

"COMMAND PERFORMANCE"
(full outline)

The rabbis were intrigued by the word צו, which gives the name to today's Sidra and which concerns, specifically, the קרבן עולה. They detected in it a certain directness that is not as evident in the synonyms most frequently used in the Bible, אמר and דבר, say and speak. Thus, the מדרש רבה, as quoted by Rashi, reads:
אין צו אלא לשון צורך איך וצדורה.
אמר ה' לעיון איוול צריך להזהר במקום של חסרון כ"ס.

The relevance of the element of חסרון כ"ס is obvious: the קרבן עולה is one from which there is no benefit for the מכה נים because it is completely consumed on the altar. However, in what manner does the word צו imply זריזות -- zest, eagerness, or avidity? The author of מדרש רבה tells us as follows: the Talmud decides that,
היה צוה וזהו איוול וזהו חסרון
and Tosafot (קידושין פ"א דף ק"א) explains that one who is under a command is always concerned and nervous, lest he not do enough, lest he be a failure. Therefore, he performs with verve and eagerness. However, one who volunteers his performance, the איוול וזהו חסרון, does not possess this anxiety, since his non-performance is not a mark of failure, and therefore does not imply guilt. Hence, one who is not under the צוה may be lackadaisical in his performance. The word צו, the concept of צוה, therefore implies זריז.

Now, whereas the Sages here were concerned with an individual law, that of קרבן עולה, I believe that the same concept applies to the totality of the Torah. After all, in the Torah itself the entirety of Judaism is referred to as הוצוה הלאה, as in the expression of משה ואלו אמר, that the entire Torah was commanded to us, or is in the category of a צוה.

One of the great problems of modern Jewish theology is the element of autonomy. Since the times of the German philosopher Kant, Western thought has been committed to the idea that man himself is the ultimate authority, that the life of man should be spent in pleasing man, not in pleasing God or some other external power. This idea of the autonomy of man has exerted an enormous influence on Western thought. Hence, many Jews who are searching for meaning in life, who are involved in a spiritual and religious quest, and have come to Judaism after years of alienation, have returned armed with Western prejudices in favor of autonomy. Thus, they have not been able to make their full peace with Torah and especially Halakhah.

So it is that we find the problem full-blown in the works of such a deeply Jewish thinker as Franz Rosenzweig. In a treatise to Buber, and expanding on one of the ideas of Buber, Rosenzweig tells us that a Jew must expose himself to all of Halakhah, from which he must then choose what is meaningful and relevant to him. As Rosenzweig put it, I observe only if I feel addressed personally by God through this commandment.

It so happens that, towards the end of his life, Franz Rosenzweig observed all of Halakhah, he felt "addressed" by all of it. Yet, this theology which is now espoused by so many non-Orthodox Jews, is incomplete, it shows the signs of unreconciled and undigested conflict. It means that those who seek to return, but only on the condition that they feel addressed, have never learned the true concept of *צו*. And that is *צו איך איראד אים*. *צו* or *צוה*, the concept of command, means that everyone is addressed, even if he does not feel it. It means that he must perform with *צוה*, with urgency and passion and *צוה איראד אים*, for once and forever.

A genuine Jew cannot be an eclectic and practice selectivism when he approaches the commandments of the Torah. It is true that in practice many people pick and choose. As it is often said, "everyone has his own *צוה איך איראד אים*". But there is a difference between recognizing this fact and sanctioning it. Making your own compromises is a personal predilection, an individual idiosyncrasy; never should it be elevated to the realm of faith for a whole people. Orthodoxy maintains its full commitment to the concept of *צו* or *צוה*, holding that when you come to the most fundamental decision, it must be thenonomous (God-centered), and not autonomous (man-centered). This means that the Torah must be accepted as a commandment, and the performance must be accomplished even if I do not "feel" it, even if I do not recognize its "relevance," and even if I fail in so many ways to live up to it.

צו as *צוה* means: improve, grow! If I compromise in my personal life -- whether it is in income tax, skirting *צוה*, skipping *צוה* or in violating a moral commandment -- the concept of *צוה* means that I must remember never to remain stationary, but must learn to transcend my limitations and grow on and out. *צו* as *צוה* also means that if I have turned dull and routinized and lifeless in my Judaism, I must inject with new passion and alacrity and warmth. *צו* means that even if I find my performance taxing, discomforting, and expensive, I still am under command and must fulfill that charge despite *צוה*, the expenses it poses upon me. Hence, the *צוה* or all the Torah are *צו*, a command performance.

I would now like to bring to your attention one specific "command performance" of the greatest urgency, and one which is our special responsibility -- Yeshiva University.

(Here -- appeal for Y.U.)