

TZAV

ON FIRE

Parashas Tzav continues the same theme as *parashas Vayikra*, which is a description of different *korbanos* and various aspects of the service in the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle). Since these laws do not apply to us today in a practical way, our challenge is to find how these sections are relevant to us on a deeper level. What messages can we learn from these verses? How can they help us improve our *avodas Hashem*?

A close examination of the text enables us to glean some questions for discussion. The first section focuses on the *korban olah* (elevation offering) and the fire on the *miẓbei'ach* (altar).

This is the law of the elevation offering: It is the elevation offering on the flame on the altar all night until the morning, and the fire of the altar should be kept aflame on it... The fire on the Altar shall be kept burning on it, it shall not be extinguished; and the *cohen* shall kindle wood upon it every morning; he shall prepare the elevation offering upon it... a permanent fire shall remain aflame on the altar; it shall not be extinguished.⁵⁸

The scripture emphasizes the altar's fire in the opening verses. Different Hebrew terms are used, including the following: *Eish hamizbei'ach*, *ha'eish al hamizbei'ach*, and *eish tamid* ("the flame on the altar," "the fire on the altar," and "a permanent fire.") Within seven short verses, the word *eish* (fire) is mentioned four times and the word *tukad* (or *mokdash* – flaming and flame) is mentioned four times. Why is "fire" mentioned so frequently?

What is the significance of the fire imagery that it is emphasized so strongly here?

Our second question relates to the context. In our *parashah*, several different *korbanos* and details of the Temple service are discussed. Why is the central symbol of the *esh tamid* mentioned specifically in the context of the *korban olah*? What is the unique connection between this fire and this particular offering?

We can formulate a third question by focusing on the verse about the permanent fire, the *esh tamid*. The *pasuk* concludes, “it shall not be extinguished.” Rashi comments⁵⁹ on the seemingly superfluous word “*tamid*.” Since the verse already explains that the fire cannot be extinguished, the word “*tamid*” here is not describing the fire’s steadfast quality. Rather, this particular use of the word “*tamid*” alludes to another instance in which the text describes fire as “*tamid*”: The fire of the *Menorah* in the *Mishkan* is called “*ner tamid*.”⁶⁰ Rashi explains, therefore, that the use of the word “*tamid*” in this verse emphasizes that the flame on the altar was used to light the *Menorah*. This might seem like an interesting piece of *Mishkan* trivia; but remember that nothing superfluous or trivial is written in our G-d given Torah. What is the deeper symbolism of igniting the *Menorah*’s candles with the *esh tamid*?

Our final question is brought up by the *Shem MiShmuel*.⁶¹ The previous *parashah* plainly articulates that the slaughtering station for the *korban olah* was located at the side of the altar on the north.⁶² By contrast, the instruction for the placement of the slaughtering station for the *chatas* (sin offering) is never stated separately, but only in the context of the *korban olah*.

This is the law of the sin offering; [at] the place where the elevation offering is slaughtered shall the sin offering be slaughtered, before Hashem – it is most holy.⁶³

⁵⁹ Rashi’s Commentary on *Vayikra* 6:6.

⁶⁰ *Shemos* 27:20.

⁶¹ *Shem MiShmuel*, adapted by Rabbi Tzvi Belovski, p. 215.

⁶² *Vayikra* 1:11.

⁶³ *Vayikra* 6:18.

Why are primary details listed for the *korban olah*, rather than for the *korban chatas*? Why does the *korban chatas* seem to have a secondary status, simply copying the main instruction for the *korban olah*? Most importantly, what is the implied connection between these two very different offerings?

Fiery Service

Let us begin by discussing the *ish tamid*. As described above, this fire was a permanent, continuous flame on the *mizbei'ach*; it was forbidden to extinguish it. We can only speculate what kind of ambience it created. The eternal flame is a reminder of G-d's permanent and imminent presence. While there were waves of activity in the *Mishkan*, the steadfast *ish tamid* always burned. What is the symbolism inherent in these facts?

The *ish tamid* burned on the altar. Rabbi Yaakov Beifus asks⁶⁴ rhetorically, “Is an altar not man himself?” The literal meaning

of *mizbach adamah* is “earthen altar,” but the word *adamah* can also allude to *adam* – a human being. Rashi explains⁶⁵ that Adam *HaRishon* was created from the soil of the area surrounding the *mizbei'ach*. From here we learn the concept that a person is a kind of altar – a channel for service to Hashem. If a fire burned continually on the *mizbei'ach*, then so too a fire must burn continually within us. The qualities of the *ish tamid* symbolize the central characteristics of our *avodas Hashem*.

We are beginning to understand why the text emphasizes the *ish tamid* so strongly. Consider the physical qualities of the element of fire. It is a powerful source of energy, heat and light. Uncontrolled, it can wreak mass destruction. Channeled wisely, it can be a tool for creativity and ingenuity. The *Sefas Emes* quotes⁶⁶ the same Rashi we cited above, regarding the use of the *ish tamid*

⁶⁴ *Yalkut Lekach Tov*, Rabbi Yaakov Beifus, p. 42.

⁶⁵ Rashi's commentary on *Bereishis* 2:7.

⁶⁶ *Sefas Emes*, p. 25.

to light the *Menorah*. He interprets this comment by Rashi as alluding to two different kinds of fire: a fire that provides light and a fire that burns.

From here, one can suggest that the *esh tamid* represents two kinds of fire within us. On one hand, we have an *esh me'irah* – an enlightening fire that is the light of knowledge. This fire is fueled by the intellect. The second fire is one that generates heat and energy and is fueled by emotions; *esh sorefes* – burning – is the fire of passion and enthusiasm. In this chapter, we will explore this dual symbolism so that we may understand the text's emphasis on the *esh tamid* and find relevant lessons for our lives.

Fire of the Mind

Let us explore the connection between the *esh tamid* and the *korban olah*. A *korban olah* was burned completely; nothing remained for a person to consume, unlike other kinds of *korbanos*, which were at least partially eaten. One of the transgressions that necessitated a *korban olah* was sinful thoughts.⁶⁷ If a person realized that his mind was occupied with thoughts of forbidden matters, he could mitigate this problem by bringing a *korban olah*, an offering that is given over completely to Hashem.

The *Nesivos Chaim* asks⁶⁸ a fascinating question on this concept. The procedure for a *korban chatas* is that only half is burned and the other half is eaten; by contrast, a *korban olah* is completely burned on the *mizbe'ach*. The *Nesivos Chaim* points out that an individual who does a forbidden **action** – such as inadvertently doing *melachah* (labor) on Shabbos – must bring a *korban chatas*, a seemingly “lighter” offering, of which only half is

⁶⁷ *The Midrash Says*, p. 61.

⁶⁸ As quoted by Rabbi Yaakov Beifus, *Yalkut Lekach Tov*, p. 42.

burned on the altar. However, an individual who just entertained sinful **thoughts** is required to bring a *korban olah*, which is given over in its entirety to Hashem. These rules seem counterintuitive. One would think that sinful actions need a bigger act of self-sacrifice to repair the soul than forbidden thoughts. Why is the opposite true?

The *Nesivos Chaim* explains that our sinful thoughts are actually worse than our sinful actions. While we live in a world of deeds, we are held more accountable for our minds than we are for our actions. Our Sages say,⁶⁹ “*Hirburei aveirah kashu mei’aveirah* (thoughts of sinning are worse than a sin).” In this world of action, materialism and routine, the physical aspects of our lives are not always within our control. We can and must control our thoughts, however. They must be completely holy and pure. Even when we are involved in physicality, our minds need to be focused on Hashem’s Will.

One may challenge this idea as follows:⁷⁰ How can we be held accountable for sinful thoughts? Fleeting ideas that are never actualized remain inside the private domain. Furthermore, are not ideas that flash through a person’s mind beyond his control?

On this subject, we find ourselves strongly influenced by Western philosophy. We live in an artificial world where that which is visible is considered reality. Individuals are not held accountable for the mind’s activity, which is the most private domain; thoughts are not public and visible, so they remain our own business and subjected to our own discretion. We can think whatever we want in our own private minds – is it not one of our basic freedoms?

The Torah disagrees. Everything is revealed before Hashem; nothing is hidden from Him. David *HaMelech* wrote,⁷¹ “*Hashem*

⁶⁹ *Yoma* 29a.

⁷⁰ *The Midrash Says*, p. 61.

⁷¹ *Tehillim* 94:11.

yodei'a machshevos adam (G-d knows the thoughts of man).” Even if those around us are unaware that we might be thinking about something inappropriate, Hashem knows our every thought. It’s an intense phenomenon that we are not always in touch with, but it is reality. Our Divinely-given free choice includes the realm of the mind; therefore, we are held accountable for how we allow outside forces to influence our thoughts. Thoughts are very much within our control, and need to live up to Torah standards.

Even if we sincerely want to purify our thoughts, how do we go about doing it? Ideas flash into our minds so quickly that they are often unsolicited intrusions. If we do not even know where they are coming from, how can we control them? The Rambam explains⁷² that sinful thoughts only enter a mind which is devoid of Torah. When Torah study occupies the mind, there is no room in the head for sinful thoughts. This explains on one level, why the fire of the *mizbei'ach* was used to light the *Menorah*. The *Menorah* represents *Torah Shebe'al Peh* (Oral Law) and Torah learning in general.⁷³ The *eish tamid* within our minds needs to be constantly attached to Torah to prevent forbidden thoughts. But does this answer imply that we are held accountable for our sinful thoughts simply because we were not engaged in enough Torah study?

Let us discuss this idea in greater depth. How are our thought processes related to this symbol of fire? The *Shelah Hakadosh* brings⁷⁴ Rav Moshe Cordovero’s advice for an individual who strives to have proper thoughts. It is a great *segulah* (mystical benefit) to recite the verse from our *parashah*: “*Eish tamid tukad al hamizbei'ach lo sichbech* (a permanent fire shall remain aflame on the altar; it shall not be extinguished).”⁷⁵ Why this verse? The *Kesav Sofer* explains that if we have *eish tamid*, meaning, if we focus steadfastly on Hashem’s Will, then He will help us purify our thoughts.⁷⁶ If we fill our minds with Torah, if we metaphorically

72 As quoted by *The Midrash Says*, p. 61.

73 *Ohr Gedalyah, Bamidbar*, p. 108.

74 *Yalkut Lekach Tov, Vayikra*, p. 42.

75 *Vayikra* 6:6.

76 As quoted by *Yalkut Lekach Tov*, p. 42.

direct the fire of our *mizbei'ach* to Hashem, then there is no room for sinful thoughts to enter.

Rav Wolbe explains⁷⁷ that *machshavah* (thought) is the highest power in a human body. *Machshavah* is the connection between the body and the *ru'ach* (spirit/soul). Our actions are responses to our *machshavah*, even when the thoughts are fleeting, on a subconscious level and difficult to identify. Therefore, *machshavah* is our authority, dictating if we are going to be animalistic (motivated by physical instincts) or human (motivated by spiritual desires). Our behavior is just a reflection of our thoughts, even subliminal thoughts of which we are unaware. This concept sheds light on the usage of the word "*nimlach*" (asking counsel) in the Gemara. *Melech* (king) and *nimlach* share the same word root. Soliciting advice, which is someone's thoughts on a matter, determines a course of action, in the same way a king's directive governs the behavior of his subjects. *Machshavah* is compared to *malchus*; thoughts have sovereignty over self.

Consider this famous insight of the *Kuzari*: A *tzaddik* can be compared to a leader.⁷⁸ In the same way a leader has command over his subordinates, a *tzaddik* has authority over both his physical and mental faculties. In addition to subduing his bodily desires, he also controls all aspects of his mind.

A story is told⁷⁹ about Rabbi Aharon Cohen, Rosh Yeshivah of the Chevron Yeshivah, who needed to have serious surgery. The doctors determined that in his case, general anesthesia would endanger his life. Rabbi Cohen tranquilly agreed to the doctor's orders and respectfully requested fifteen minutes of solitude before the procedure would begin. After the agreed time had elapsed, the doctors then proceeded to perform the surgery. Astonishingly, Rabbi Cohen lay still on the operating table without uttering single cry of pain, despite the invasive operation.

⁷⁷ Rav Shlomo Wolbe, *Alei Shur*, p. 259.

⁷⁸ Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi, *Kuzari*, translated by Rabbi N. Daniel Korobkin, pp. 129-130.

⁷⁹ Zev Greenwald, *Stories My Grandfather Told Me, Vayikra*, pp. 185-6.

When asked how he could have possibly tolerated the pain, Rabbi Cohen simply replied, “I was involved in a *sugyah* (topic of Torah study) and did not feel a thing!” Stories such as these are not told to relate a supernatural miracle; rather, this phenomenon demonstrates the extraordinary human power to control all aspects of the mind, including the perception of a physical sensation. This ability is not reserved for the *tzaddik*. We too have the capability to control our imaginations, our perceptions of visual images, and our memories.

It is critical to control our minds because our thoughts define our essence. Rav Wolbe brings⁸⁰ proof from the following famous case mentioned in the *Gemara*. A wicked person says, “Behold I betroth this woman on the condition that I am a righteous person!” and, shockingly enough, the marriage is valid.⁸¹ How can this be true, if the stipulation of the person being righteous is not fulfilled? The answer is that perhaps the person had thoughts of repentance in his mind at that very moment of betrothal. If he simply considered doing *teshuvah*, then he is considered righteous. His thoughts alone define who he is, and the marriage is legitimate. The core of a person is determined by his or her thoughts. We now understand why keeping our thoughts pure is so vital. The *eish tamid* teaches us to keep this continual fire of the mind burning in the service of Hashem.

On the Back Burner

As cited above, the *Sefas Emes* teaches us how the *eish tamid* stands for two kinds of symbolic fire: a fire that provides light and a fire that burns. Let us continue exploring the first concept of *eish me'irah* – the fiery light of knowledge, of the mind. We can now better understand why the *eish tamid* is discussed in context with the *korban olah*: the *korban* was offered as a *tikkun* (corrective measure) by a person who wished to purify his thoughts, i.e. his intellectual aspect. We also understand why the *chatas* seems to be secondary to the *korban olah*. A *korban chatas* comes to correct

⁸⁰ Rav Shlomo Wolbe, *Alei Shur*, p. 259.

⁸¹ *Kiddushin* 49b.

sinful actions, which are of secondary importance as compared to our sinful thoughts, for which a *korban olah* should be brought.

Some questions remain. First, what is the connection between the *korban olah* and *korban chatas*? We have already emphasized their differences. The *olah* is burned completely, while the *chatas* is split between Divine and human consumption. One is required for forbidden thoughts, while the other for prohibited actions. Despite their differences, they are discussed together in the text, commanding that they be offered in the same location. How are they related? Second, why was specifically the *Menorah* lit from the permanent fire on the *mizbei'ach*?

The *Shem MiShmuel* notes⁸² that the *olah* was offered to the north of the *mizbei'ach*. The Hebrew word for “north” used in these verses is “*tzafon*,”⁸³ which is etymologically related to the term “*mats'pun*” (intellect or conscience). We can understand why a *korban olah*, which was offered for sinful thoughts, was offered in that location, because the north represents human intellect. But the *Shem MiShmuel* points out a difficulty here. Was not the *korban chatas* offered in the same location? “The place where the elevation offering is slaughtered shall the sin offering be slaughtered.”⁸⁴ A *korban chatas* was brought by a person who transgressed accidentally and without premeditation; there was no intent behind the action. Why is a *korban chatas* offered in the north when it apparently has no connection to thoughts or the intellect?

Let us explore the cause of accidental sins. What causes a person to transgress unintentionally? There is no act without thought; as we learned earlier, all actions are just a reflection of the mind. We also know that our thoughts operate on many levels of consciousness. Our primary thoughts exist in the forefront of our minds. But there also exists a subconscious mind; we are often unaware of our thoughts that “simmer on the back burner,” so to speak.

82 *Shem MiShmuel*, p. 215.

83 *Vayikra* 1:11.

84 *Vayikra* 6:18.

The *Shem MiShmuel* suggests the following scenario: A person has a hidden desire to do a particular act, but he continually refrains from that act because he knows the Torah prohibits it. The person's consciousness of Hashem's Will prevents him from sinning. However, as long as that sinful thought simmers on the back burner, his psyche is connected to that action in theory. The moment his conscious mind is distracted, his subconscious mind takes control and causes him to sin. Even if he is mindful of Torah boundaries most of the time, his subconscious thoughts lie in wait to cause a reflexive behavior that is forbidden.⁸⁵

Why were both the *olah* and *chatas* offered in the north? Both offerings were a *tikkun* for sins of the mind. The sinner who brought a *korban olah* only entertained forbidden thoughts, without subsequent action. The accidental sinner who brought a *korban chatas* also had forbidden thoughts, but they dwelled only within the realm of his subconscious mind, eventually causing him to sin unintentionally.

Although both the *olah* and the *chatas* were offered in the same place, the *olah* is a stronger offering than the *chatas*: an *olah* is completely consumed by the fire on the *mizbei'ach*. Conscious sinful thoughts are more dangerous than subconscious forbidden thoughts. The conscious thoughts at the forefront of our minds feed our intentions and motivations; they directly determine a person's behavior and define his essence. Subconscious thoughts are also damaging, but they can be controlled with great care and mindful consistency.

Mind Benders

85 *Shem MiShmuel*, p. 215.

The importance of controlling both conscious and subconscious thoughts cannot be overstated. Rav Wolbe points out⁸⁶ that the mind never shuts off. Even when our bodies sleep, our minds continue dreaming and thinking. How often do you wake up with a new idea in your head? That is why the Torah presents this image of the *esh tamid*, the permanent fire on the *mizbei'ach*. Let us direct the fire of our minds, the fire that is always ablaze, to thoughts of improving our *avodas Hashem*.

But how can we control our thoughts and direct them toward Hashem? Even the most sincere person struggles to muzzle the power of the *machshavah*. Rav Wolbe warns⁸⁷ that we cannot work on controlling our own minds by way of “chopping down trees.” Shaping the *machshavah* does not happen overnight, with one powerful blow of a metaphorical axe.

Rather, says Rav Wolbe, consider shaping your thoughts as you would learn to play an instrument. It takes gradual, gentle effort and a lot of practice to play beautiful music. He suggests thinking about a singular idea for just one minute. Repeat the exercise until you are able to focus on that one idea for the duration of a minute. You may be surprised at how difficult the exercise is! The mind is constantly racing and is easily distractible. After you have mastered one minute, add another minute. This is the kind of training we need to learn to control our thoughts and keep them focused on *kedushah*.

Rabbi Zelig Pliskin offers another suggestion for mind training:⁸⁸ analyze the first thoughts that enter your mind when meeting another person. Human nature is to be critical and judgmental. *Look at that hat – so ugly*. Or we might wonder, *What is*

⁸⁶ *Alei Shur*, p. 259.

⁸⁷ *ibid*.

⁸⁸ Rabi Zelig Pliskin, *Kindness*, p. 29.

she thinking about me? Rabbi Pliskin recommends we condition ourselves to arouse new and more positive first thoughts.

He suggests asking oneself, “What can I do for this person?”

With a conscious effort, ask yourself this question many times. Through repetitious exercises, you will become less judgmental and experience an instinctually positive disposition to others. We can condition ourselves to think positively about other people; so too we can condition our train of thought to be on the Torah track.

Fire in the Belly

As alluded to in this chapter’s introductory section, the *eish tamid* represents two central qualities of our *avodas Hashem*, both of which are represented by the symbol of fire. At this point, we have learned in depth about the *eish me’irah* – the enlightening aspect of the *eish tamid* – the fire of Torah knowledge. Let us now analyze the message of *eish sorefes* – the fire that burns. Thus imagery of fire is associated with excitement and enthusiasm. *Eish sorefes* refers to the emotional element of our *avodas Hashem*. And, as with physical fire, it needs to be channeled and contained, so that it does no damage. Let us now address our questions from this different vantage point, from the perspective of *eish sorefes*.

The *korban olah* was not only a corrective measure for sinful thoughts; it also atoned for neglecting to fulfill a *mitzvas aseh* (positive Torah commandment).⁸⁹ For example, if a man forgot to put on *tefillin* (phylacteries), he would bring a *korban olah*. But let us investigate the cause of this negligence. Not taking advantage of the opportunity to do a *mitzvah* indicates something deeper.

Forgetting is a sign of apathy. Would you ever forget your own birthday or wedding anniversary? When an individual neglects to do a *mitzvah*, he intimates that the *mitzvah* is not so meaningful to him. Even if he normally performs this *mitzvah*, we can assume that he does so by rote and his heart is not in it. Negligence with regard to *mitzvos aseh* is a symptom of not being in love with G-d, so to speak. From this perspective, we see another

⁸⁹ *Artscroll Stone Chumash*, p. 545.

reason why the *eish tamid* is mentioned specifically in the context of the *korban olah*. This fire of enthusiasm and excitement in *avodas Hashem* is the antidote to the spiritual malaise that leads to the neglect of *mitzvos aseh*.

We have already mentioned the symbolism of a person being an altar for Hashem. There is also a prevalent idea that a person represents the *Beis HaMikdash* (the Temple), and every physical aspect of it has a counterpart symbol in every Jew.⁹⁰ According to this imagery, the heart corresponds to an altar. Just like there was an inner altar and an outer altar, a person has two levels of his heart: an inner essential core and an outer public personality. The *eish tamid* burned on the outer *mizbei'ach*. The location of the *eish tamid*, and what it symbolizes for us, teaches us that our love for G-d must be an expressive and revealed emotion.

Why? Does Hashem really need to see our love on the outside? If He knows all our thoughts, then he surely knows how we feel! Why do we need to put on an emotional display? In *parashas Terumah* it says, “*Mei'eis kol ish asher yidvenu libo tikchu es terumasi* (from every man whose heart volunteers him you shall take My donation).”⁹¹ Why was it so important that the person’s “heart volunteer him”? Why did the person need to be emotionally moved to give? After all, the whole world belongs to Hashem. Anything physical we could give Him is already in His possession. Therefore, the only thing we can offer Hashem is our hearts – our love for Him. An open display of our enthusiasm and excitement for Torah and *mitzvos* is all that we can give to Hashem.⁹²

The Maggid of Mezeritch presents⁹³ a new insight on our *pasuk*. “*Eish tamid tukad al hamizbei'ach lo sichbeh* (a permanent fire shall remain aflame on the altar; it shall not be extinguished.)⁹⁴

⁹⁰ *Torah Studies*, by the Lubavitcher Rebbe, edited by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, p. 159.

⁹¹ *Shemos* 25:2.

⁹² See *Torah Tapestries* on *Shemos*, *Parashas Terumah*.

⁹³ As cited in *Torah Studies*, p.160.

⁹⁴ *Vayikra* 6: 1-2, 5-6.

He suggests that instead of translating “*lo sichbeb*” literally as “it shall not be extinguished,” we should read “it extinguishes ‘no’.” The fire of love extinguishes negativity. When a passionate love for G-d has waned, the force of inertia prevails. Opportunities to grow in *avodas Hashem* present themselves, and a person says “no” and turns away from them. The *eish sorefes* extinguishes this ‘no’.

Everything is possible where there is love – a fiery passion to serve G-d. Even when the logical mind says “no,” passion says “yes”! This *eish tamid* fuels a person with excitement for Torah and *mitzvos* and burns down any barriers of hesitation or doubt. But if this flame is not *tamid* – not steadfast – a person grows cold and says “no” to Hashem.

The greatest hazard to our spiritual health is growing cold in *avodas Hashem*! Apathetic and lifeless *avodas Hashem* harbors doubts and tarnishes our *emunah* (faith). Consider what the Torah writes about Amalek, the quintessential symbol of *safek* (doubt, uncertainty). We are commanded to remember Amalek “*asher karcha baderech* (who happened upon you on the way).”⁹⁵ Rashi comments that the word “*karcha*” can also relate to the word “*kar*” (cold).⁹⁶ Remember that Amalek made you cold! Amalek struck the faint and weary, those who were lagging behind. Amalek’s influence over us is the power to cool off our fiery passion for Hashem. We need *eish tamid*. We can never let the flame dim.

We witness this perilous phenomenon in every generation. Consider the words of one of the most infamous Amalek descendants, Haman *HaRasha* (the wicked one). When he plotted to annihilate the Jewish people, he said to Achashveirosh, “*Yeshno am echad* (there is a certain people).”⁹⁷ Our Sages note⁹⁸ that the letters of “*yeshno*” (there is) are the same letters as “*yashnu*” (they

⁹⁵ *Devarim* 25:17.

⁹⁶ Rashi’s Commentary on *Devarim* 25:17, referencing *Bereishis* 8:22 “hot and cold.”

⁹⁷ *Esther* 3:8.

⁹⁸ *Gemara Megillah* 13b.

slept). Haman recognized the auspicious time to attack the Jewish nation was when they were spiritually sleeping. Although the Jews were observing all the *mitzvos*, their *avodas Hashem* was dry and lifeless, lacking enthusiasm. They were vulnerable to attack because they were performing *mitzvos* in their sleep.

Rabbi Mordechai Miller suggests⁹⁹ why the demonstrative manifestations of emotions were the rectification at that time. When hearing about the decree of genocide, Mordechai tore his clothes and “went out in the middle of the city and cried loudly and bitterly.”¹⁰⁰ Mordechai knew that the genocide decree was a punishment for spiritual indifference. The fire of passion for G-d had died down in that generation. Mordechai tried to fan the embers and ignite Jewish souls with an open display of extreme emotion.

Our generation is sleeping, too! Rav Wolbe notes¹⁰¹ how we live in a generation that is embarrassed to show emotion. This indicates that we are in spiritual danger. We need to show emotion to relate to G-d. A healthy, lasting relationship with Hashem cannot remain on an intellectual level alone. It needs to burn in the heart.

Have a Heart

We have now gained a better understanding of the *eish sorefes* – enthusiasm and passion for G-d. Let us try to apply it to our earlier questions and find practical applications in our daily lives. How can we fire up our love for Hashem? The Lubavitcher Rebbe explains¹⁰² that we need to put fire into all three aspects of our

⁹⁹ Rabbi Mordechai Miller, *Yom Tov Shiurim*, p. 136.

¹⁰⁰ *Esther* 4:1.

¹⁰¹ *Alei Shur*, p. 166.

religious lives: Torah, *tefillah* and acts of kindness. These three elements are the basis of our world.¹⁰³

As we mentioned earlier, the *Menorah* represents *Torah Shebe'al Peh* (the Oral Law) that has been taught and discussed between teachers and students from generation to generation. The fire on the *mizbei'ach* – the *eish sorefes* – was used to light the *Menorah*. Our Torah learning must be imbued with enthusiasm and excitement. Generally speaking, our emotional memory has greater retention than our intellectual memory; information which elicits our emotional reaction (either positive or negative) is far more memorable than dry facts. In order to internalize Torah learning and allow it to shape our essence, Jewish education cannot be a superficial intellectual activity.

Rav Moshe Feinstein argues¹⁰⁴ that effective pedagogy is teaching with a fiery passion. The excitement of the teacher fires up the students, and they are inspired with an enthusiasm for Torah and *mitzvos* that lasts long after they have left the classroom. Are we not our children's teachers? We can share what we have learned with excitement in our voices. We can listen to what they have learned in school with attentive eyes and expressive faces.

Regarding *tefillah*, the second aspect mentioned above, a cursory glance at our own *shuls* will reveal how the recitation of our *tefillos* has deteriorated. How lifeless our *davening* has become! People are sleeping – spiritually and physically – in *shul*. Our robotic and mechanical intonation of prayers is not the service of the heart. It is stated in *Pirkei Avos*,¹⁰⁵ “Do not regard your prayer as a fixed mechanical task, but as an appeal for mercy and grace before the Omnipotent.”

¹⁰² As cited in *Torah Studies*, p. 163.

¹⁰³ *Pirkei Avos*, 1:2.

¹⁰⁴ Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, *Darash Moshe*, p. 78.

¹⁰⁵ *Pirkei Avos* 2:13.

Take a few minutes before *davening* and think how you are about to speak with the Almighty. If you were about to enter the office of a high-ranking government official, would not you take a few minutes to gather up your thoughts first? Think about the predicament of those less fortunate, and feel *rachmannus* (compassion). Think about all that you are grateful for and feel joy and appreciation. Try to tap into your emotions and imbue your words with them. The demonstration of emotion is not on display for others; it is your offering to Hashem.

Tzedakah and all acts of *chesed*, do not accomplish much when fulfilled perfunctorily. In fact, these *mitzvos* are not wholly fulfilled unless they change our character. *Gemilus chasadim* is meant to be performed with warmth and sincerity that is openly manifest to the receiver. The purpose of giving *tzedakah* is to shape us into generous, sensitive people.¹⁰⁶ Giving reluctantly or without positive emotion does not change us.

In this light, our Sages present another reason why the *korban olah* and *korban chatas* were offered in the same place. Sinners were saved from embarrassment.¹⁰⁷ A *korban olah* could also be brought as a simple donation, and not as a result of a transgression. Onlookers, therefore, could not assume that a person was bringing a *korban* after sinning, and would have the opportunity to judge favorably. The fire on the *mizbei'ach* – this passion and emotion – is meant to be channeled into our interactions with others and develop within us sensitivity and compassion.

We have seen how our *esh tamid* – our fire for Hashem – must be in our minds and in our hearts. The intellect and the emotions complement each other. The fire of the mind is one of discipline and training. While this steadfast quality is valuable for establishing healthy thinking habits, any repetition can become rote and dry. The fire of emotions within us binds us in a deeper relationship with Hashem.

¹⁰⁶ See *Torah Tapestries, Parashas Terumah*.

¹⁰⁷ Rabbi Zelig Pliskin, *Love Your Neighbor*, p. 228.

However, flames have different levels of intensity and at times they can burn irrationally and out of control. Held in balance, together, these two fires combine into central qualities necessary to help us grow closer to Hashem.

May the fire of our love for Hashem and of our attachment to Torah never be extinguished.