

The Expensive Esrog

The first day of Succos found four great sages on a boat at sea. Only Rabbi Gamliel had an *esrog*, which he had purchased for the vast sum of one thousand zuz. After he fulfilled the mitzvah of taking the four species, he gave it as a present to Rabbi Yehoshua, who fulfilled the mitzvah and then presented it to Rabbi Eliezer ben Azaria, who did the same in regard to Rabbi Akiva.

The main point of this story is that even on the first day of Succos when the four species must be one's property in order to fulfill the mitzvah, it is considered *his* if the original owner gives it to him as a gift on the condition that he return it, and he indeed fulfills that condition. This was the manner in which all of these sages fulfilled the mitzvah, each in his time, although there was a single owner at the beginning and at the end.

But why did the *gemara* have to tell us how much the *esrog* cost? The answer, we are told, is to let us know how much Jews value the *mitzvos*.

This *gemara* is cited by Tosefos (*Bava Kama 9b*) in his discussion of how much is a Jew obligated to spend in order to acquire the means for fulfilling a mitzvah. (In regard to avoiding transgressing a prohibition we have already seen in *Yoma 92a* that the command to love Hashem "with all your might" means that you must be prepared to sacrifice *all* your possessions in order not to commit a sin.) The *gemara* there says that a Jew is not expected to spend a third of his resources to buy an *esrog*, and Tosefos notes that another *gemara* (*Kesuvos 50a*) warns against giving away more than a fifth of his resources to charity. As additional proof that one is not required to give away all or even a major part of his resources for a mitzvah, Tosefos observes that Rabbi Gamliel's action of spending so much money on an *esrog* is highlighted as an expression of an exceptional love of *mitzvos*, and not as the expected norm.

How much should one spend to fulfill a mitzvah? In *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 656:1* Rema writes: "One who is lacking an *esrog* or the object needed for any mitzvah which must be done right now is not required to spend a large fortune for it." He, too, sets the limit at a fifth like the aforementioned Tosefos, because our Sages were afraid that someone who gives away too much of the resources he lives on may himself become poor and dependent on others. *Mishna Berura* (656:8) cites the halachic opinion that while a fifth is the maximum to be spent, a tenth is the minimum, but raises the possibility that in the case of a mitzvah like *esrog* which cannot wait until he finds a cheaper one tomorrow, there may even be an obligation to spend up to a fifth.

Succah 41b

Bonds and Restrictions

"Bind the buxom animals to the Festival," says King David (*Tehillim 118:27*) "until the corners of the altar." This understanding of a passage we say in our Hallel prayer on Festivals forms the basis of a remarkable statement in the *gemara*:

"Whoever makes an *issur* to the Festival with food and drink is equated by this passage with one who builds an altar and offers sacrifices upon it."

What is this "*issur*" and what is its relevance to us?

Rashi defines *issur* as a "bond." One explanation is that this bond refers to the proper celebration of the Festival with food and drink. Rashi's second explanation is the best known one, for it serves as a basis for our reference to the day after the Festival as "*Isru Chag*." According to this approach, a Jew should try to bind himself to the Festival by extending its celebration one more day with a greater indulgence in food and drink than is his norm.

Other commentaries find difficulty with Rashi's first approach because of the lack of any clear connection between the word "*issur*" and celebrating the Festival with food and drink. They offer alternative approaches based on understanding "*issur*" in its literal sense of restriction.

Maharsha sees the *gemara's* statement as a praise of the Jew who restricts himself in his celebration of the Festival, and avoids overeating and intoxication, for such overindulgence is no longer motivated by a desire to serve Hashem. That extra food and drink that he denies himself on a Festival in order to better utilize it for the service of Hashem is considered as an animal sacrifice offered upon an altar.

Iyun Yaakov refers us to an earlier *gemara* (*Succah 27b*) in which Rabbi Elazar praises those who do not leave their home on the Festivals because the Torah indicated that a man should spend the holiday with his family. If we translate the word "*avosim*" literally to mean ropes, rather than buxom animals, we understand the passage as advocating tying oneself with ropes to his home and restricting himself to his family circle.

Even though this last commentary does not offer a comparison to the altar and sacrifices, he probably intended to use the same approach as Maharsha; that is, to view a restriction on travel during the Festival as a sacrifice, thus celebrating the holiday as Hashem wished, and therefore equivalent to the animal sacrifices offered upon an altar.

Succah 45b

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