

**From Each According to His Ability**  
**Rabbi Zev-Hayyim Feyer**

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*Parshat Tazria*

**On the eighth day he shall take two perfect sheep and one perfect year-old ewe. . . . If he is poor and cannot afford this, then he will take one sheep . . . and two pigeons or two doves, which he can afford. (Leviticus 14:10, 21-22)**

How many people there are – we all know them – who study, who pray, and who think to themselves that, even if they are not devoting themselves to these holy activities to the extent they might, at least they are doing a better job than are their friends and neighbors.

The Hafetz Hayyim (Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan, Poland, d. 1935), noting that a poor person afflicted with *tzara'at* (traditionally, although inaccurately, rendered as “leprosy”) can bring two pigeons or doves as his offering after being cleansed, while a wealthy person who brings the same two birds does not fulfill his obligation, says that one who has a better understanding and appreciation of the value of study and prayer has a concomitant obligation to do more than his less able (or less aware) neighbor.

Judaism, the Hafetz Hayyim teaches, does not encourage “competitive religion.” Because each person has his or her own unique background, has undergone his or her own unique experiences, and faces his or her own unique set of circumstances, a given response may be a phenomenal success for one individual and an utter failure for another.

One who appreciates a *mitzvah* (Divine Commandment) as a tool for spiritual development should take hold of it, fulfilling it with all his or her heart and soul, fulfilling it with *hidur mitzvah* (beautification of the *mitzvah*). Our master and teacher Rebbe Nahman of Breslov (Ukraine, 1772-1810) teaches that each individual should find one particular *mitzvah* which speaks to his or her heart and soul and then strive to observe that particular *mitzvah* – without in any way denigrating or lessening the observance of the other *mitzvot* – with a special intensity.

To follow that drive is indeed praiseworthy, but, as the Hafetz Hayyim reminds us, it can become destructive of one’s spirituality to use one’s intense observance as a vehicle for feelings of superiority over others. The fact that others do not observe a particular *mitzvah* – or the *mitzvot* in general – with great intensity does not justify looking down upon them. After all, what may be an utter failure for one individual may be a phenomenal success for another.

As our ancient Talmudic sages taught, it matters not whether one does much or little, but only whether one’s heart is turned toward Heaven.

Shabbat Shalom.