who brings a meal offering..."

The Maggid used the above parable to explain the continuation of the verse in T'hilim - "he did not hide his face from Him." God does not despise the poor person's offering, as long as "he did not hide his face from Him."

We judge others by external factors - the style of clothing, the length of the beard, the type of head-covering. Especially with regard to offerings and donations which are in the public domain, we tend to judge according to their size and expense. "For a man sees [what is visible] to the eyes, but the Eternal sees into the heart" (Shmuel Alef 16:7). God sees into the heart - if we "do not hide our face from Him."

If, like the poor man in the parable, we "bring ourselves" in our offering to God.

Adapted from Mishlei Yaakov, p. 197-198