

G'D THE SOURCE OF LIFE

by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky

1. G'd the Source of Life

The Torah tells us that the Altar upon which burnt offerings were brought was made of wood that was covered with a thin layer of copper. It is therefore referred to as "the copper Altar" and "the Altar of burnt offerings." The Midrash states, "Moshe said before G'd, 'Master of the Universe, You had commanded me to make an Altar from Achacia wood and cover it with copper. You also told me that there will be a continuous fire that burns upon it. Will the fire not melt away the copper and burn the wood that is beneath it?' G'd responded to Moshe, 'The fact that fire burns through copper and consumes wood is a phenomenon that exists within the physical realm. However, in the spiritual realm these laws do not apply. Gaze upon the angels. They are composed of a consuming fire. In addition, in the spiritual realm there are great amounts of ice, yet the fire of the angels does not melt it. Fire and ice coexist without interfering with one another.'"

The Midrash continues, "You (Moshe) have witnessed things that were not alive and suddenly became alive. As you have seen regarding the staff of Aaron. It was a staff made from dry wood; however, when there was a question about who was qualified to be the High Priest, he was told to put his staff among the staffs of the other Princes of the Tribes. Aaron's staff sprouted almonds while the others remained non-fruit bearing. When something comes in contact with the Divine Presence, life is infused into it. Reb Levy explains that when King Solomon brought the Holy Ark into the Temple, all the wood in the Temple became moist. The Cedar wood began to sprout fruits. As it states, 'That which was planted in the courtyard of G'd began to sprout (fruits.)' It was from these fruits that the Priests were sustained. However, when King Menasha, brought idolatry into the Temple, the viability of the wood was lost. It once again returned to its dry state and no longer produced fruit." Therefore, Moshe need not be concerned that the fire that burned continuously upon the Altar would melt away the copper covering and consume the wood. The setting of the Altar was part of the spiritual realm and thus not subject to the physical laws of nature. Was this fact not known to Moshe? What was the basis for Moshe's lack of understanding that required G'd's response?

The Midrash tells us that at Sinai every Jew stood in a physical state of perfection. Whoever had been previously blind was able to see. If one were crippled, he was able to stand. Those who were deaf were able to hear. This is because the Divine Presence had come upon Sinai. Since G'd is the source of all life and everything that is perfect, anything that is within His proximity is infused with a

life force and thus assumes a state of perfection. There is no deficiency within the life force that one receives directly from G'd. Thus, anything that is exposed to His Presence assumes a perfected state. However, after the sin of the Golden Calf the Divine Presence distanced itself from the Jewish people. Those who had been previously handicapped reverted back to their imperfect state.

Moshe had understood that the Mishkan was a semblance of Sinai but was not an exact replication of Sinai. Since the Jewish people themselves were no longer qualified to contain the Divine Presence, directly within their midst, it was only through the medium of the Mishkan that they were able to have a relationship with G'd. Moshe believed that the Mishkan no longer represented the spiritual realm. Thus, it was subject to physical phenomena.

Ramban explains that every aspect of the Mishkan reflected and symbolized the setting of Sinai. Thus, the Mishkan was the equivalent of Sinai in accommodating G'd's Presence. Moshe, therefore needed to be informed that despite the spiritual regression of the Jewish people, as a result of the sin of the Golden Calf, the Mishkan itself was an exact spiritual replication of the Sinai setting.

Chazal tell us that before Adam had sinned by eating from the Tree of Knowledge all trees were fruit bearing. It was only after the sin that non-fruit bearing trees came into being. After the sin of Adam, the world became tainted and thus G'd distanced Himself to a degree from the physicality of existence. Consequently, some trees no longer bore fruit because they were no longer attached to the source of life. Thus, they existed in a deficient state. At the end of time, when G'd will return and permeate all existence, all trees will once again produce fruit.

The Torah tells us that Moshe had said to the Jewish people, "For forty days and forty nights bread I did not eat and water I did not drink." When Moshe was in heaven receiving the Torah on behalf of the Jewish people, he existed without food or drink. How is it possible for a physical being to survive without physical sustenance for such an extended period of time? Because Moshe had ascended to the spiritual realm and was in the proximity of the Divine Presence, he no longer had any physical needs. He was sustained by the source of everything, which is G'd Himself. It is only when one is distant from the Divine Presence does one return to his natural state.

G'd explained to Moshe that although the Jewish people had regressed because of the sin of the Golden Calf, the Mishkan itself retained the status of Sinai. It was functional within the spiritual realm. Therefore, the continuous fire on the Altar would not wear away the copper covering and consume the Altar.

2. The Jew's Presence in Existence

The Torah tells us that G'd commanded the Jewish people to build the Mishkan saying, "Make for Me a dwelling place so that I may dwell in your midst..." Chazal tell us that there is a principle that the sequential reading of the Torah is not always in chronological order. When was the commandment to build the Mishkan given? Did it precede the sin of the Golden Calf or was it only after the Jewish people had sinned that they were they given this mitzvah? Based on the sequential reading of the

Torah, the mitzvah of building the Mishkan was given before the sin of the Golden Calf.

The Midrash tells us that the commandment for the building of the Mishkan was actually communicated to Moshe on Yom Kippur. The first Yom Kippur occurred after the Jewish people had sinned with the Golden Calf. Because Moshe had smashed the first set of Tablets upon seeing the Golden Calf being worshiped, the Jewish people needed their relationship with G'd to be reinstated through a second set of Tablets. The second set of Tablets was a confirmation to the Jewish people that they were forgiven for the sin of the Golden Calf. This took place on Yom Kippur. It was also at this time that Moshe was told by G'd to tell the Jewish people to build the Mishkan.

The Midrash states, "Although the Portion of the building of the Mishkan appears before the sin of the Golden Calf the mitzvah was actually given after the sin...On Yom Kippur G'd commanded Moshe, 'Make for Me a Sanctuary....' Why was this mitzvah given on Yom Kippur? It was so that the nations of the world should know that G'd had forgiven His people for the sin of the Golden Calf. This is the reason the Mishkan is referred to as 'the Mishkan of the Testament.' It is a testament to the nations of the world that G'd had forgiven the Jewish people for the Golden Calf, since G'd's Presence dwelt in their midst. G'd had said, 'Let the gold that was given for the building of the Mishkan atone for the gold of the Calf.'" Why was it important for the nations of the world to know that the Jewish people were forgiven for the sin of the Golden Calf?

After the splitting of the Sea, the world stood in awe of the Jewish people because G'd had altered nature and had destroyed the mightiest and most advanced civilization on their behalf. This did not deter the Amalekites from attacking them. Although the world at large would not dare approach the Jewish people, the Amalekites attacked them without any regard. The Midrash explains that the Amalekite attack on the Jewish people is analogous to a fool jumping into a scolding hot bath that others are frightened to go near for fear of being burned. The fool, who jumps into the bath, although he is scolded, he nevertheless cools the water down for others to enter. Before the Jewish people were attacked by the Amalekites, they were revered and esteemed by the nations of the world. The attack of the Amalekites undermined that special reverence and awe that the world had. Consequently, the level of influence that the Jewish people could have had on the world was no longer the same because they were seen as being no different than any other nation. The Jewish people were meant to be the inspiration and motivation through which the world would worship G'd and become monotheistic. However, after being attacked, this was no longer meant to be. G'd therefore said, "My Throne will not be complete until Amalek is obliterated from under the heaven." Amalek had brought about the ultimate desecration of G'd.

If the mitzvah of building the Mishkan is believed to have been given before the sin of the Golden Calf, then it would be possible for the nations of the world to claim that the Jewish people were disenfranchised from being the chosen people as a result of their spiritual failing. They had forfeited their divine status. G'd, therefore, G'd gave the commandment to build the Mishkan on the first Yom Kippur after the sin of the Golden Calf to inform the world that the Jewish people were in fact

forgiven and reinstated as His holy people. They thus were able to continue and function within existence as before the sin of the Golden Calf. They were the model for the world to see how to worship G'd and live by His Word. The mission of the Jewish people is to be the testament to the world that G'd is the Creator. Without reinstatement, this representation of G'dliness would no longer be viable.

The Midrash tells us that the Greek exile is alluded to in the words of Creation as "darkness (choshech)." This is because the Greeks had "Blackened the eyes of the Jewish people through their harsh decrees." The Greeks decreed that every Jew should engrave on the horn of a cow, "We have no share in the G'd of Israel." This horn was to be displayed in the household of every Jew. Maharal of Prague explains that the reason the Greeks chose the horn of a cow was to allude to the sin of the Golden Calf. They wanted to diminish and discredit the Jewish people, who believed that they had a special relationship with G'd because of the Sinai event. The Greeks had said, "If a woman were to have an adulterous affair after many years of marriage, it does not reflect upon the original relationship between the husband and wife. Initially, it was wholesome and there was a sincere commitment to one another. However, if the adulterous affair were to take place immediately after the wedding, then it is clear that there was never a relationship between husband and wife." This is what the Greeks had said to the Jewish people. How is it possible that the initial commitment of the Jewish people to G'd had any value if soon after being taken as His people they engaged in idolatry. Therefore, the Greeks wanted the Jewish people themselves to acknowledge the fact, through the inscription on the horn of the cow, that there was never a relationship between themselves and G'd. They should not delude themselves with such foolishness. This is the meaning of "they wanted to darken the eyes of the Jewish people." They did not want them to believe that they were the chosen people of G'd.

The Jew is meant to represent G'd in this existence through his being and thus would be a light unto the world. However, the Greeks attempted to extinguish that light. Thus, "They blackened the eyes of the Jewish people..." The Greeks wanted to minimize the Jewish people in their own eyes and in the eyes of the world so that they could no longer influence existence with holiness. Therefore, G'd gave the mitzvah of the building of the Mishkan on Yom Kippur to demonstrate to the world that they were fully forgiven and reinstated, despite the sin of the Golden Calf.

3. The Positive Side of Disappointment

The Torah states, "Now you shall command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure, pressed olive oil for illumination, to kindle the lamp continuously..." The Mitzvah of kindling the Menorah was incumbent on Aaron and his children, the Priests. The Gemara in Tractate Bava Basra explains that the light of the Menorah symbolizes the Oral Law, which is an elucidation of the Written Law. Through the kindling of the Menorah, the Jewish people merit the Divine Assistance that is necessary for one to fathom G'd's Wisdom.

The Midrash states, "You (G'd) illuminate all creation, yet You command us to kindle the lights of the Menorah. Reb Meir says, 'G'd said, 'The lights that Aaron had kindles are more beloved to Me than the luminaries that I have set in the heavens.' Why is this so? When all of the Princes had brought gifts and sacrifices on behalf of the inauguration of the Mishkan, the Tribe of Levy was not included. As a result, Aaron was personally pained and was in a state of melancholy. He had said, 'All of the Princes were asked to participate in the inauguration of the Mishkan, but I have no share in the offerings.' G'd responded to him, 'I swear, that while their participation was only one time, you will have your own special inauguration by kindling the lights of Menorah.' ... This is what is meant by the verse in Psalms, 'The desires of the humble, G'd had heard.'" Aaron's kindling of the Menorah was more beloved to G'd than all of the luminaries in heaven because its kindling was G'd's response to Aaron's pain of being excluded in demonstrating his dedication and love for G'd. His pain did not emanate from the fact that he was denied personal glory, but rather, he was pained that he did not participate in the sanctification of G'd's Name. We find something similar, regarding the hospitality of Avraham. The Torah tells us that on the third day after Avraham's circumcision, which is the most difficult day of recovery, he was sitting at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. Chazal explain that from the beginning of existence until that moment there was no hotter day. G'd had taken the sun out of its sheath in order to discourage wayfarers from coming to Avraham so that he should be able to recuperate. Despite G'd's attempt to create a setting of respite for Avraham, he was disturbed and pained that he could not offer his hospitality to people for the sake of espousing monotheism. In order to alleviate Avraham's pain, G'd sent three angels in the form of men for him to host. The Torah describes in detail every aspect of hospitality that Avraham had provided for the angels. It describes how he had offered the shade of his tree and water to wash their feet. He offered them bread and slaughtered calves on their behalf. The Gemara in Tractate Bava Metzia tells us that for every aspect of his hospitality, his children were paid in kind. In the merit of the shade of his tree the Jewish people merited the Clouds of Glory. In the merit of the bread, they merited the Manna. In the merit of the water that he provided the angels, they merited the living well-spring that followed them throughout their forty-year trek in the desert.

The hospitality that Avraham had offered himself, G'd provided for the Jewish people without any human initiative. What was offered through an intermediary, required Moshe's participation to bring about the miracle, such as striking the rock. Avraham, at the time of the circumcision was already 99 years old. He had provided hospitality for wayfarers and performed acts of kindness for many years. Why then does the Torah single-out this particular moment of hospitality? Why does it choose to scrutinize and evaluate its merit to a greater degree than all previous acts of kindness?

It was only because Avraham was pained by the fact that he was denied the opportunity to serve G'd that his act of hosting the angels was valued to a greater degree. If one is denied the performance of a mitzvah and experiences a sense of loss and pain, and subsequently is able to perform the mitzvah, that act of service will assume another dimension of spiritual value.

4. The Inner Workings of Existence

The Torah states regarding the placement of the Menorah, "In the Tent of the Meeting, outside the Curtain that is near the Testimonial (Ark)." The Menorah was located on the outer side of the Curtain, that separates between the Holy and the Holy of Holies.

The Midrash states, "The Menorah should be kindled outside of the Curtain so that you should not think, 'I (G'd) need your light.'" G'd does not need anything because He is perfect in the most absolute sense. The value of the Torah and mitzvos that are performed by the Jewish people to serve G'd are only so that they should be the beneficiaries of His Goodness. The Gemara in Tractate Bava Basra tells us that the light of the Menorah symbolizes the Oral Law, which is G'd's elucidation of His Written Word. The logical location for the Menorah to be situated would have been along side the Holy Ark, which is the repository of the Tablets and the Torah itself. However, the location of the Menorah was in the area of the Holy, so that one should not mistakenly believe the G'd needs our light.

The Midrash continues, "Moshe said to G'd, 'You are the light of the world. Why then do You command us to kindle the lights of the Menorah?' G'd responded, 'To elevate you in the eyes of the nations of the world. So that they should see that G'd needs your light.'" Seemingly the two statements of the Midrash are contradictory. If in fact G'd does not need the light of the Jewish people, because He is perfect in the most absolute sense, then what is the meaning of the second Midrash that G'd does need the light of the Jew?

Regarding G'd Himself, He is not in need of anything because need indicates deficiency. He is not deficient in any way. Every mitzvah that the Jew performs is to attain his own spiritual perfection. Thus he will become worthy of having a relationship with G'd. One of the tenets of Judaism is that there is a system of reward and punishment that is in effect. If one behaves in a positive manner in accordance with the Will of G'd, which is transmitted through the Torah, then he will be rewarded. However, if one fails and transgresses His Word, he is held culpable. Since the objective of Creation was for the sole purpose of the Jewish people fulfilling the Torah, the function of physical existence is affected by their spiritual achievements and failures. All the blessing that comes to existence is based on the spiritual performance of the Jewish people. When they live and abide by the principles and dictates of the Torah, the world is elevated and receives G'd's bounty. The Jew is the one who is the determining factor of whether the world rises or falls. This is the meaning of the Midrash that states, "I need your light." However, G'd is not bound by any laws, ordinances, or systems that were put in place. He may choose to override them whenever He sees fit. Pharaoh and the Egyptians mistakenly believed that G'd was bound by the Zodiac and the natural order.

Even when the Jewish people are not worthy of receiving His Kindness, G'd may choose to allow them to be beneficiaries of His blessing. This is an expression of His dominance. We say at the end of the first blessing of the Amidah, (Silent Prayer), "...Who recalls the kindnesses of the Patriarchs and

brings the Redeemer to their children's children for the sake of His Name, with love." The Jewish people are maintained in existence because of the merits of the Patriarchs. However, when those merits are depleted, G'd will bring the Redeemer (Moshiach) for the sake of His Name with love. Despite the fact that the Jewish people may have exhausted the merits of the Patriarchs and are unworthy of redemption, G'd will nevertheless bring Moshiach. The reason Moshiach has not yet come is because the world is still maintained by their merit. It is preferable that existence advances and perfects itself due to the free choice of the Jew. However, when the merit of the Patriarchs will no longer be G'd will choose to do as He sees fit.

Rambam writes in the last of the thirteen tenets of Jewish belief, "O believe with complete faith that there will be a resuscitation of the dead whenever the wish emanates from the Creator..." Meaning, G'd will decide and determine when the resurrection of the dead will occur. This determination will be made outside of the constraints of any system, calculations, or order. It is solely based when He deems it fit to do so.

It is interesting to note that the Torah states regarding the materials that were given to build the Mishkan, "Take for Me Terumah..." One would think that it should have stated, "Give for Me Terumah..." because the Jewish people were asked to donate towards the building of the Mishkan. The reason the Torah uses the term "take" rather than "give" is to indicate that when one gives in accordance with the Will of G'd one is in fact "taking" because he is the beneficiary of his own actions. G'd does not in any way need or benefit from the service of the Jewish people, but rather they are the beneficiaries.

5. Torah, the Mechanism For Spiritualization

The Torah states, "(G'd said to Moshe) Now you shall command the Children of Israel that they shall take for you pure, pressed/crushed olive oil for illumination (Menorah)..." It seems from the words "...that they shall take for you (Moshe)..." that the Jewish people were to take, for the sake of Moshe, the first droplet of pure olive oil for the illumination of the Menorah. Why were they commanded to do this for the sake of Moshe?

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh cites the Zohar that states the Jewish people were redeemed from the first three of their four exiles in the merit of the Patriarchs. In the merit of Avraham, our Patriarch, they were redeemed from the Babylonian exile. In the merit of Yitzchak, our Patriarch, they were redeemed from the Persian exile. In the merit of Yaakov, our Patriarch, they were redeemed from the Greek exile. The redemption of the Jewish people from the fourth and current exile, the Edomite exile (Roman), will come about only in the merit of Moshe. However, Moshe, being the personification of Torah, will not allow his merit to be utilized to bring about redemption until the Jewish people are quantitatively and qualitatively engaged in Torah study.

Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh explains that the "pure, pressed olive oil" of the Menorah symbolizes the manner in which one must engage in Torah study in order to be worthy of Moshe's merit. Just as

only the purest droplet of oil qualifies to kindle the Menorah, so too must one study Torah with a pure intent. The Torah must be studied for its own sake (l'shmah). Just as the olive was crushed in order to extract the pure oil for illumination, so too must one be willing to sacrifice and deprive himself from the material for the sake of Torah study. It is only when the Jewish people will engage in Torah in this manner, will Moshe allow his merit to be used to bring about redemption.

We pray every day in the blessing for the Davidic Reign (es tzemach David avdecha) in the Amidah (Silent Prayer) that G'd should bring the Moshiach, speedily in our day. The Gemara tells us that when Moshiach will come, G'dliness in existence will become so evident that one's level of free choice will effectively become almost non-existent. The primary focus of humanity will be to address and advance their spirituality. Rambam writes in the Laws of Repentance that one's deservingness of reward is based on one's ability to choose between right and wrong. However, if one is no longer in conflict because he is compelled to do good because of its obviousness, then one is no longer deserving of reward. If the coming of Moshiach will bring an end to the setting of free choice, which is the ultimate objective of creation, then why do we pray for his coming?

We pray for the coming of Moshiach because when G'd's Presence is not experienced and felt, it becomes a setting for a desecration of His Name. We are willing to forego and deny ourselves, for His sake, the purpose of our own existence, which is spiritual advancement. Why would Moshe, who had dedicated his life selflessly to G'd's Glory, deny the Jewish people their final redemption to bring about the greatest glorification of G'd?

Moshe understood that without proper Torah study, one would not have the capacity to internalize and appreciate the ultimate revelation of G'd's Presence. The only way one would be qualified and be sufficiently developed to understand its value, one must engage in Torah study in a qualitative and selfless manner. Only then will His revelation be understood. Not appreciating G'd's Presence, when it is the most obvious, would be the ultimate desecration. Therefore, Moshe chooses to withhold his merit from the Jewish people to prevent a greater desecration of G'd's Name.

5. Reciprocatation, a Prerequisite to Reinstatement

The Midrash explains the basis for every aspect of the Mishkan, "Rav Bisna says, 'G'd said to the Jewish people: My Children, I want you to do for Me as I have done for you. Just as I sustained you in the desert with the Manna, I want you to sacrifice before Me a lamb every morning (daily communal sacrifice). Just as I cleansed you with water, you should make for Me a Laver (kiyor). Just as I anointed you with oil, you should bring the anointing oil (shemen ha'mishchah). Just as I have cloaked you in elaborate embroidered vestments, you should make for Me an embroidered curtain (Paroches)...Just as I adorned you with ornaments, you should make the Holy Ark and its crown. Just as I adorned you with earrings/nose rings/jewelry, so too should you cover the Ark with a gold covering...Just as I provided you with the pillar of fire that accompanied you at night in the desert, so too should you kindle the Menorah...' What is the significance of the Jewish people reciprocating for

what G'd had done for them as a people? G'd, being Complete in an absolute sense, does not need anything.

Ramban explains that the Mishkan was a replication of Sinai. The intensity of G'd's Presence in the Holy of Holies in the Mishkan was the equivalent to that of the Sinai event. Just as G'd communicated to Moshe and the Jewish people at Sinai, He spoke to Moshe from between the Cherubs on the Holy Ark that was located in the Holy of Holies. Ramban presents many correlations, (based on verses) that indicate that the Mishkan was the equivalent of Sinai.

The Gemara in Tractate Avodah Zorah explains that when the Jewish people had unequivocally accepted the Torah at Sinai with the declaration "Naaseh v'nishma - we will do and we will listen" they were reinstated to the level of spirituality of Adam, before the sin of the Tree of Knowledge. A consequence of their new spiritual status was that they had overcome all of their physical handicaps (if one were blind he was able to see etc.) The Jewish people were no longer subject to death. They had reverted to the state of Adam before the sin, which was eternal. It was only after the Sin of the Golden Calf that they regressed to the post-sin status of Adam.

The Mishkan was a symbol of the reinstatement of the Jewish people after they had sinned with the Golden Calf. The Mishkan was the medium through which G'd dwelt in their midst. As it states, "Make for Me a Sanctuary so that I shall dwell in your midst." In order to replicate the setting for the Divine Presence to dwell, the Jewish people needed to meet certain criteria. The Torah tells us that the materials that were given by the Jewish people for the building of the Mishkan needed to be given "through the generosity of their hearts" (not as an obligation). If one felt obliged to contribute the materials to the Mishkan, it did not qualify. The materials for the Mishkan needed to be given with the same selfless dedication as the Jewish people had embraced the Torah at Sinai with their declaration of "Naaseh v'nishma."

The Torah tells us that when G'd confronted Adam regarding his eating the fruit of the Tree, He asked him "...Have you eaten of the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?" Adam replied, "The woman whom You gave to be with me - she gave me of the tree..." Chazal tell us that Adam's response to G'd's question was an expression of an ingrate. Rather than being thankful and appreciative for the wife that G'd had created for him, who was essential to actualize his potential, Adam chose to blame G'd for his failing. He had said that as a result of this woman that G'd had given him, he ate of the tree. When the Jewish people complained about the Manna in the desert, which was essential for their survival and spiritual development, G'd quantified them as "ingrates." He said, "You are ingrates who descend from an ingrate (Adam)." The innate negative characteristic of lack of appreciation emanates from Adam, the father of mankind.

In order for the Mishkan to be able to facilitate the Divine Presence in its midst, the Jewish people had to address the innate failing of Adam. After eating of the Tree of Knowledge, Adam had demonstrated the negative characteristic of being an ingrate. The materials, which G'd had

instructed the Jewish people to donate, acted as a medium through which they would express their gratitude for everything that G'd had provided for them from the time they had left Egypt until the present. Through this reciprocation they addressed and corrected the failing of Adam, thus allowing themselves to be worthy of a relationship with G'd that was similar to what had existed before the sin.

In order for a Jew to have greater relevance to the Divine Presence, he must continuously be appreciative for all that G'd provides. One must recognize that even his own initiative is a gift from G'd. Text Copyright © 2011 by Rabbi Yosef Kalatsky and **Torah.org**.

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