

Parshas Tzav -Keep the Fires burning  
by Rabbi Eliyahu Kirsh

The Parsha opens up with the mitzvah of removing the ashes daily from the altar from the previous day's korbonos and placed next to the altar. Then, when there was a buildup of these ashes, they were to be taken to a special place outside the camp. The Torah stresses two times [6:5 and 6:7] that the fire shall be kept burning. The section concludes with a prohibition of extinguishing the fire on the altar.

From all of these verses, there is a dispute in Mishnah Yoma 4-6 regarding the exact way to understand the arrangements of the fires on the altar. Rabbi Meir held that there were to be four fires placed on the altar daily and on Yom Kippur five fires. The first fire was for the daily *korbon tamid*, the second fire was for the incense, the third was for afternoon tamid to burn through the night and the fourth was to fulfill this mitzvah in the Torah of keeping a fire burning. On Yom Kippur there would be a special fire for the incense to be brought into the *kodesh kodashim* for the special service of Yom Kippur. All of the Tanaaim agreed to this special fire for the Yom Kippur ritual. Rabbi Yose held there was no special fire required for the parts of the afternoon *tamid* so according to his opinion there were three fires every day and on Yom Kippur, four fires. Rabbi Yehuda held that there was no requirement to keep a separate fire burning all of the time. He held that the *pasuk* about keeping the fire burning and not to extinguish it was merely telling us that there was a requirement for the fires to be lit on the altar and not on the floor and brought up afterwards. This is similar to the requirement that the Chanukah menorah must be lit in a halachically appropriate place and not to be lit first in an improper place and then be transferred. So according to Rabbi Yehuda there were only two fires on the altar every day and on Yom Kippur three.

The Ramban writes that there is a specific mitzvah for the Kohanim to make sure that there is enough wood on the altar to make sure the fire does not ever go out. If the Kohanim are negligent in this matter, then they have transgressed this prohibition of *Lo Sichbeh*. He then quotes the Torah Kohanim that states that this prohibition extends even if one coal is extinguished.

Besides the halachic ramifications discussed above, there are also a number of lessons in mussar and hashkafa that we learn from these verses as well. The Sefer Hachinuch, Mitzvah 132, states that all miracles follow some natural pattern and have some natural appearance as for example when the Yam Suf split, there was a wind to cause the waters to move as opposed to the waters just splitting without any force at all. Similarly, while the fire came down from above to light the altar initially, it is still a mitzvah to bring fire by human hands in order to maintain that natural appearance. Nevertheless, it is incumbent upon us to keep the fires of the altar burning in a natural manner as for example, by making sure there is enough wood to burn. Hashem wants

that wonders should have some sort of a natural appearance. In truth, all of our brachos in what we do come from what we do for Hashem, as for example all of our bread is receiving bracha from the Lechem hapanim, bread that were baked purely for Hashem's command. Therefore, by lighting these fires on the altar, we make sure that we keep our inner fires burning and balanced. It is known that everything is made up of four elements: fire, water, earth, and wind. [The Tanya also speaks of this in the first chapter.] The important thing is that the proper balance of these elements must be maintained a for example if there is too much fire in one's system, the result is fever which is not good for the body. The same idea is true for all of the other elements that they must be balanced in each given entity. Maintaining the fires of the altar is a way of maintaining the proper balance and harmony in the universe.

The Lev Simcha of Ger writes in the name of the Sfas Emes that this mitzvah teaches us how we always have to maintain holy and pure thoughts in our service of Hashem. This is understood for the phraseology *Toras Haolah* the law of the burnt offering and also meaning law of ascent. The law of ascent is that we always have to remember that we are servants of Hashem and maintain holy and pure thoughts at all times. We have to rise early every single morning to serve Hashem in purity as well as maintain this throughout the day. Just as the fire on the altar was never to go out we have to make sure our mode of purity in avodas Hashem does not extinguish. The Lev Simcha adds that this extends to making sure that anything we do, even if mundane and physical must be consecrated for avodas hakodesh and we never forget that we are ALWAYS servants of Hashem.

The Ohr Hachaim at the end of his explanation of these pesukim sees a lesson for us as to how we are to view our future history. He writes about how we have seen so many tragedies to our people throughout our history. We experienced the galus of Bavel as well as the current galus which we do not know how long will last. We suffer bitter oppression and suffering on a level no other nation has suffered. Yet, we must maintain our emunah that this fire of oppression is ultimately part of our aliyah ascent as it staes Zo Toras Haolah. At the end of time, the nations will say of Am Yisroel, *Mi Zos Olah* [Shir Hashirim 8-5] who is this ascending from the desert, so holy and pure, having clung to Hashem during its darkest years of exile? After all, our galus with all of its brutality will last till only until the morning as we are told in yeshaya 21- 'the watchman states that 'morning has come' and our exile will be finished. At that time, Hakadoh Baruch Hu will remove the fats that have consumed the Olah meaning the nations that have oppressed his am segulah will be punished to fullest extent with the same measures of cruelty that they needlessly applied to Am Yisroel. And then we will see 'morning has come', a whole new day has dawned for Am Yisroel and the rest of the world where Hashem will be acknowledged as the real king and the glory of his

nation will be restored to its proper standing. May we all be zocheh to see the fulfillment of these prophecies every soon. Amen