

# TORAH WEEKLY

Denver KOLLEL

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## The North Face

By: Rabbi Avraham Dovid Karnowsky (Originally Published 2019)

One of the basic concepts of Judaism is that the Torah does not expect one to do the impossible. While one is obligated to fulfill all the commandments to the best of one's ability, sometimes an outside factor holds one back from fulfilling it, and one is exempt. For example, if a person is bedridden and quite ill, he would not be held accountable for not praying.

This is true in regard to accountability. However, there is a world of a difference as to how different people react to such a scenario. One who is serving G-d just because he feels compelled to do so will be happy and even relieved when he is technically exempt from doing a mitzvah. A pious person, however, will feel upset that he did not merit performing this mitzvah. Even though he is physically unable to fulfill it, he wishes he would have been able to do so.

The Torah alludes to this idea in an unexpected place in this week's Torah portion.

The Torah commands the Jewish People to slaughter the daily Tamid offering on the northern side of the Altar. Tana Divei Eliyahu explains the underlying reason for the need to slaughter specifically on the northern side. At the time of Akeidas Yitzchak (Binding of Isaac), Avraham was commanded not to touch Yitzchak, and to sacrifice a ram in his place. That ram was slaughtered on the northern side of the altar. The Tamid offering was therefore slaughtered on that side of the Altar, to arouse the merit of that ram.

Why is it so important to recall the merit of the offering of this ram? Seemingly, the great merit of Akeidas Yitzchak was Avraham's willingness to sacrifice his son. What merit is there in the slaughtering of the ram, which took place after G-d ordered Avraham not to harm Yitzchak?

Rabbi Yehoshua Leib Diskin (1818-1898) explains that in the times of Avraham, the custom was to slaughter the sacrifice on the altar itself. Yitzchak was accordingly bound on top of the altar. The command then came to take Yitzchak down and slaughter a ram instead. Avraham should have then removed Yitzchak from the altar and replaced him with the ram. But Avraham did not want to do that! He was hoping that the ram would be rendered unfit for a sacrifice. He could then proceed with fulfilling the original commandment and sacrifice his very own son for G-d. He therefore left Yitzchak on top of the altar and sacrificed the ram on the northern side of the altar instead.

We thus slaughter the animal on the northern side of the altar to arouse the merit of the ram. The ram was on the side of the altar only because of Avraham's great desire to fulfill G-d's original commandment. We want to arouse the merit of our Patriarch who was not pleased with the elimination of the commandment to offer his son to G-d. On the contrary, he was hoping that he would perhaps still be able to perform it. Instead of feeling relieved, he was waiting to see if there would still be a chance for him to fulfill it.

While this may be an extreme example, we nevertheless need to strive to incorporate this feeling at our level. It is not unusual to find ourselves exempted from a particular obligation. But the key is to not feel relieved. We should work on arousing the feeling of "if only I could be in a situation that I would not be exempt." This shows Hashem what our real and true desire is. We are not doing mitzvos just because we have to. We want to do them because that's the best possible thing in the world to do. Even when not it may not be possible to fulfill a mitzvah, one should hope the situation will change and the opportunity to fulfill G-d's commandments will present itself.

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Rabbi Avraham Dovid Karnowsky

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Rabbi Karnowsky, teaching in Kollel, 2019

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