



Bechukosai: Personal Worth

Rabbi Shmuel Silber

“And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to the children of Israel and say to them: When a man expresses a vow, [pledging the] value of lives to the Lord ... (Vayikra 26:1-2)”

The Book of Vayikra ends with a discussion of “*erech*” (valuation) vows. A person has the ability to pledge their “value” to the Temple. The Torah provides a framework based on age and gender, irrespective of a person’s abilities, profession, or skill set.

Yet, we find a fascinating detail. The verses state:

“The [fixed] value of a male shall be as follows: From twenty years old until sixty years old, the value is fifty silver shekels, according to the holy shekel ... And if [the person is] sixty years old or over, if it is a male, the value shall be fifteen shekels ... (Vayikra 26:3,7)”

Why this significant shift in value? A man above the age of sixty loses close to two-thirds of the value he possessed between the ages of 20-60. How are we to understand this change?

The Imrei Emes (Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Alter, Rebbe of the Hasidic dynasty of Ger, 1866-1948) explains this dynamic. Every person has an intrinsic value. We each have a worth. Even if we make mistakes, bad decisions, fall and fail; we possess holiness and Godliness within. This is the deeper meaning of *erech* vows. From the time a baby is 30 days old until one draws his last breath, (s)he has value. But our innate value is directly related to our ability to change. The power of change is the greatest gift God has given us. No matter what I have or have not done – I can become someone better and holier. Change is always possible no matter when, no matter where. However, the reality is that the older we get, the more set in our ways we become, and the more difficult change becomes. As we get older, change is still possible, it just may not be probable. My “value” is fundamentally linked to my ability to change. Therefore, the individual between 20-60, representing the prime of life, has the highest value, because his ability and probability of change is highest. Once the individual is over sixty, the ability for change is still present, but the danger of becoming set in one’s ways is a bit more pronounced, and as such, the *erech* value of such individual decreases.

In this last lesson of Sefer Vayikra, God conveys to us, His beloved children, that we each have value. Too often, we assume that our mistakes and missteps deprive us of worth; there is nothing further from the truth. We each have incredible value until we draw our last breath. The way to actualize and amplify your personal worth is to tap into the gift of change. The more we are willing to change, the more value our life has.