

PARASHAT TETZAVEH



תדיר ומקודש

Frequency and Sanctity

■ The Importance of Frequency

Our Sages set two standards by which to determine which of two simultaneously occurring mitzvot we should perform first: **Frequency** and **holiness**. The Mishna (Horayot 3,6) states: “Whichever is more frequent than the other takes precedence, and whichever is holier than the other takes precedence.”

An example of the “frequency” rule is found in the Laws of the Reading of the Torah: On Rosh Chodesh Tevet, which is also Chanukah, we first read aloud the Rosh Chodesh passage (three aliyot), and only then do we read the Chanukah portion – because Rosh Chodesh comes more frequently than Chanukah.

Examples of the Mishna’s second principle, “the holier comes first,” are found in the general preference the Torah gives the Cohen and the fact that he is given the first Aliyah to the Torah.

■ The Holy

Let us analyze why it is that the holier is given precedence. The explanation is that when we consecrate something, we are actually sending it to the front lines. In the Temple service, the sacrifice stands at the forefront, for it is to be burnt upon the altar. Just behind it stands the Priest, consecrated for the Divine Service; he knows that if he is not precise in his sacred service, his life is endangered.

We learn of this aspect of Priestly life from G-d's response to the complaints of Bnei Yisrael. After the plague that struck Korach and his gang, the nation was overcome by despair:

הוֹ גּוֹעֵנוּ אֲבִדְנוּ כָּלְנוּ אֲבִדְנוּ. כָּל הַקָּרֵב הַקָּרֵב אֶל מִשְׁכַּן ה' יָמוּת,
הָאִם תִּמְנוּ לַגּוֹעַ.

*Behold, we are dying, we will perish, we are all lost!
Whoever comes the closest to G-d's Sanctuary dies!
Have we been consigned to die?* (Bamidbar 17,27-28)

That is, “Who will protect us from the sheer sanctity of G-d's sanctuary?” In response, Hashem informs Aharon that the Priests are the live shield for Bnei Yisrael, protecting them against the holy fire:

אַתָּה וּבְנֵיךָ וּבֵית אָבִיךָ תִּשָּׂאוּ אֶת עוֹן הַמִּקְדָּשׁ
וְאַתָּה וּבְנֵיךָ אֶתְּךָ תִּשָּׂאוּ אֶת עוֹן כְּהֵנְתְּכֶם.

*You and your sons and your father's house with you
shall bear the iniquity associated with the Sanctuary,
and you and your sons with you shall bear the iniquity
associated with your priesthood.* (18,1)

What this means is that the Priests are sent to the front lines, directly in the line of the dangerous Divine fire, for the purpose of bodily protecting Bnei Yisrael. The most painful example of this was provided by Aharon's two sons, Nadav and Avihu, who paid with their lives for their mistake in the Temple service.

It is thus clear why the more sanctified comes first: The one who is sent to the dangers of the front lines should be given precedence in other areas. As our Sages teach:

The Torah teaches: “You shall sanctify him, for he sacrifices the bread of your G-d” (Vayikra 21,8) – and this means that we must give him precedence in every matter of sanctity: He must read [the Torah] first, and lead the Grace after Meals, and choose the best portion. (Nedarim 62a-b)

■ The Frequent

We must now clarify the other principle, that which gives precedence to the more frequent and common. The Talmud (Zevachim 89a) provides a Torah source for this:

מִלְבַּד עֹלֶת הַבֶּקֶר אֲשֶׁר לְעֹלֶת הַתָּמִיד תַּעֲשׂוּ אֶת אֵלֶּה.
*Aside from the morning burnt-offering offered as
 a perpetual burnt-offering, you shall offer up
 [the afore-mentioned sacrifices].* (Bamidbar 28,23)

The implication is that the daily *tamid* sacrifice precedes all the others, precisely because it comes every day. By giving precedence to the most frequent, we show our appreciation and esteem. Our Sages went so far as to attribute the very existence of the world to our day-in, day-out sacrifices and prayers:

אִם לֹא בְרִיתִי יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה חֻקֹּת שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ לֹא שָׁמַתִּי.
*If not for My covenant day and night, I would not have
 emplaced the laws of heaven and earth.* (Yirmiyahu 33,25)

This tells us that “frequency” is linked with the fundamentals of existence. We see this in our physical lives: Food is critical for our existence – but water is even more so. While one can live for a long period without food, he cannot live as long without water. Even more critical than water is the oxygen in the air we breathe; just a few minutes without it can cause permanent damage to the brain, even death. And most critical of all are our hearts and brains; if they stop functioning for even a very short time, death is likely to follow.

The order of importance is thus: Brain, heart, oxygen, drink, food. That which is needed more frequently is that which is more vital and must be therefore given precedence. This entire concept can be formulated by saying that any unit of the following two groups is given precedence:

1. The fundamentals of existence (frequency)
2. The Divine aspects of a mission (sanctity)

This leads us to the following question: Since both frequency and holiness are critical, what do we do when two mitzvot clash, and one is more frequent and the other is more holy? Which one comes first: a fundamental of existence, or something that stands for a Divine mission? The Halakhah’s answer is that if both criteria obtain, there is no longer an obligation to perform one before the other, and one may choose to do either one first, according to personal preference. This tells us that both criteria are equal.

■ Frequency and Perpetuity

Based on this introduction, let us check how many times, and where, the Torah uses the word תמיד, *always*. It appears 18 times, and all but one concern the commandments of the Mishkan and the Priesthood – the sacred Divine objectives. The 18th instance appears in connection with the Land of Israel: “*the eyes of Hashem your G-d are always on it*” (D’varim 11,12) – the holiest land on Earth. Holiness and frequency thus come together.

This leads to two conclusions:

- a. When sanctity is attained, we must maintain consistency and perpetuity.
- b. The Holy Temple service is vital for the healthy spiritual development of the Nation of Israel in the Land of Israel.

Let us deepen our understanding of these concepts. There is a difference between *tamid* and *tadir*. *Tamid* is a word used by the Torah, and it expresses consistency and permanence; *tadir* is the Sages’ expression and means “frequency” or “repetitiveness.” When Chazal rule that “the more *tadir* mitzvah is to be performed first,” they mean that whichever mitzvah is performed more than the other during a given time period should be performed first.

For instance, the *olah* sacrifice is offered twice a day, while the *Mincha* offering is brought once a day. Clearly, they both precede the *Mussaf* offering, which is generally brought only once a week; that is, in a given week, the *olah* is the most *tadir*, as it is brought 14 times; the *Mincha* is offered seven times, and the *Mussaf*, the least *tadir*, is brought only once.

On the other hand, when the Torah calls the *olah* sacrifice an *olat tamid*, this does not refer to frequency, but rather to perpetuity; it is set forever in the time slot that the Torah has set for it.

Can we unite the two definitions? That is, can we say that that which is more frequent is also permanent? Let us look at Parashat Tetzaveh’s opening mitzvah, that of lighting the Tabernacle lamps:

... וַיִּקְחוּ אֵלֶיךָ שֶׁמֶן זֵית זָהָב כֹּתֵית לְמָאוֹר לְהַעֲלֹת נֵר תָּמִיד.

*They shall bring you pure beaten olive oil for illumination,
to raise a perpetual light.* (Sh’mot 27,20)

What does the Torah mean in the last phrase? Does it mean that the light should burn continuously, 24 hours a day? If so, this contradicts the succeeding verse, according to which the Priests arrange the light anew every evening to last until the morning: “*Aharon and his sons shall arrange it, from evening to morning, before the Lord*” (verse 21) – indicating that the lamps were to burn only by night, and not during the day! Can this be considered *tamid*, “always”?

Yes, it can - because it is a constant cycle; the light is to burn each and every night. In fact, the Torah tells us in another passage that this is a clear example of *tamid*:

מחוץ לפרכת העדת באהל מועד יערך אתו אהרן מערב עד בקר
לפני ה' תמיד ...

*Outside the curtain of testimony,
in the Tent of Meeting, Aharon will arrange it
from evening until morning, always ...* (Vayikra 24,3)

The Torah's use of the word *tamid* here refers to a regular nightly cycle. But is this the only meaning of the word *tamid*? Or can it also mean a consecutive 24-hour continuum, as the simple implication of *to raise a perpetual light* in the above-quoted verse 20 implies? Chazal answer affirmatively.

■ Cycles and Continuity

The Torah discusses the Perpetual Light, *Ner Tamid*, at the start of Behaalot'cha:

אל מול פני המנורה יאירו שבעת הילות.

*The lamps shall illuminate towards the face
of the Menorah.* (Bamidbar 8,2)

On this verse, the Medrash teaches as follow:

Can I understand from this that these lights were lit forever? No, because the Torah states *from evening until morning*.

If so, does this mean that all of the lights were lit from evening until morning? No, it states *to raise a perpetual light* – referring only to the westernmost lamp, which would burn constantly, and from which fire would be taken to light the other lamps every evening. (Yalkut Shimoni, Behaalot'cha, 719)

That is, our understanding was correct: *Tamid* refers to a perpetual continuum. However, it was referring only to one of the lamps – the western lamp, which remained miraculously lit, night and day, even though it was provided with the same amount of oil every evening as the other lamps. In addition, all the other lamps were fed by and relied upon this western lamp; they were all sustained by this miraculous indication that the Divine Presence was constantly present amongst Israel.

We see that the Menorah itself had two forms of *tamid*: It had the “regular cycle” of the six lamps, which were lit anew every evening – and it also had the “constant, never-ending” aspect of the western lamp, which remained burning 24 hours a day!

Which of the two supported the other? The logical answer is that the “miraculously constant” is that which sustains the “regularly repeating” phenomenon. Again, we see this in our physical bodies: The miraculously perpetual drive for life with which G-d imbued us is that which fuels and drives the constancy of our breathing.

This understanding leads to the following most astonishing conclusion, though in reverse: If we maintain a regular routine in fulfilling mitzvot, Hashem will surely watch over us miraculously and never-endingly. We take care of the “cyclical,” and G-d deals with the “continuous.” Every mitzvah that we perform regularly and do not allow ourselves to “miss,” will be accompanied by G-d’s constant presence and protection.

■ The Showbread

The special bread that was prepared every week by the Priests in the Mishkan/Mikdash, like the lamps, involved two types of *tamid*. On the one hand, it was prepared once a week, and the old bread was replaced every Sabbath with new bread. This was the “regular cycle,” and the Torah uses the word *tamid* when referring to it:

בְּיָוֶם הַשַּׁבָּת בְּיָוֶם הַשַּׁבָּת יַעֲרֹכֵנוּ לִפְנֵי ה' תָּמִיד
מֵאֵת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּרִית עוֹלָם.

*Every Sabbath day, he will arrange it before G-d, always,
from the Children of Israel, an everlasting covenant.* (Vayikra 24,8)

But in addition to the repetitiveness, it also had an aspect of miraculous perpetual constancy: The bread remained warm and fresh all week long – just as ready-to-eat on the seventh day as on the first day. Here, too, the word *tamid* is used:

וְנָתַתְּ עַל הַשֻּׁלְחָן לֶחֶם פָּנִים לְפָנַי תָּמִיד.

*You shall place showbread on the Table before
Me always.* (Sh'mot 25,30)

This verse expresses an ongoing and never-ending miracle of Heavenly accompaniment. Again, Hashem provided the miraculous, “never-ending” aspect, while man – in this case, the Priests – took care of the regular-cycle of preparing and replacing the bread once each week.

The law, ideally, is that there should never be a minute in which there is no showbread on the Table. For this reason, the bread was replaced each Sabbath as follows: Two Priests would take out the old one, while at the same moment, two other Kohanim would place the new one in its place. Thus, the Table always had showbread in it – a manifestation of the “perpetual permanence” of *tamid*.

But there is another opinion as to how the bread is replaced. The Talmud (Menachot 99b) quotes R. Yosi, who says: “Even if the old bread was taken away in the morning, and the new one was placed in the evening, it is acceptable.” R. Yosi holds that the “continuum” is maintained in having the bread there *every* day, even if not *all* day. An aspect of *tamid* is still preserved – that which expresses the miraculous continuum of constant heavenly accompaniment, enabling the bread to remain fresh all week.

The Gemara proceeds, fascinatingly, to derive other laws from R. Yosi’s words:

R. Ami said: “We learn from R. Yosi that even if one studied only one chapter of Torah in the morning, and one in the evening, he has still fulfilled the commandment of ‘Let not this Torah leave your mouth, and you shall engage in it day and night.’” (Yehoshua 1,8)

R. Yochanan said in the name of R. Shimon bar Yochai: “Even if one did nothing more than to recite Kriat Shma morning and evening, he has still fulfilled this commandment [of Torah study].”

This remarkable comparison teaches us that the most important thing in Torah study is simply to keep a set time, day and night, in which to learn! This is true even if the learning session is very short - and even if nothing more is said than Kriat Shma!

This ruling is so revolutionary that the Gemara actually discusses whether it should be publicized. One opinion states that an ignorant man should

not be taught this ruling. The reason is obviously so that he should not rely on it in order to avoid in-depth Torah study.

But there is a second opinion: Rava says that it is a mitzvah to publicize this ruling, even to the ignorant! Those who do not study so deeply or so intensely should know that they, too, can be considered among those who “receive the Torah,” even if they study very little. They should set aside even short times for Torah learning in the morning and evening, and should certainly not give up altogether.

This beautiful parallel teaches how critical is the act of setting aside even a short permanent time for Torah study. Chazal say (Shabbat 31a) that when one arrives in the Heavenly Court after his death, he is asked: “Did you set aside regular times for Torah study?” If one is *kove’a ittim laTorah*, i.e., he makes a regular schedule for Torah study both day and night, Hashem will do His part as well, and will grant him the merit of miraculous continuity between his Torah sessions. It will thus be as if he was engaged in Torah continuously throughout the day!

Similarly, one who sets permanent times for prayer will merit miraculous Divine protection that will remove all possible hindrances to his set schedule of prayer. This will be a “miraculous continuum,” just like that of the western lamp of the Menorah, and just like the freshness of the showbread.

