

WHY ARE YOU ASLEEP?

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Tzav

Why are you asleep?

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Sponsored by Bert and Beverly Anker on the seventh yahrzeit of Bert's mother, Ida Anker (Chaya Feigel bas Yitzchak Nissan Halevi a"h)

Our parashah opens: "Command Aharon and his sons, saying, 'This is the law of the olah / burnt-offering--it is the burnt-offering [that stays] on the flame, on the Altar, all night until the morning, and the fire of the Altar should be kept aflame on it.'" The Midrash Tanchuma comments: Regarding this it is written (Tehilim 51:20), "Do good with Your favor on Zion; build the walls of Yerushalayim." After this it is written (in the next verse), "Then you will desire the offerings of righteousness, burnt-offering, and a whole offering; then will bulls go up on Your Altar." This means to say, says the midrash, that if Yisrael does not offer burnt-offerings, Yerushalayim will not be built, for it is only built in the merit of the olah. [The midrash apparently reads the verses:

"Do good with Your favor on Zion; build the walls of Yerushalayim. . . Then you will have desired the offerings of righteousness, burnt-offering, and a whole offering," i.e., the second verse precedes the first verse chronologically.] Why is the rebuilding of Yerushalayim dependent upon the olah more than on other offerings? Because they are called, "the offerings of righteousness." [Until here from the midrash]

How can the building of Yerushalayim be dependent upon the bringing of offerings, which cannot be brought, according to many halachic authorities, until the Temple in Yerushalayim has been rebuilt? R' Avraham Meir Rosen z"l (Warsaw; 19th century) explains that the midrash is not speaking of actually offering sacrifices. Rather, as our Sages teach, studying the laws of the sacrificial service is equivalent to offering a sacrifice. In this light we can better understand how this midrash relates to our verse: "This is the law of the olah--it is the olah . . ." Studying the law of the olah will enable you to have the opportunity to offer an actual olah. (Beur Ha'amarim)

"If he shall offer it as a todah / thanksgiving offering . . ." (7:12)

Our Sages say: "The todah will never cease to be brought." R' Aryeh Levin z"l (died 1969) asks: Why is this a happy tiding? The korban todah is brought, after all, by one who has been saved from danger! If the todah will never cease to be brought, that means that people will never cease to find themselves in danger!

R' Levin answers: When Pharaoh refused to release Bnei Yisrael from Egypt and instead decreed that they work harder, Moshe asked Hashem (Shmot 5:22-23), "Why have You made things worse for this nation?" Hashem answered him, "You will see!" He meant: You will see that from every tragedy comes something good; from exile and persecution comes redemption.

The Midrash says that when Yosef died, the Jews wanted to assimilate into Egypt. Hashem therefore made the Egyptians hate the Jews, causing the Jews to reunite and to support each other. This is an example of how good -- the continued existence of the Jewish people -- came from bad, i.e., from the Egyptians' hatred.

So, too, Chazal say that the gift of Eretz Yisrael is acquired through suffering. The Torah (Devarim 8:5) tells us, however, that it is the type of "suffering" which a loving parent imposes on a child for the child's own well-being.

Thus, it is not a bad tiding that a korban todah will always be necessary. Good comes from what is seemingly bad. (Quoted in Ish Tzaddik Hayah p.303)

"At the entrance of the Ohel Mo'ed you shall dwell day and night for a seven-day period . . ." (8:35)

R' Joseph B. Soloveitchik z"l (1903-1993) observes: It is impossible to move between the mundane and the holy instantaneously. Before Aharon and his sons were dedicated as kohanim, they had to prepare for seven days. Before the Kohen Gadol performed the Temple service on Yom Kippur, he had to prepare for seven days (as described in the mishnah, Yoma 1:1). Before the Torah was given, there were three days of preparation (Shmot 19:10-11). Mentally, a person cannot switch between the "desert" and Har Sinai"--between the street and the bet ha'knesset--in an instant.

For the same reason, halachah requires a person to arrive in shul some amount of time before davening and to linger some amount of time after davening. It is a "serious transgression" (in R' Soloveitchik's words) that people habitually remove their tefilin before or during Aleinu, except in truly pressing circumstances.

R' Soloveitchik adds: The word kedushah / holiness literally means, "set aside" or "prepared." Without preparation, there is no kedushah. If a person anticipates and looks forward to kedushah, it has a ta'am / taste. If one does not pine for kedushah, it will be tasteless. (Al Ha'tefilah p.29)

"At the entrance of the Ohel Mo'ed you shall dwell day and night for a seven-day period, and you shall protect Hashem's charge so that you will not die; for so have I been commanded.' Aharon and his sons carried out all the matters that Hashem commanded through Moshe."
(8:35-36)

R' Zalman Sorotzkin z"l (1881-1966; the "Lutzker Rav") writes, "I saw a wondrous thing in the Midrash Tanchuma." It says:

Moshe said to Aharon and his sons [regarding the seven days preceding the dedication of the Mishkan], "Observe seven days of mourning before it is relevant to you, for Hashem likewise observed seven days of mourning before He brought the flood. Where do we find that Hashem mourned? It is written (Bereishit 6:6), "Hashem reconsidered having made Man on earth, and He had heartfelt sadness"-this is mourning. At that time, Hashem observed seven days of mourning before bringing the flood, as it is written (Bereishit 7:10), "It came to pass after the seven-day period that the waters of the Flood were upon the earth." Likewise, Aharon and his sons observed seven days of mourning; however, they did not know for what they were mourning, as it is written (Kohelet 8:5), "He who obeys the commandment will know no evil," i.e., he will not know for what pending evil he is obeying the commandment to mourn.

R' Sorotzkin comments: This is a terrifying, but important, teaching. One can never be certain whether he is at a celebration or at a place of mourning. Here you have five people--Aharon and his four sons--sitting amongst the trappings of royalty, so that at the end of the seven-day period they would receive the kehunah / priesthood for themselves and their descendants forever. Only later did they find out that, simultaneously with the seven days of celebration, they were sitting shivah for two of their number (Aharon's sons Nadav and Avihu) who died on the very day of their "coronation."

R' Sorotzkin continues: This sheds new light on the verse (Kohelet 9:12), "For man does not even know his hour." Not only does a person not know what the future holds; a person does not even know the nature of the present, whether it is "A time to weep, a time to laugh," etc. The midrash equates the mourning that Aharon and his sons Elazar and Itamar observed before their sons' / brothers' deaths to the mourning that Hashem observed before the Flood. Here, however, there was something different. In retrospect, Nadav and Avihu sat shivah for themselves! Has such a thing ever been heard of or existed? R' Sorotzkin asks.

This harsh lesson has a message for us, R' Sorotzkin writes. The Chafetz Chaim z"l (see p.4) told his

students not to count on their heirs to save them from Gehinnom by reciting kaddish or learning mishnayot. Who knows if they will do those things and, if they do, what value they will have? Rather, we must prepare for our own posterity by studying Torah and sanctifying G-d's Name. Of course, one does not know when his end will come, so he cannot sit shivah for himself. Therefore, one should devote as much time as he can to sitting in the bet ha'midrash and engaging in other acts that will ensure his eternal life. (Oznayim La'Torah)

Why are you asleep?

The above title was given by R' Yisrael Meir Hakohen z"l (the Chafetz Chaim; died 1933) to an open letter that he published on Erev Yom Kippur 5688 / 1927. The following are excerpts:

A few weeks ago, I published an essay regarding the earthquake that occurred in our Holy Land [on July 11, 1927, measuring 6.2 on the Richter scale and killing 130 people in Yerushalayim alone and hundreds more elsewhere]. In it, I encouraged the Jewish People to repent, for this earthquake was a warning to the entire world to turn back from its evil ways and to believe in Hashem, for everything occurs by His hand and it is not by coincidence that many frightening events have befallen us this year. Now we have received a new and terrifying report of awesome floods in our country [Poland] and of an earthquake in Russia in which thousands were killed or injured--men, women, and children, and many farm animals. How many of them were buried alive under their own homes? This earthquake was felt even in our own country. [Perhaps the Chafetz Chaim refers to the earthquake on September 11, 1927, which was centered on the Crimean peninsula and measured 9 on the Richter scale. That earthquake reportedly caused flames 500 feet high to shoot up from the waters of the Black Sea.] Certainly, fear and trembling should grip any thinking person. What has G-d done to us? Is He not good to all and merciful to all His creations? He does not even wish a wicked person to die, as it is written in Yechezkel (33:11), "As I live--says Hashem--I do not desire the death of the wicked one, but rather the wicked one's return from his way, so that he may live." The understanding person will recognize that Hashem is encouraging us to repent, and He is showing all people that it is in His power to do as He wishes. Who among all creations above or below can tell Him what to do?! It is clear to me that, if we had prophets, they would be standing up to encourage Yisrael to return to our Father in Heaven, but now that, for our sins, we do not have such messengers, He uses other messengers to encourage the people of the world, as it is written (Tehilim 104:4--Barchi Nafshi), "He makes the winds His messengers, the flaming fire His attendants." . . .

Now, my brothers--We see that the Midat Ha'din / Attribute of Strict Justice has strengthened in the world and we have no day when we don't hear terrible and terrifying reports. There is

almost no country in the world which has escaped the Midat Ha'din this year. It is incumbent upon us to believe that this is a warning from Hashem that we must repent, for who knows what tomorrow will bring?! Any person whose heart has been touched by Yirat Hashem / Awe of G-d is like a ship's captain, for he must clarify for the simpler folk the obligation to repent. [The Chafetz Chaim then lists areas requiring special attention: Shabbat observance, including taking responsibility for one's children's observance; putting on tefilin every day; proper immersion in a mikvah; maintaining "kosher" schools with "kosher" teachers; and, in particular, strengthening emunah / faith. He concludes:]

May He give us good counsel so that we will return to Him in true repentance, and may He bless us with a year of life and peace, a year of redemption and salvation for all of Yisrael. (Kol Kitvei He'Chafetz Chaim: Michtavim No. 12)

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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