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The Torah speaks about three different offerings — the animal offering (most expensive), the bird offering (less expensive), and the grain offering (least expensive). Despite the many differences between them, all three are **equally** described as — “*Ishei reiyach nichoach* — a fire offering and pleasing aroma” — since G-d commanded them and His will was fulfilled. The final *mishnah* in *Menachot* (13:11) explains that this teaches us about all of the offerings we bring: “*Sh'echad hamarbeh v'echad hamamit, u'bilvad she'yechavein adam et da'ato (or libo) la'Shamayim* — Whether a lot or whether a little, [the key is] that one direct their mind and their heart towards Heaven.”

The *Gemara* (*Menachot* 104b) describes the more expensive *korbanot* as being offered by an **adam** (person) (*Vayikra* 1:2), while the least expensive *mincha* was offered by a **nefesh** (soul) (*Vayikra* 2:1). This teaches us that Hashem accepts the poor person's simpler offering as if he has offered up his very soul.

Rashi (*Brachot* 17a) explains that the *s'char* (spiritual benefit) of one who serves Hashem with a small gift is just as great as the *s'char* of one who serves Him with a large gift, as long as *libo la'Shamayim* (his heart is towards Heaven) — one's sincere intent is to serve Hashem to the best of one's ability.

This principle is really fundamental to all of our *avodat Hashem* (service of G-d) — in every aspect of it, the preeminent value is **eichut — quality**, not **kamut — quantity**.

This is particularly significant when it comes to one who, tragically, passed away young. Whether one was granted many years or few, the essential issue is how one was able to “direct their mind and their heart towards Heaven.” With an elevated *kavanah* (focus and intention), then even one who was granted less years will still have lived a meaningful life.

Four different explanations of: “Whether a lot or whether a little, [the key is] that we direct our mind and our heart towards Heaven.”

1) G-d demands from people only what they are capable of. Both the *ribui* (abundance) and the *miyut* (limitation) are decrees from Heaven, while “*she'yechavein libo la'Shamayim*” (directing our heart towards Heaven) is a choice. Therefore, when the *ribui* and the *miyut* come with equal directing of one's heart towards Heaven, one's *s'char* (spiritual benefit) is identical as well, even if one person actually did do more.

Sources — Rabeinu Yona, *Sha'arei Ha'avoda* (*sha'ar aleph*); *Sefer HaLikutim* on *Parshat Bereshit*; *Mishnah Brurah* (*siman aleph, se'if gimmel*), *Magen Avraham*, *Tosfot Yom Tov to Avot* 2:16, *Magen Avraham* on *Orach Chaim* 1:6, and *Pirkei Avot* 2:9.

2) With proper quality, quantity is almost irrelevant. In fact, an abundance of quantity in one's relationship with Hashem can sometimes even impede the quality of the relationship (and one's values). By definition, our efforts in *avodat Hashem* (service of G-d) have no significance apart from being a fulfillment of *ratzon Hashem* (G-d's will). As long as our focus is on quantity, we are inherently limited.

Rachmana liba ba'eih — Hashem desires the heart. While the generation of Rava was greater in Torah, the generation of Rebbe Yehuda had a closer connection to Hashem. The key is what is in one's heart. The Maharsha explained that without devotion in our heart, our intellect won't lead us to truth.

Sources — Maharal (*Chidushei Agadot, Menachot*); *Michtav M'Eliyahu* (14–16); *Magen Avot l'Rashbatz* (*Pirkei Avot* 3:15); *Chatam Sofer* on *Shavuot* 15a. Extra Sources — *Sanhedrin* 106b, *Michtav M'Eliyahu* (123–131), *Sfat Emet, Parshat Vayikra* — “*u'bilvad she'yechavein libo la'Shamayim.*”

3) Strong quality can actually transform a small quantity into a large amount. The acquisition of the *mitzvot* is possible only through *ameilut* (toil and effort). “*Yafeh pa'am achat b'tza'ar m'meah pa'amim b'lo tza'ar* — One time with difficulty and effort is more valuable than 100 times without difficulty and effort.” Even minimal difficulty and effort will multiply the *mitzvot* and their *s'char* (spiritual benefit). [And] every additional level of *tza'ar* will continue to turn even regular *mitzvot* into very great ones. Enthusiasm for *mitzvot* also gives us *siyata d'Sh'maya* (Heavenly assistance) to then be able to reach lofty heights.

In *Olam Haba*, we will only have the Torah [and *mitzvot*] that we toiled in, not what we simply acquired through our inborn abilities and intelligence. Sources — *Hakdama* to *Chovot Halevavot* (pg. 39), *Michtav M'Eliyahu* (13–25), *Sheim m'Shmuel* — *Shemot*.

4) How is it possible for the the *mamit* (who did less) to be equal to the *marbeh* (who did more)? It is obvious that the poor person would also rather bring a nicer animal offering, but he simply can't afford it. Therefore, Hashem combines his positive intention with his [more limited] action, similar to one who is physically prevented from doing a mitzvah. As the *Gemara Shabbat* (63a) explains — “Even if one intends to do a mitzvah, but is then prevented from doing it, it is considered as if he had actually done it.” The essential requirement is — “*u'bilvad she'yechavein libo la'Shamayim* — that one direct his heart towards Heaven.”

Our desire to fulfill the *mitzvot* is considered like an actual deed and is able to combine with [even] a small [physical] action, as we say — “*machshava tova mitztarefet l'ma'aseh* — A good thought can combine together with the [physical] act.” If *Chazal* (our Sages of blessed memory) tell us that — “*hirhurei aveirah kashyan m'aveirah* — the thoughts of a transgression are more destructive than the transgression [itself],” all the more so can we say the opposite — “*hirhurei mitzvah k'mitzvah v'adif* — the thoughts of a mitzvah are like a mitzvah, and [even] better.” Sources — Rav Raphael m'Hamburg, *Marpeh Lashon*; *Hakdama* to *Chovot Halevavot* (pg. 39); *Sfat Emet, Likutim* on *Shas* — “*Echad hamarbeh v'echad hamamit.*”

Summary of the four different understandings:

- 1) Hashem demands of people only what they are actually **capable** of.
- 2) As long as one has the proper *eichut* (quality and values), **kamut** (quantity) is almost **irrelevant** to Hashem.
- 3) With strong quality and values, or *ameilut* (dedication and hard work), a small quantity will be **transformed** into a large amount.
- 4) A limited quantity can combine with positive *kavanah* (intention), especially when one is **unable** to carry out his positive intentions.

Two understandings from Rav Zev Leff

In terms of – “Whether a lot or whether a little” – Hashem gives every person different potentials, challenges, and tasks in this world. The evaluation is, therefore, **not comparative**. Everyone is rather evaluated in terms of how they did with what they were given.

And in terms of — “one direct their mind and their heart towards Heaven” – Hashem only evaluates us on our **effort**, which is completely in our hands, and not on the **output** (i.e., whether large or small) that we have no control over (but is entirely in G-d's hands).

S'char (spiritual benefit) is according to *ameilut* (exertion) and quality, not quantity

Pirkei Avot (2:16, 5:22) says: “*Lo alecha hamelacha ligmor* — It is not upon you to finish the work,” and “*L'fum tza'ara agra* — According to the effort and exertion is the benefit.”

The **Maharal** explains: This means that Torah was given for people to toil in; completing it is not the main point. And, therefore, even if one did not learn so much Torah, but he struggled with that small amount just as much as one who learned a much larger amount, he will be given the same degree of *s'char*. After all, we never say that a person must do more than is **possible** for that person to do.

Similarly, the Chasid Ya'avetz (*Pirkei Avot* 5:22) wrote: Speak to the hearts of those involved in Torah, and tell them — Although you may not have attained the greatest level of achievement, [remember] — *echad hamarbeh v'echad hamamit* — whether a lot or whether a little. You simply need to be immersed in it with all of your strength. This is in contrast to the other wisdoms in the world, where reward is never given [just] for the effort that one puts in.

In the prayer of appreciation to Hashem for Torah, when we have finished learning at the end of the day, we say: “I toil and they toil. I toil [in Torah] and receive *s'char*, they toil [in secular pursuits] and do not receive *s'char*”.

The *Chafetz Chaim* explained that while people in the world at large certainly do receive salaries and profit, they receive it not for the effort they exert, but rather only for their final results. When it comes to Torah, however, we receive *s'char* for the **effort** itself, independent of how successful we were.

One who passed away young can still achieve *shleimut* (completion)

The **Maharal** directly addressed the tragic case of one who passed away young:

Don't mistakenly think that *shleimut* (completion or perfection) is impossible for one who was taken from this world before he or she had the opportunity to actualize their potential. One who was working towards *shleimut* but then died, doesn't lose *Olam Haba* at all, since his inability to achieve that *shleimut* was completely beyond his control. As the *Gemara Brachot* (6a) puts it — “One who wants to do a mitzvah but is prevented from doing it, receives the *s'char* for this, as if he had actually done the mitzvah.” Physical obstacles are relevant only for the *guf* (body) in *Olam Ha'zeh*, not for the *s'char* of the *neshama* in *Olam Haba*. The *neshama* is, therefore, given the *s'char* in *Olam Haba* as if the person had actually done the mitzvah. (*Tiferet Yisrael* — Chap. 3).

The mitzvah is a purely spiritual entity, not a **physical** one. Therefore, if one fully intended to do a mitzvah, with a strong awareness and clarity, but was **physically** prevented from carrying it out, since his desire was to do the mitzvah, and only the **physical** component of the mitzvah was lacking, it is considered as if he had actually done it. Therefore, the *s'char* of the mitzvah can be given to the *neshama*. (*Chidushei Agadot* on **Shabbat 63a**).

One loses the *s'char* for a mitzvah only if it was **possible** to have been done, but was willfully ignored with full knowledge and awareness, since that is obviously relevant to the *neshama*.

There is a special quality of *Yisrael* which is oriented towards *Olam Haba*

At the end of each chapter of *Pirkei Avot* we have the following statement:

“*Amar Rebbe Chananya ben Akashya — Ratza HaKadosh Boruch Hu l'zakot et Yisrael, l'fikach hirba lahem Torah u'mitzvot* (Rebbe Chananya ben Akashya said — The Holy One, Blessed be He, wanted to benefit and purify *Yisrael*, therefore He increased for them Torah and *mitzvot*), *she'ne'emar* (as it says in *Yeshaya 42:21*) — “*Hashem chafeitz l'ma'an tzidko, yagdil Torah v'ya'adir* — Hashem desired for the sake of the righteousness [of *Yisrael*] that the Torah be made great and glorious.””

The **Maharal** asks an obvious question on this: How are the multitude of *mitzvot* which Hashem gave the Jewish people a clear benefit for them? Wouldn't it have been more logical for Hashem to have **reduced** the [number of] *mitzvot* so the [Jews] wouldn't have to guard so many of them? The [Jews] would then be able to merit *Olam Haba* through this small number of *mitzvot*, as opposed to a large number which, it would seem, would make it [almost] impossible to properly merit *Olam Haba*.

The **Rambam** offers an answer in his commentary on the *Mishnah* at the end of *Makkot*:

A fundamental belief of the Torah is that when a person fulfills any one of the 613 *mitzvot* fittingly and properly, without mixing in any other *kavanah* (focus or intention) in the world, but rather does it [purely] from love... behold he will merit life in *Olam Haba*. And on this Rebbe Chananya said — Since the *mitzvot* are very numerous, it is [virtually] impossible that a person won't do [at least] one of them properly and completely during his lifetime, and through the fulfillment of the action of that [single] *mitzvah*, his *nefesh* will then live [in *Olam Haba*].

Even so, the question of the Maharal still seems relevant. In the end, the more *mitzvot* there are, the greater the likelihood that one will also do more *aveirot* (transgressions)!

The **Maharal**, therefore, suggests a different approach: The significance of the large number of *mitzvot* is that *Yisrael* has an inherent level of preparation [and orientation] towards the Torah and the multitude of *mitzvot* that it contains. [And, independent of their ability to [actually] do any **physical** deeds, this is what allows them to receive *schar*].

He then points out: It is specifically because *Yisrael* has this special elevation of preparation [and orientation] towards the Torah, that those who are unable to fulfill the *mitzvot* of the Torah, because they died as children, are still able to merit to *Olam Haba*. (Chapter 5).

The special quality of *Yisrael*, not *mitzvot*, prepares and orients us for *Olam Haba*

The **Maharal** wrote: Our great Sages foresaw the exile of the Jewish people and their many difficulties all throughout this long and bitter period. They arranged [the preface to the *mishnayot* of *Pirkei Avot*] to console their hearts, and so they should know their own greatness and elevation... *Yisrael* should take pleasure in their portion and in their ultimate successes. They therefore began [each chapter of *Pirkei Avot*] with —

“*Kol Yisrael yeish lahem chelek l'olam haba* — All of Israel have a portion in *Olam Haba*.” This is not [referring] to *s'char* (the benefit) of *mitzvot* at all, but rather to the essential creation [of *Yisrael*] that had been formed by G-d. Since the Jewish people are referred to as “G-d's [own] handiwork” (*Yeshaya 60:21*), they have a great elevation, and are deserving of *Olam Haba*.

The *Gemara* (*Perek Chelek*, ***Sanhedrin 110b***) presents a number of opinions as to when a young child [is able to have a portion in] *Olam Haba*:

From the time of **birth**, From when he or she can **speak**, From the time of **conception**, From the time of **milah** (circumcision) [for a boy] and From the time he or she says “**amen**.”

This shows that it is the inherent creation of *Yisrael*, that they are “*neitzer mata'ei* — the sapling that Hashem planted,” which [makes] them fit for *Olam Haba*, and not any [actual] *mitzvot* or physical actions.

The Maharal [emphasizes again] at the end of Chap. 58 — “*Olam Haba* has absolutely no requirement for the [actual] **performance** of *mitzvot*.” (*Derech Chaim, Reish Perek, Pirkei Avot*).

More *mitzvot* (i.e., the special quality of *Yisrael*) helps to prepare and orient us for *Olam Haba*

The **Maharal** continues: Our preparation [and orientation] is towards a Torah filled with large numbers of *mitzvot*, and, therefore, a *zechut* (merit) which is enormous. This eliminates the difficulty that whatever gain we have from the increased number of *mitzvot* we would lose with the potential for greater numbers of *aveirot* (transgressions).

We learn a fundamental principle from here. We would have thought that *s'char* (benefit) in *Olam Haba* is given [exclusively] in terms of effort, hard work, and standing up to the challenges of this world. And, according to this understanding, there would be no possibility for a child [who passed away] to get to *Olam Haba*, since he or she would necessarily be lacking in all of these aspects.

S'char in *Olam Haba* is rather a function of the **compatibility** that exists between a person and *Olam Haba*. Since *Olam Haba* is an *olam ruchani* (spiritual world), and one who toils in Torah and *mitzvot* is able to become an *adam ruchani* (spiritual person), there is necessarily a compatibility between that person and *Olam Haba*. That type of a person is, therefore, able to [have a portion in] *Olam Haba*. Of course, the more that one develops and elevates oneself, the greater will be their compatibility to *Olam Haba*, and the greater will be their portion in *Olam Haba*. Therefore, even a child who dies young can merit to existence in *Olam Haba*. Since this child is called “*Yisrael*,” and within his soul there is an inherent preparation and orientation towards Torah and *mitzvot*, even this child can consequently be [counted among] the *b'nei adam ruchni'im* (spiritual people) that are particularly compatible with *Olam Haba*, and will be able to enter its gates.

And since *mitzvot* cleanse and purify us, there will be more purification with many *mitzvot* than with fewer *mitzvot*. The essential [reason] for the giving of Torah and *mitzvot* is to provide physical actions and deeds that will purify our physical nature to be pure and transcendent. Otherwise, as the *possuk* in *Kohelet* (3:19) says —

“*Motar ha'adam min habehemah ayin* — There will be no elevation at all for a person over an animal.”

It should be clear and obvious, therefore, that the multitude of *mitzvot* are [exclusively] a merit for a person. Hashem wants to help us just like a father that chastises and reproves his child for his own good. And even if the child would say that he doesn't desire this, the father will still try to assist him, even against his will. As the verse in *Devarim* (8:5) says –

“*V'yadata im levavecha, ki ka'asher y'yaseir ish et b'no, Hashem Elokecha m'yasreka* — And you should know with your heart, that just like a parent challenges and chastises his child, G-d your L-rd challenges and chastises you.” And He, therefore, gives him a yoke of [many] *mitzvot* in order to purify him more. (*Sof Perek* — *Pirkei Avot*).

This should be *I'zechut ul'iluy nishmat Ruchama Rivka, a"h, bat Asher Zevulun*