



Yeshivat Ma'alot

Parashat Tzav

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ישיבת מעלות

פרשת צו

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The Fire of Hashem and the Fire of Man

Parashat Tzav opens with the mitzvah of Trumat Hadeshen, removing the leftovers from the mizbeach. At the end of these p'sukim, Hashem gives Bnei Yisrael an additional commandment- "An *Esh Tamid*, eternal fire, should burn on the mizbeach and not be extinguished." The Rambam counts this as a Mitzvat Aseh¹, a positive commandment. In his explanation, he writes that the mitzvah is that there should always be a fire burning on the mizbeach. This is done by adding wood to feed the fire in the morning and in the afternoon. The Rambam concludes by saying that even though one of the miracles of the Beit Hamikdash was that fire would descend from Heaven, it is still a mitzvah for man to keep the fire burning.

In the Shorshei Sefer Hamitzvot² (the introduction to the Sefer Hamitzvot), the Rambam writes that "hachana", or preparation for a mitzvah is not counted as a mitzvah. In light of this, it is somewhat unclear why keeping a burning fire on the mizbeach is considered a mitzvah onto itself; it seems that it is a necessary prerequisite for the korbanot and not a mitzvah which stands by itself. The answer can be deduced from the question itself. If the Rambam counts the Esh Tamid as a mitzvah, then it must have its own intrinsic value.

The mizbeach expresses the power of desire and will (as opposed to Ohel Moed which expresses the intellect). Harav Kook zt"l writes³ that the mizbeach is the source of uplifting one's will; this is parallel to the korbanot which were offered upon it, which were Hashem's will and desire. The fire on the mizbeach expresses the awakening within the heart of man. The concept of free choice is not applicable with regard to man's will, or desire. Man cannot choose if he wants to desire something or not, rather it is a constant power within man. It is the source of life in the heart of man. What is under man's control is *what* to desire. Man has the choice how to connect this life-force with the complexities of this world. Harav Kook zt"l⁴ expounds on the mitzvah of having an Esh Tamid burning on the mizbeach. If a person who extinguishes the fire from the physical mizbeach violates a mitzvah, all the more so someone who extinguishes the spiritual flames that burn inside a Jewish heart. Just as on the physical mizbeach there is a mitzvah to feed the fire in order to keep it burning,

¹ Sefer Hamitzvot, 29

² Shoresh 10

³ Olat Reiyah vol. 1, p. 119

⁴ Orot Hakodesh, vol. 3, p. 210

so too there is a mitzvah to keep the spiritual mizbeach burning by feeding Torah and mitzvot to the fire.

There are times when a person's desire burns and the inner flames blaze higher and higher. At these times a person needs to also bring fire from the outside. One must merge the Godly fire with reality; a reality comprised of intellect and emotion, bravery and wisdom, Torah and mitzvot. One must reveal the inner will and connect it with everyday life. Yet this connection is not always so simple. The inner desire for good can be damaged when it meets the trials and tribulations of everyday life. Unwanted thoughts can enter the soul of man. Everyday life covers up the inner will. In such situations, one must connect reality with the inner Godly desires of one's soul. The Shlah Hakadosh writes⁵ in the name of the saintly Rabbi Moshe of Kordova that Eliyahu Hanavi revealed himself unto him. He taught that in order to nullify evil thoughts, one should repeat the pasuk "An Esh Tamid should burn on the mizbeach and not be extinguished" many times. It seems that man's thoughts are considered human fire, and in order to negate them, one must think about Godly fire, and connect to that inner place that thirsts for Godliness. By doing this, one elevates his thoughts, and they are no longer thoughts of emptiness. By connecting empty thoughts to Godly desire, the thoughts are elevated.

The ideas of Harav Kook zt"l and the Shlah Hakadosh compliment one another. Harav Kook teaches that inner fire, by itself, is not enough, and one must connect it to his intellect and all the other parts of one's being. This fire must be revealed within life, and connected to life. Although, in life, one's inner desire is not revealed in its exalted and pure state. How must one compensate when the inner fire is not revealed outwardly? The Shlah Hakadosh teaches that at these moments one must connect his thoughts to the Esh Tamid. This is done by repeating the pasuk. One must always connect his thoughts, which are likened to mundane fire, to the inner Godly desire, which is the Heavenly fire. Heavenly fire must be connected to mundane fire, and the mundane fire must be connected to the Heavenly fire; by doing this, completion is created.

⁵ Sha'ar Haotiot, Ot Lamed, "Lev Tov", 7