

# STRAIGHT FROM THE HEART

*by Rabbi Pinchas Winston*

## Friday Night:

"The continual fire shall burn upon the altar; it shall never go out." (VaYikrah 6:6)

Rav Chiyah said: The fire is Yitzchak's, as it is written, "Behold, here is the fire and the wood ..." (Bereishis 22:7); the wood is Avraham's, as it says, "The priest shall burn wood on it every morning ..." (VaYikrah 6:5; Zohar 3:30a)

The first verse is talking about the fire on the altar in the time of the Mishkan. Rav Chiyah's reference to Yitzchak's fire and Avraham's wood is from the time of the Akeida (Binding of Yitzchak) 363 years earlier. The implication is simple: the service of the Mishkan is a continuation of whatever began with Avraham and Yitzchak at the time of the Akeida, and represented the same spiritual reality.

This is not the only connection of the sacrifices in the Mishkan to the time of Avraham. When G-d had commanded Avraham to bring his own sacrifices in response to his query about future ownership of the land of Israel, He told him:

"Bring Me three heifers, three goats, three rams, a dove, and a young pigeon." (Bereishis 15:9)

Rashi explains as follows:

"Three heifers" alludes to ... the heifer brought on Yom Kippur, the heifer brought for the unwitting national error, and the heifer brought in the case of the unknown murderer; "three goats" [alludes to] the goat offered on the Inside, the additional goat offered on the holidays, and the goat brought by the individual transgressor; "three rams" [alludes to] the Definite Transgression-Offering, the Doubtful Transgression-Offering, and the sheep that was brought by the individual for a sin, etc. (Rashi)

If you add to this the following statement ...

Rava said, and some say Rav Ashi said: Avraham Avinu kept [the entire Torah] ... as it says, "My laws"; referring to the Written Law and to the Oral Law. (Yoma 28b)

Then, it is clear that Avraham was already doing that which would not be commanded of us until hundreds of years later, at Har Sinai. However, Rav Chiyah is telling us more than this, for he specifically draws a connection between the Akeida and the burning of the fire continuously on the altar. The question is, what is alluding to?

The "fire of Yitzchak" refers to far more than the physical fire that was brought up that day in anticipation of the slaughter and burning of Avraham's son. If not, then the fire should also be called, "Avraham's fire," since it was he who brought both the wood and the fire to Har HaMoriah at that time.

Instead, "Yitzchak's fire" can refer to the spiritual reality and commitment he personally "ignited" that day when he, recognizing that he was to be the sacrifice, abandoned himself completely to the will of His Father in Heaven, and his father on earth. This, the commentators explain, is the meaning of the verse:

"... And they walked together as one."

That is, with a single heart (Rashi) ... even after the realization that the "missing sacrifice" that Yitzchak had asked about was in fact not missing at all, but was he himself.

What is the "wood of Avraham"? Wood is fuel for the fire, and this is what Avraham had provided his son. It had been Avraham's test to bring Yitzchak up as an offering to G-d; who had set up the situation so that Yitzchak could choose to be bound and offered to G-d. This is the ultimate "gift" a parent can give to a child: the opportunity to know G-d, to love G-d, and to choose His way.

It is this that is supposed to burn continuously on the altar of the Jewish people. Firstly, there is the commitment of each generation to set up the appropriate spiritual opportunity for the next generation to intimately know truth, G-d's truth. Secondly, there is the commitment of the subsequent generations to seize that opportunity, and to use it to their best spiritual advantage. In this respect, even after the Mishkan and Temples are no longer here physically, the fire of the altar can still burn continuously throughout all the generations.

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## **Shabbos Day:**

One of the Offerings mentioned in this week's parsha is the Mincha (Meal)-Offering. This offering did not involve an animal, but was made up of flour that was burnt on the altar. Altogether, there are thirteen different types of menachos mentioned in the Torah.

With respect to this simple offering, the Talmud states:

Rav Yitzchak said: Why is there only a reference to "nefesh" (soul) with respect to the Mincha? The Holy One, Blessed is He said, "Who usually brings a Mincha-Offering? The poor person [who can't afford to offer up an animal]! Yet, I look at it as if he has offered his very soul before Me!" Rav Yitzchak [also] said: What is unique about the Mincha that these five kinds [that require oil; Rashi] are mentioned? It can be compared to a human king, for whom a beloved subject made a meal. Knowing he was poor, he [the king] told him, "Make me five kinds of fried dishes so that I can take

pleasure from you." (Menachos 104b)

In other words, G-d, to honor the poor person, glorified the Mincha-Offering by making various types.

In our eyes, the Mincha-Offering is one of the less-dramatic of all the offerings enumerated in the Torah. A handful of doughy substance scooped up by the kohen was burned on the altar, as opposed to the dramatic procedure performed by many kohanim, carried out when an animal was offered up. Yet, the Talmud is telling us that this is not the way a Mincha-Offering appeared before G-d.

The explanation for this is implied in the following statement:

[What matters is not] whether one brings a lot, or a little, but that he directs his heart to Heaven. (Menachos 110a)

In other words, even though the Torah prescribes different kinds of sacrifices to accomplish different tasks, the bottom line is what is going on in our lives and hearts at the time of serving G-d. Someone can offer to G-d the most glorious animal offering, but if his heart is not in it, then it counts for very little. On the other hand, a person may offer a small offering but with a lot of love and desire to be close to G-d, and it will count for everything. The same applies to every mitzvah we do, be it light Shabbos candles, donning tefillin, or praying to G-d, or even the learning of Torah.

A mitzvah is a vehicle, a conduit, so-to-speak, to channel our spiritual energies. It is a catalyst, designed by G-d to inspire us to reach deep down into our very being and tap hidden sources of energy. How much more so is this the case when it comes to laws and specifics dealing with the sacrifices.

This can help to explain why the parsha begins with the word "tzav" which means to command ("Command Aharon and his sons ..."). Rashi explains the usage of this word:

The expression "Command!" always implies urging on to carry out a command, implying too that it is effective immediately and binding on all generations. (Rashi)

But what about the generations that are forced to live without a Temple, during times when the kohanim are powerless to carry out this law? What about in the time of Moshiach, when, according to the Talmud, mitzvos will no longer be effective? (Niddah 61b)

Effective, no, but active, yes! Whether it is before Moshiach comes, or after he comes, it is our hearts, ultimately, that we sacrifice to G-d. Hence, the word "tzav" informs us that, imbedded in the sacrifices are concepts that can always apply, even when there is no longer a Temple.

"If so," a person once asked me, "then who needs the mitzvos now?! Why not merely bless G-d the way I want to ... in my heart?"

The answer is, until Moshiach comes, and until the time that our yetzer haros will cease to have an

effect on our decision-making process, we will require every last detail of the mitzvos to guide us into tapping, and then channeling our spiritual energy in the direct of G-d. Without such direct, even the best of intentions can end in the worse of situations, as we have witnessed historically.

However, after Moshiach comes, when we will know the day spoken about in Zechariah:

"On that day, G-d will be One, and His Name One."

We will no longer be misguided by the negative thoughts of our hearts, and we will automatically become the very best sacrifice we could ever bring. Then, all our hearts will want to do is to serve G-d and become increasingly closer to Him, the way it was meant to be achieved.

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## Seudos Shlishi:

Anyone who "involves" himself in Torah is like one who offered a Burnt-Offering, a Mincha-Offering, a Sin-Offering, and a Transgression-Offering. (Menachos 110a)

What's the difference between being "involved" with Torah and "studying" it? To study something is to observe it in a detached way, like a scientist. To be involved with something is to have an ongoing relationship with it.

In life, there are some who study Torah, but do not have a deep relationship with Torah, evident by a certain lack of respect for Torah and the way they perform mitzvos. Yet, there are others who have barely learned Torah, and have already exhibited a profound sense of respect for Torah's importance, and do the best they can to sincerely live according to what they know of Torah. It is the latter approach that the Talmud is advocating.

We see a similar admonition later in the Chumash, when G-d is warning the Jewish people to adhere to Torah:

"If you walk in My statutes and guard My mitzvos to do them ..." (VaYikrah 25:3)

From "If you walk in My statutes ..." one might think that this denotes the fulfillment of the commandments; but when the Torah states, "and guard My mitzvos to do them ..." it is clear that this statement refers to this. How then do we understand "in My statutes"? As a warning to toil in Torah laboriously. (Rashi)

Those who explain Rashi focus on his choice of words, which imply that studying Torah is not enough to avoid the Divine wrath. One has to be "involved" with Torah, so that Torah imbues every moment of one's life with a level of holiness, even in the most mundane matters. If not, then Torah becomes an external way of life only, and G-d hates such falsehood.

Hence, the Talmud writes:

One is not [truly] called modest until he is modest [even] in the bathroom. (Brochos 62a)

Even in a bathroom? Even in our most private moments, we have to act in a Torah-fashion ... as if ... as if G-d is watching us there, too?

The answer is, yes, if you believe you were made in the image of G-d, you do. If you believe that Torah is of a Divine origin, you do. The answer is, if you believe that Torah is a manual to cultivate self-dignity, to help raise us to live in the Divine "image" in which we created, then we must.

Living life this way cannot result from merely studying Torah; it is the result of living Torah, and of become a living Torah. When this is the case, the Talmud teaches, then one's whole life is looked upon as a holy offering to G-d, and is treated accordingly, and it was for this, as we learn from the Haggadah, that we were taken out of Egyptian slavery.

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## Melave Malkah:

He [Moshe] slaughtered it; Moshe took some of its blood, and put it on the tip of Aharon's right ear ... (VaYikrah 8:23)

The above verse refers to part of the procedure Moshe performed, as commanded by G-d, to initiate Aharon and his sons, Nadav, Avihu, Elazar, and Itamar, into their priestly positions. However, as glorious a moment as this may have been for Moshe and his brother's family, as well as for all of the Jewish people, storm clouds of disappointment lingered off in the horizon: soon Nadav and Avihu will offer their "strange fire" and die at the hand of G-d.

Perhaps there is a hint of this upcoming tragedy, even in the verse mentioned above. As most people are familiar, the weekly public Torah reading is not merely read, but sung also, according to special notes (called "Trupp") that, traditionally, go back to Moshe at Mt. Sinai. One such note, which is rarely used, is called the "shalsholet" (literally: chain) which sounds like someone practicing a full scale of notes up and down, three times in a row, and it gives a sense of hesitation.

For example, appropriately, this note appears over the word "and he hesitated" (Bereishis 19:16) in the story of Lot and S'dom. As the angels pressed Lot to flee S'dom before G-d rained down destruction on the spiritually bankrupt city people, Lot had difficulty making the break. The note to which this word is read, the shalsholet, allows us to feel Lot's hesitation.

Again, much later in time, when Yosef was trying to flee the Egyptian temptress, the wife of Potiphar, the note is again used. This time, the word is, "and he refused" (Bereishis 39:8); the note again is the shalsholet, and it gives the impression that Yosef's refusal had not been an easy one, as if there had

been some hesitation in his decision to avoid his master's wife. Indeed, the Talmud explains why this was so.

However, this time the shalshet appears over the word, "he slaughtered." However, what hesitation could there have been in Moshe's slaughtering of the animal necessary for the initiation of his beloved brother and nephews? Perhaps, this time, the usage of this rare but telling note is the Torah's way of foreshadowing that the initiation of two of the kohanim present was to be a temporary one. G-d willing, next week, we will look at why this was the case.

Shabbat Shalom.

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