

TIMELESS TORAH

PARSHAT TZAV - Aspiring to Move From Seven to Eight

The Eternal Flame

Much of Parshat Tzav closely follows the pattern of the previous parshah, Vayikra, but the focus, the Ramban (d.1270) explains, is quite different. While last week's parshah speaks about the *adam hamakriv*, the lofty level of the individual who offers a sacrifice, this parshah emphasises the Kohanim's role in the Mishkan. Indeed, the word *tzav* means 'command', which, according to the Sages, is a word that is used to encourage action specifically when financial loss is at stake. Here, Moshe is instructed to command the Kohanim in the service of the *korbanot* (offerings) despite the costs that they might incur in doing so.

This is a concept that seems difficult to understand. Ultimately, there was an understood contract between the people and the Kohanim. The Kohanim were expected to devote a portion of their time fulfilling their duties in the Mishkan and the Beit HaMikdash, in return for which they were supported by the people through the various *matnot kehunah*, the gifts that had to be dedicated to the Kohanim. Moreover, the Kohanim were entitled to a portion of every korban brought in the Beit HaMikdash, so their lack of enthusiasm to perform this service requires explanation.

The Ohr HaChaim (d.1743) suggests several approaches to explain why there was a need to particularly urge the Kohanim to perform their responsibilities. His final conclusion is that the main reason for this was due to the requirement to keep the *eish tamid* (Eternal Flame) alight. This was the fire that was kept constantly burning on the Mizbeach.

The other fires on the Mizbeach each served a purpose, but the sole function of the *eish tamid* was simply that it should be kept burning always, and the Kohanim here are being exhorted not to be lax in supplying the fuel for it. This is the 'financial loss' that might have discouraged the Kohanim: not 'costs' in the normal sense of the word, but a sense that the wood fuelling the fire was going to waste.

Constant Renewal

Clearly, the constant fire, however enigmatic its purpose was, formed a critical part of the Beit HaMikdash. The Rambam makes this clear. In Hilchot Beit Habechirah (1:1), he writes that there is a mitzvah to build a temple for the sacrificial service, which will also serve as the focal point for Jews to gather on the festivals. Elsewhere, in his List of Positive Mitzvot (Mitzvah 20), he adds that the temple should be a place for the constant fire. What is the significance of the *eish tamid*?

Rabbi Moshe Shapira (d. 2017) suggests that the key to understanding this lies in the well-known Midrash about Avraham Avinu's journey towards recognising Hashem and rejecting idolatry. The Midrash compares Avraham to a man who is walking through a forest and comes across a palace in flames. Clearly, this person thinks to himself, someone must have set fire to this palace in the first place. So too, Avraham's discovery of faith came when he recognised that the world must be controlled by an absolute Higher Power. It was at this point that Hashem appeared to him and revealed that He is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe.



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The key theme of this Midrash, Rabbi Shapira explains, is the paradox of fire. Fire gives the appearance of being a constant entity while it is really consuming fuel every moment that it burns. A flame renews itself continuously, but it goes out the moment the fuel is removed. As such, the flame is the great teacher that the existence of the world is impossible without Hashem continually sustaining it.

With this in mind, we can deepen our understanding of the link between this parshah and next week's parshah, Parshat Shemini. This parshah details the inauguration process for the Mishkan over the first seven days, while Parshat Shemini deals with the dramatic events of the eighth day. The Maharal (d.1609) explains that the number seven denotes the world as we see it, while the number eight signifies *l'maleh min hateva*, that which is above the natural order and therefore beyond this world. As such, it is significant that the seventh *hakafah*-cycle of the seventh day of Sukkot, Hoshana Rabbah, is based on the importance of fire throughout Jewish history. As Sukkot culminates, we strive to move from the observable world to the miraculous. We express this with fire because once we have finally understood the seventh dimension, the entirety of the natural world, we remind ourselves that it is only Hashem who is the fuel for the fire of this world and without His continuous input, existence itself would cease.

Possibly, this is why the *eish tamid* is so critical. The Beit HaMikdash is the focal point for the Jewish people, and it is there, with the constant fire of the Mizbeach, that

we learn that this world is nothing but a manifestation of Hashem's will. Once we recognise that the entire existence of the world is only due to the fact that Hashem constantly sustains it, we will be able to move towards living and breathing the values of the Torah in all we do.

Chametz, Matzah and a Thanksgiving Offering

One of the *korbanot* mentioned in this parshah is the *Korban Todah*, the Thanksgiving Offering. Like certain other *korbanot*, the *Korban Todah* is brought together with accompanying loaves of bread, but uniquely, the loaves of this korban are comprised of both chametz and matzah.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch's analysis of the lessons that can be learned from this korban complement the message that we have gleaned from the *eish tamid*. Chametz, he writes, denotes a person's independence and prosperity, and is therefore fitting to be brought in thanks for having been saved from danger. Matzah, on the other hand, is made of simple ingredients and embodies humility and subservience. When a person recognises his or her 'chametz standpoint', they are encouraged to realise that their independence is really only enabled by their dependence on Hashem, as symbolised by the matzah. Thus, the *Korban Todah* loaves contain equal amounts of chametz and matzah — *ten esronim* (a specific measurement) of each — to underscore that one's regained independence only magnifies their obligation to recognise Hashem's Presence in their lives.

Next Timeless Torah Shiur is taking
place on Monday 28th April