Sermon/Drasha Parshas *Tzav*: What Does it Mean to be Reliable?

When Antonio de Sousa's car broke down on the way to work, calling a tow truck didn't enter his mind. Instead, he left his car beside the highway and ran five miles through downtown Tampa, Fla., to get to his job as a doorman at the Hyatt Regency hotel. "I was all sweaty, but I made it on time, at exactly 3 o'clock," he said.

17-year-old high-school senior Ciara Cetraro had a marvelous opportunity to enjoy a 'Senior Ditch Day' with friends as the end of the school approached. But Ciara wouldn't consider it.

Ed Batka, 59, a compounding specialist at a Los Angeles Cosmetics company, said "I get razzed once in a while. People say, 'Why don't you take a day off? Is there something wrong with you?'"

What makes Antonio the doorman run five miles to work?

What motivates Ciara -- who lives in Hawaii, of all places -- to resist 'Senior-itis' and stay in class?

What's wrong with Ed the Cosmetics worker? Why doesn't he just chill out and take a day off?

Antonio, Ciara and Ed's curious behavior can't be explained from anything that appears in *Tzav*, this week's Torah portion --but is indicated from something glaringly absent in *Tzav*.

Leviticus (*Vayikra*) is largely filled with details of various offerings (*korbonos)* to be brought in the Tabernacle (*Mishkan*). Sin-offerings. Peace offerings. Thanksgiving offerings. Guilt offerings. You name the offering, it's right here in the book of Leviticus. Except for the *Korban Tamid*, the daily offering.

We're within thirty days of Passover, so I can phrase the obvious question in the following way: *Mah nishtana* the daily offering? Why is the *Korban Tamid* described earlier in the Book of Exodus by the building of the Tabernacle, and not here in Leviticus by all the other offerings?

Antonio de Sousa ran 5 miles to work, because that sprint years ago kept him on track toward his record of 26 years of perfect attendance.

Ciara Cetraro didn't skip school because she didn't miss a day of school ever -- since kindergarten -- through, and including her senior year in high school. That's more than 2,000 days of showing up for every day of school.

And Ed Batka wouldn't take a day off of work, because he had a 25-year record of perfect attendance.

The *Korban Tamid*, the perpetual offering, was brought morning and afternoon every day of the year. Weekdays. Shabbos. Holidays. Every day of the year without fail. It had 'perfect attendance'! The placement of the commandment of the *Korban Tamid* by the building of the *Mishkan* signified that the daily offering wasn't just an offering or a service like other offerings in Leviticus. The daily offering was, first and foremost, a defining part of the structure of the Tabernacle itself.

Why?

There are only good things to be said about individuals who are consistent, dependable and reliable. How many days a year did you miss, on average, when you were in school? What's the longest you've gone without taking a day off?

*Tamid* means always, regular or perpetual -- as in the *Ner Tamid*, the Eternal Light. It is an important word in our social, psychological and spiritual dictionary. It means to be reliable, to always be there – for our spouses, our friends, our synagogues and our communities. Who can complain about someone or something that is reliable? Look how admiring we are of the stream of boiling hot water that shoots out of the earth on a regular schedule in Wyoming. In fact, we call that geyser “Old Faithful,” implying that it is like an old friend who never lets us down.

A rule of social character and a lesson of the *Korban Tamid* is that there is tremendous benefit in being a reliable person. Like the *Korban Tamid* was a defining part of the *Mishkan*, reliability is a defining part of our character.

What does it mean to be reliable? Let's look at five things that reliable people do.

1) Reliable people are punctual.

Vince Lombardi was a famous football coach of the Green Bay Packers, known for a number of amazing accomplishments. One of Lombardi's 'secrets to success' was his emphasis on punctuality.

Lombardi used to tell his players that they needed to show up to practice 15 minutes early. Otherwise, they were considered late. His fifteen minutes early concept came to be known as Lombardi Time. This was so well known that in, 2012 a new clock was erected at Lambeau Field in Green Bay, WI that was permanently set 15 minutes ahead of the actual time. Lombardi’s belief was that being on time wasn’t enough.

Show up one minute late to a job interview and you may not get hired. Show up one minute late to a flight and the plane many already be taxiing out to the runway. Keep your customer waiting and you may not make the sale. Late is late. And ....it's disrespectful. But being a minute or two early, and in some cases fifteen minutes early, is really more than just being on time. It shows reliability.

2) Reliable people keep their promises.

Being a person of your word is the cornerstone of reliability. If you tell someone you’re going to do something, and do it in X amount of time, you better move heaven and earth to fulfill that promise. If you say, "I'll be with you in 5 minutes", or "Let's do something together on Sunday", or "I'll help with the cooking" or "I'll be there for the minyan" -- you best do everything possible to be there. A reliable person isn't simply afraid of violating the prohibition of telling a falsehood (m'davar sheker tirchak) -- but wants to be an honest, truthful person in all areas, big and small.

3) Reliable people don’t leave other people hanging.

If you do make a promise that truly dire and unforeseen circumstances prevent you from fulfilling, let the person know as soon as possible. Bite the bullet and don’t wait until the last minute to tell them you can’t make it. If you’re running late, call ahead to let the person you’re meeting know instead of letting them wonder where you are. But don't use the fact that you can call ahead, to be late.

Always strive to be prompt in your responses to phone and online communication as well. Try your best to reply within 24 hours of receiving a call, text or email, even if just to say, “I can’t give you an answer right now, but will look into it, and get back to you as soon as I can,” or “Got it. Will get to work!”

4) Whatever reliable people do, they do it well.

The maxim: “If something is worth doing, it’s worth doing well,” has been around for a couple of centuries, and is just as true today as it ever was. Reliable people do their best work whether the task is fulfilling and important, or menial and mindless. Some feel that it’s OK to slack off when it’s a task that’s “beneath” them, saying that they’d put in a real effort if the work was commensurate with their talents and abilities. But it’s the person who takes pride in his or her work, whatever it is, who becomes reliable. They use the talents and skills Hashem has blessed them with to the best of their ability. The reliable person strives for excellence.

5) The reliable person is consistent.

Consistency is a huge part of reliability. The person who gets pumped about an exercise program, works out every day, and then after two weeks falls off the wagon for several months; the student who sometimes churns out A+ papers and sometimes doesn’t turn them in at all; the friend who hangs out with you every day but disappears when you ask for a favor; the person who 'dabbles' in Judaism -- sometimes engaging, sometimes not. These lack consistency, fail to gain the trust of others, and most significantly, fail to build faith in themselves.

We all want:

• Reliable cars. A car that starts when we turn the ignition key

• Reliable mail. That gets delivered on time.

• Reliable cell-phone service. Calls that connect and don't get dropped.

• Reliable airlines. Flights that land and take off on time

• Reliable restaurants. That have quality food and service

• Reliable friends and colleagues. People in our lives who do what they say.

If so, shouldn't we make ourselves into people who are more reliable?

There are many reasons why people act with exceptional reliability.

Antonio de Sousa, the doorman, explained his perfect attendance record by saying, "I just love my job." Antonio said that being at work every day allows him to remember the faces and occupations of repeat guests, greet them by name, and engage them in meaningful conversations.

Ciara Cetraro, the student who never missed a day of school, said: "I never did this for the recognition or awards. School is very important to me and I like it. I've always been afraid of possibly missing something. I just wanted to try my best, learn as much as I can and continually improve myself. By not missing a single day of school, I get the opportunity to build on and broaden my knowledge."

Ed Batka, the cosmetic company employee, had a different reason for never missing work. Employees at Ed's company can get a diamond ring or washer and dryer for nine years' perfect attendance. Ed said, "I get razzed once in a while. People say, 'Why don't you take a day off? Is there something wrong with you?'" His answer: "You won't be laughing when I'm up there at the attendance awards, getting my gift" -- which last year was a free trip to Hawaii, where he and his wife renewed their marriage vows.

And for us? While the ideas above present a compelling case to become a reliable person, it's a mitzvah for us to learn and apply the lesson of the *Korban Tamid*; reliability is a foundation of the Tabernacle, and a foundation of our spiritual makeup.

It's a *mitzvah* to be reliable. Today, we've suggested five areas in which we can improve our reliability.

1) Be punctual

2) Keep your promises

3) Don't leave people hanging

4) Do what you do well

5) Be consistent

Reliability is a key to excellence, respect from others, self-respect, reaching your potential, and creating a closer relationship with G-d.