



## The Pardes Parsha Discussion by Rabbi Alex Israel

### Tzav: Fire of Renewal

The parsha opens with a peculiar Mitzva. A simple daily Temple ritual called *Terumat Hadeshen*. Every morning, a priest ascends the altar to the burning pyre that sits on its top and removes a small volume of ash. He then descends and carefully places the ash in a designated spot alongside the altar. The ash is then disposed of outside the camp. When the Torah instructs this symbolic action of disposal, it adds a positive note:

Every morning the priest is to add firewood and arrange the burnt offering on the fire ... **The fire must be kept burning** on the altar continuously; it must not go out.!

It may be that I am in a rather Pesach-focused state of mind, but the deliberate removal of the ash from the altar reminded me of our removal and burning of our Hametz. Is there a connection?

#### Renewal

The Rebbe of Gur in his work, *Sefat Emet*, develops a personal, spiritual reading of this Temple ritual, applying this symbol to our religious lives. His first point relates to the need for renewal, constant growth and effort:

*The priest/kohein shall burn wood upon it every morning: ...We must seek out, each morning, new methods and ideas in order to clarify truth - THAT is the wood (to be added to the fire) each morning... Rashi states that although fire may descend from Heaven, there is an instruction to bring fire from a worldly source. For in the heart of every Jew, one may find a source of fire, in the dimension of Torah that exists within the Jewish soul. However, in order for that small spark, that focal point, to spread throughout the body, one needs methods, techniques, strategies. In addition, one needs genuine desire to annul all other aims in life let alone God's Will. (5637)*

In the reading of the Sefat Emet we are instructed in a daily rekindling of our soul's energies. He suggests that whereas we do bear a certain innate spirituality, we must make daily efforts to channel our Judaism correctly, part of which relates to the eradication of harmful influence and attraction.

Which brings us to the Sefat Emet's second point:

### **Purging Evil**

The Sefat Emet notes a certain duality in the act of *Terumat Hadeshen*. At first glance, this ritual simply removes ash from the altar to dispose of it outside the camp. This is akin to waste removal in any environment. We don't love taking out the garbage, but it is a job that must be done, even if it is unpleasant. But on second thought, the act of this removal raises our home. This *Terumat HaDeshen* is the first daily act of worship. It is called "Teruma" from the Hebrew root indicating raising, lifting and elevation. Moreover, the ash is discarded in a "Makom Tahor" - a pure place! Is this an act of waste disposal or possibly a moment of purification?

For Sefat Emet this ritual comes at the close of the night, after all the previous day's sacrifices have burnt; and after this burning comes a "raising."

The Mitzva of raising the ash is because in accordance with the burning of the extraneous, the waste, the superfluous; One then discovers the holiness of Man. (5636)

The Olah comes (to atone) for the thoughts of the mind; as the Zohar says: That is the Olah: the bad thoughts of a person that are burned on the Altar... However, in the aftermath of the burning of the "yeast" (the evil inclination) one needs to raise the ash, because every descent is there to precipitate an ascent... by burning the evil, one reaches the good... and hence the raising of the ash is the ultimate purpose of the Sacrifice. (5635)

We need regularly to purge, to purify ourselves by the removal of the bad that we have within us. Indeed, this process is hard (and takes place at "night") but the aim is to arrive in the morning at a point in which we may be raised and may ascend to the Almighty. Sometimes we must recognize that we do indeed contain evil, negative strains, that must be burnt to allow our goodness to shine. After the cathartic process of the fire, we may approach God.

On Pesach too, we burn the Hametz - dough that has been left unguarded, unrestrained, to rise to a state of leaven. Maybe this symbolizes sides of our personality that have been left unguarded and unrefined. In contrast, we "guard" the Matzot, a symbol of God in our lives. Matza represents focus and control. After we burn and remove all leaven, we are ready to usher in the night of our Redemption.

**So, please discuss:**

- Do you agree with the need for daily renewal? If renewal is daily, then doesn't it become boring and routine? How can we remain real, fresh, always adding something new to the fire?
- What can we do to renew our Judaism on a daily basis? (a suggestion: daily learning refreshes our perspective and infuses new content into daily ritual.
- And if burning the Hametz is taking out the "bad", then how does Pesach elevate us? Why and in what manner, after we have purged ourselves of leaven, does Pesach leave us in a "higher" place?

Wishing you a Shabbat Shalom and a Chag Kasher Vesameach!.