

WEIGH IT FIRST!

PARSHAS TZAV

One of the *avodos*, tasks, performed by the *kohanim* in the *Beis Hamikdash* was the removal of the ashes that had accumulated on the *mizbayach*. The ashes were placed on the floor of the courtyard, on the side of the *mizbayach*.

What determined which *kohain* would do this *avoda*? The **Talmud** (Yoma 22A) teaches us that initially, any *kohain* who wanted to do this *avoda* would join others in a race towards the top of the ramp leading to the *mizbayach*. The ramp was 32 *amos* long. There is a difference of opinion if it was 48 or 60 feet long. Whichever *kohain* "won the race" by reaching the top 4 *amos*, received the privilege of doing this *avoda* of removing the ashes.

One time, two *kohanim* who were vying for this privilege were racing to the top of the ramp. They were both close to reaching the top of the ramp. A terribly sad incident occurred in which one *kohain* purposely pushed the other *kohain* who then fell off the ramp and broke his leg. The *kohain* who did the pushing did not intend to cause harm to the other *kohain*. He was motivated by a strong desire to do a *mitzvah*, yet his actions caused physical harm to another *kohain*. Not only that, but the other *kohain* was prohibited to do other *avodos* in the *Beis HaMikdash* until his leg healed.

When *Beis Din* realized the danger involved in this process, they changed the process. From then on, a lottery system determined who would be picked to do the *avoda* of removing the ashes.

Rabbi Avraham Pam zt"l ([Shabbos with Rav Pam](#) by Rabbi Sholom Smith) learns a beautiful lesson from this incident. Sometimes when a person has a strong desire to do a *mitzvah*, while he is trying to fulfill it he may accidentally violate a law of the Torah.

"The kohain shall dress in his linen garment... and he shall separate the ashes when the fire consumes the burnt-offering on the altar and place it next to the altar." (Vayikra 6:3)

This is obviously not what Hashem wants. One must carefully weigh his actions to make certain he is not inadvertently sinning or harming someone else. The **Mesilas Yesharim** (Chapter 20) by [Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto](#) zt"l warns that sometimes a person thinks he is doing a great *mitzva* while in reality he is sinning.

Other times, he may be doing a *mitzva*, but the consequences of his actions are causing hurt or pain to others, undermining and disqualifying the *mitzva*. For example, the **Torah** tells us (Vayikra 19:17) to rebuke our friend if we see that he is sinning. However, rebuking must be done in a way in which you are not sinning. As **Rashi** explains, do not rebuke and shame him in public for then you will be sinning. The **Mesilas Yesharim** continues that many great *tzadikim* would not do their accustomed unique acts of *tzidkus*, saintliness in public. They did not want to appear as if they felt that they were better than others. They did not want to be the cause of leading others to sin by gossiping or mocking their unusual actions.

We must weigh our actions carefully to ascertain that what we are doing is truly a mitzva and to make sure that we are not causing anyone pain in the process. That would turn the mitzva into a sin.

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Rabbi Yaakov Finestone is the director of JEP Queens. For almost 50 years JEP Queens has been in the forefront of kiruv. JEP has changed the lives of thousands of Jewish children enrolled in public schools and kiruv schools. Many are shomrei Torah and mitzvos today because of JEP.

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