



Among the laws presented in Parashat Tzav is that of the *minchat kohen*, the meal offering brought by a *kohen*, which differed significantly from meal offerings brought by other Jews. Generally speaking, when a Jew offered a meal offering, a handful from the offering was placed upon the altar, while the rest was eaten by the *kohanim* officiating at that time in the *Beit Ha-mikdash* (see Vayikra 2:1-3). By contrast, when a *kohen* brought a *mincha* (meal offering), it was entirely burnt upon the altar; no part of the offering was eaten by him or any other *kohen* (6:16).

Maimonides suggests a reason for this *mitzva* in the third section of his *Guide for the Perplexed* (chapter 46):

The oblation [*mincha*] of the priest was entirely burnt, because the priest offered up his oblation by himself, and if he were to offer it, and at the same time to eat it, it would appear as if he had not performed any service. For nothing was offered upon the altar of the ordinary oblations of any person except the frankincense and a handful of the flour or cake; and if, in addition to the fact that the offering was small, he who offered it were himself to eat it, nothing of a sacrificial service would be noticed. It is therefore entirely burnt.

In other words, since only a handful of the *mincha* offering was placed on the altar, were the *kohen* to eat the rest of his own offering it would not appear as an offering at all. Instead, it would give the appearance simply of a *kohen* partaking of a baked or fried pastry. The Torah therefore required that a *kohen's* meal offering be entirely burnt upon the altar, so that it would indeed have the appearance of an expression of devotion to the Almighty.

One might, at first glance, question Maimonides' explanation of this *mitzva* on the basis of the simple fact that all *mincha* offerings were equally shared among all the *kohanim* currently "on-duty" in the Temple. (See *Torat Kohanim* to 7:10, and Maimonides, *Hilkhot Ma'aseh Ha-korbanot* 10:14.) If so, then even had the Torah not required burning the entire *mincha* brought by a *kohen*, he would not have partaken of the offering individually. It would have been evenly distributed among all the *kohanim* currently officiating, seemingly negating the concern to which Maimonides points as the underlying rationale for this *mitzva*.

The *Sefer Ha-chinukh* (142), who follows Maimonides' approach in explaining the reason behind this *mitzva*, addresses this question, and comments, "Even though his colleagues partake of his and he of theirs, it is all ascribed to the same account." Meaning, the *kohanim* working together in the *Mikdash* were looked upon as a single group, in that they shared the sacrifices brought to the Temple. Hence, if a *kohen's* offering would be distributed among the *kohanim*, it would indeed appear as though he brought the offering for himself, rather than as an offering to the Almighty.

Maimonides' approach in explaining this *mitzva* bears relevance even beyond the specific context of the *minchat kohen*, and can be extended to all *mitzvot* that we perform. Although ideally the performance of any *mitzva* should bring a person joy and satisfaction, as we all know, this is often not the case. Religious observance at times strikes us as demanding, burdensome, and, in some instances, outright overwhelming. If performing *mitzvot* was always enjoyable, comfortable and convenient, then, as Maimonides noted regarding the *minchat kohen*, it would not be discernible as an "offering," as an expression of true devotion and subservience to God. The nature of Torah observance is such that we cannot always "partake" of our own "offerings," we will not always enjoy or otherwise derive immediate gratification from the performance of *mitzvot*. In order to demonstrate our unwavering commitment to the Almighty, we must ensure to properly observe even the less convenient and enjoyable aspects of the Torah, even as we aspire to find meaning and joy in the performance of each and every *mitzva*.