

Pardes from Jerusalem - Weekly Parsha Podcast – Parshat Tzav

The spiritual meaning of the verse: “Fire shall be kept burning upon the alter continually; it shall not be extinguished” (Leviticus 6:6). Keeping the flame burning --- a Divine invitation to be in partnership, in relationship, in connection.

את הצמאון האלהי, הבוער וסוער בשלהבת עזו בלב, אסור לכבות. אם כל המכבה גחלת מעל המזבח הגשמי עובר הוא בלאו של “אש תמיד תוקד על המזבח לא תכבה”, קל וחומר המכבה גחלת רוחנית עליונה מעל גבי המזבח הרוחני, המלא חיי קודש, הלב הישראלי.

אמנם צריכים תמיד להוסיף אש מן ההדיוט, בשכל טוב, בחכמה ובבינה, באור תורה ונר מצוה, כדי שתהא השלהבת עליה ומתרוממת, עולה ומוסיפה כח וגבורה, בכל הדרגות של החיים, מרום רקיעא עד ארעית תהומא.

אורות הקודש, חלק ג', שער שני, סדר ראשון יא'

Rav Kook teaches in *Orot HaKodesh*, volume 3, second gate, first order, teaching 11, the following: Regarding the thirst for Godliness, that burns and rages with a strong flame in the heart, it is forbidden to extinguish it. If an individual were to extinguish the spark or ember upon the physical alter (in the Tabernacle or in the Holy Temple), he would transgress the prohibitive commandment (Leviticus 6:6) “ Fire shall be kept burning upon the alter continually; it shall not be extinguished.” So much the more so, one who extinguishes the spiritual supernal spark that burns upon the spiritual alter, which fills up one's sacred life --- the Jewish heart.

Indeed, (just as with the fire that burnt on the alter in the Tabernacle and in the Holy Temple) one needs to continually add fire from “below”, from the realm of the human being (and not only refrain from extinguishing the flame within oneself whose source is from above but not to rely solely on this fire that miraculously descended from “above.”) This fire that the human adds to the alter from “below” consists of applying one's intelligence, with wisdom and understanding, with the light of learning Torah, and with the light of fulfilling a *mitzvah* (*Proverbs* 6:23 - “For the commandment is a lamp – נר מצוה - and the Torah is light – ותורה אור”). All of this in order for the lofty flame within to rise and increase in its strength and power, affecting all aspects and levels of one's life -- - from (spiritually) the highest place in heaven to the lowest place on earth.

*Within this context, I would like to suggest that the "fire from above" refers to the existence of the soul within each of one us. This neshama within every human being is the breath, the **neshima**, that God breathed into Adam and Chava, and ever since, continues to breath into every human being. The "fire from below" refers to the expression of the soul, in the way we think, we speak and behave. Hence we see the partnership, the relationship and connection between God from above and the human being below, vis á vis the soul, that piece of God from above within each one of us below.*

הרמב"ם בהלכות תמידין ומוספים, פ"ב ה"א כותב: "מצות עשה להיות אש יקודה תמיד על המזבח שנאמר "אש תמיד תוקד על המזבח" והאש הזאת היתה נסית שירדה מן השמים.

אבל אין התורה מסתפקת באש שירדה מן השמים אלא היא מצווה אותנו להביא גם אש מן ההדיוט, ולומדים זאת מהכתוב "ונתנו בני אהרן הכהן אש על המזבח."

למה אין התורה מסתפקת באש היורדת מן השמים והיא מצווה אותנו להביא אש גם מן ההדיוט? כי השילוב הזה של מעשה השמים עם מעשה האדם יש בו הדרכה והנחיה לתפקידו של האדם בעולמו של הקב"ה. במדרש קהלת רבה ז' מסופר "בשעה שברא הקב"ה את אדם הראשון נטלו והחזירו על כל אילני גן עדן ואמר לו: 'ראה מעשי כמה נאים ומשובחים הן, וכל מה שבראתי בשבילך בראתי, תן דעתך שלא תקלקל ותחריב את עולמי'."

אבל תפקידו של האדם אינו רק שלא לקלקל ולהחריב את עולמו של הקב"ה, כי האדם לא נברא בשביל להיות יצור פסיבי שאינו עושה ואינו יוצר, אלא תפקידו העיקרי של האדם הוא לשכלל ולהשלים את העולם, ככתוב "אשר ברא אלקים לעשות."

הרב יעקב הלוי פילבר 30.03.12

The Rambam writes in *The Laws of the Daily & Additional Offerings*, Chapter 2, Halacha 1, "It is a positive commandment to keep a fire continually burning on the alter, as it is said (Leviticus 6,6) 'Fire shall be kept burning upon the alter continually.'" This was the miraculous fire that descended from the heavens. (Leviticus 9:24 "A fire went forth from before HaShem and consumed upon the Alter the offering").

Rav Yaakov HaLevi Filber, senior faculty member at the Merkaz HaRav Yeshiva, foremost student of Rav Tzvi Yehuda Kook, son and leading disciple of Rav Abraham Isaac Kook, provides the following insight:

However, the Torah is not satisfied solely with this fire that descended from the heavens. Rather, she commands us to bring as well fire from the human being. We learn this from the verse (Leviticus 1,7) "The sons of Aaron the Priest shall place fire on the Alter."

Why is the Torah not satisfied with the fire that descended from the heavens and therefore commands us to bring (additional) fire from the human being? Because this combination of a Heavenly act with a human-made act contains guidance and direction for the role of the human being in God's world. In the *Midrash Kohelet Rabba*, Chapter 7, it is told, "When the Holy One Blessed Be He created Adam He gave him all the trees in the Garden of Eden and said, 'See how beautiful and praiseworthy My deeds are. Everything that I have created, for you I have created, take care not to spoil and destroy the world.'"

However, the role of the human being is not merely to abstain from spoiling and destroying the Holy One Blessed Be He's world, because the human being was not created in order to be a passive creation who does not make nor create anything. Rather the fundamental role of the human being is to enhance and complete the world.

I would like to suggest that the human being, unique among all of the wondrous amazing creations, was ennobled with both the privilege and hence responsibility to profoundly become an active partner with God in the ongoing practice of bringing the world to its ideal state for which it was created; specifically, revealing the presence of the Divine Creator in a world that apparently conceals its very essence. We human beings are born into an incomplete world that needs our engagement in order to realize its potential as a space whereby the Divine Presence is apparent and indeed recognized. Indeed, our very being bears tremendous significance in the greater scheme of God's created universe.

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman, director of the Lubavitch Chabad Kehot Publication Society, provides yet another unique insight as he teaches the following from the Lubavitcher Rebbe:

The fire on the Alter must be kept burning even on Shabbat, despite the fact that starting or stoking a fire on Shabbat is usually prohibited. Additionally, ritual defilement, *tum'ah*, precludes the priest from entering the Tabernacle and performing the sacrificial rites. However, if there are no undefiled priests available, then ritually defiled ones are in fact allowed to enter and perform the rites, including tending the fire on the Alter.

The Divine fire within our hearts --- our enthusiastic desire to cleave to God through learning His Torah, fulfilling His Mitzoth and revealing His/Her presence in the world --- must also be constantly kept stirred and alive. The law that the Alter fire must be kept lit even on Shabbat and even in times of defilement provide the following insights in our spiritual practice:

The essence of the Shabbat is the ascent of consciousness from its **active orientation toward transforming the world into God's home** into a **passive orientation toward experiencing the world as already being God's home**. This is why we are forbidden to engage in weekday work on Shabbat: involvement with worldly work contravenes the higher reality of the Shabbat. Cognizant of this fact, we might think whenever we enter into the "Shabbat consciousness" --- whenever our minds become

entranced with God's presence in our lives and we become absorbed in "basking" in this revelation --- we are not only allowed to detach ourselves from the world but encouraged to do so, and we need not be concerned that this elevated consciousness have any impact on our emotional involvement in our daily observance of the mitzvot. The Torah therefore teaches us that the fire of the heart must be kept aflame most definitely, *davkah*, on Shabbat. Our connection with God must never become a purely intellectual affair, but must always set our hearts aflame as well. (*In fact, in Proverbs 23:26, we read, "My son, give me your heart" and in the Zohar we read, "God only wants the heart"*).

At the other end of the spiritual spectrum, we may sometimes feel so distant from the Torah's ideals or we may feel so encumbered by our own negative spiritual baggage, that it is hard for us to imagine how we could even begin to live in accordance with such ideals. In times of such cynicism, we are told to keep our Divine fire burning **also** in times of "ritual defilement", i.e. even when we feel unqualified, disconnected, and distanced, thereby mistakenly rendering us unable to enter realms of holiness.

By keeping our enthusiasm fired **even** in such times, the Divine flame within us will eventually burn away all impediments to joyful, holy living. As the Maggid of Mezeritch, Rabbi DovBer, interpreted the verse, "If the inner fire of the heart is kept burning continuously, it will extinguish all negativity."

But the fire can only manifest its wondrous power if it is kept burning continuously; any lapse in enthusiasm is an opportunity for cynicism to find its way into our hearts. An intermittent fire or the memory of recent flames is therefore not enough; we must become adept in our spiritual practice in cultivating our inner fires to continuously burn, no matter how our moods may vary.

In closing, I would like to suggest that what all three of these inspiring teachings share in common is the importance of encountering the Divine spark within our hearts, and equally so the importance in believing and trusting in ourselves that we can in fact bring healing, bring warmth, and bring connection to a fragmented, cold and lonely world that is suffering in anguish, in despair, and in hopelessness. As we bring our own fire from below to enhance the fire from above, under all conditions, at all times and in all places, we are literally helping to bring humanity to a higher plane of redemptive and radical consciousness.