

The Shul

at the Lubavitch Center

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Ki-Tavo

16 Elul, 5780

The Fire in the Heart

Many Jewish customs are associated with our sense of loss over the destruction of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem and our prayers and hopes that it will be rebuilt. In fact, the prayer book is replete with our requests for the rebuilding of the Temple, as well as for the restoration of the sacrifices. But even though many of us have no problem eating a hamburger, the idea of animal sacrifices is a little barbaric to us.

Much has been written about the purpose of the sacrifices, at great length and from many perspectives, ranging from the sociological to the mystical. Here, we'll present an overview of a Chasidic approach, one that shows us that the Temple service is more than a barbeque with Hebrew.

The main question, of course, is why animals? To answer that, we have to understand the relationship between the categories of creation and the elements of existence.

Generally speaking, creation can be divided into four categories: inanimate, vegetable, animal or human.

Similarly, all physical existence is composed of a combination of four elements: earth, air, fire and water. (When we hear the word "elements" we generally think of how modern science classifies elements by the number of protons in the nucleus - hydrogen one, for instance, while gold has 79 - its atomic number. Nevertheless, it also recognizes four states of nature - solid, liquid, gas and what is referred to as plasma - a highly energized "hot" state. These correspond to earth, water, air and fire, respectively.)

Chasidic philosophy informs us that these two deep structures correspond one to the other. Thus:

- Earth - Inanimate
- Water - Vegetable
- Fire - Animal
- Air - Human

The correspondence may be obvious, but still: Earth has no motion. It does not change. And inanimate objects "are what they are." Vegetable life, on the other hand, grows. That's its defining characteristic, as any one knows who's had a weed problem. And the agent for growth is water. Fire is characterized by heat and motion - the flame flickering - and animals are defined by internal warmth and mobility. (Even cold-blooded animals have an internal combustion engine, so to speak, to provide them energy.) Air is in one sense the most intangible, and of course a prerequisite for speech - the distinguishing feature of being human.

Further, Tanya, the basic book of Chabad Chasidic philosophy, clarifies the relationship between the elements and the four primal emotions, creating a new chart:

- Earth/Inanimate-Laziness,
- Water/Vegetable-Desire,
- Fire/Animal-Enthusiasm, and
- Air/Human-Mockery.

But the chart makes clear why specifically animals must be sacrificed. Each animal that was to be slaughtered corresponds to a side of our internal animal (the sheep, ox or goat within us.) The sacrifice changed both. Our enthusiasm and energy, previously directed - devoted - to the negative, the selfish, the non-Divine - is sacrificed, and transformed - devoted - to the corresponding positive attribute, the selfless (self-sacrificing), the Divine.

The sacrifices of the Temple take an abstract concept and make it real. The sacrifices enable us to transform our enthusiasm, redirecting our energy to G-dliness.

And that's a sacrifice worth making.

(from <http://www.lchaimweekly.org/>)

That First Time

The first Mitzvah found in this week's Torah portion is the obligation to bring the first fruits to the Temple in Jerusalem. At the end of this passage, Moshe (Moses) says "Today, G-d, your Master, has commanded you to carry out these statutes and the laws. You should guard them, and observe them, with all your heart and all your soul (Deut. 26:16)." Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (Rashi) understands the choice of the word "Today" as an ongoing, daily obligation to treat the Mitzvos as if they were just given to us for the first time. Each day of serving G-d should be treated as if His orders were given "Today."

When a boy reaches the age of 13, or a girl the age of 12, he or she becomes obligated to perform the Mitzvos, the commandments of the Torah. When a child grows up in an observant home, he or she learns how to do many of these Mitzvos, so that when the time of the Bar or Bat Mitzvah arrives there is no sudden transition. He or she is already "well practiced" in what to do.

There is an exception, however. Although Jewish men wear Tefillin, phylacteries, during morning prayer, boys do not. Depending on family custom, a boy will wear Tefillin for the first time on the day of his Bar Mitzvah, or perhaps a month earlier. This is because one must maintain spiritual focus while wearing Tefillin, which a child cannot do. And so, as you might imagine, the day a boy puts on his Tefilin for the first time is an exciting occasion, almost a holiday for him and his family.

Occasionally I have the opportunity to see a young boy put on his Tefilin for the first time. I always take note of the care they exhibit, as they slowly wrap the shiny new straps, one Tefilin box on their arm and one on their head. Their excitement and awe is palpable, as well as contagious.

Since Tefilin is a Mitzvah observed daily (with the exception of Shabbos and most Jewish holidays) it becomes a matter of routine. But this, says our parsha, is not the way it — or any Mitzvah — should be observed. What greater honor could there be than to serve the Creator of the Universe Himself? That is something we should feel every day. The Bar Mitzvah boy's careful winding of those shiny new straps helps me imagine I too am putting on Tefilin that morning for the first time, and capture that feeling of enthusiasm and awe. That is the way, Rashi tells us, to approach all the Mitzvos of the Torah.

(by Mordechai Dixler from Project Genesis at www.torah.org)

Yahrzeits This Week:

Marvin Pazornick	17 Elul - Saturday night / Sunday	for mother	Zelda Pazornick
Dr. Chaim Eisenberg	19 Elul - Monday night / Tuesday	for mother	Estelle Rose Eisenberg

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DAVENING AND SHIURIM SCHEDULE

Friday, 9/4 — 15 Elul
 Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.
 Candles — 7:13 p.m.
 Minchah / Ma'ariv — 7:00 p.m.

Shabbat, 9/5 — 16 Elul
 Shacharit — 9:00 a.m.
 Sof Z'man Kriat Shema — 9:50 a.m.
 Beitzah Gemora Shiur — 6:00 p.m.
 Minchah — 7:00 p.m.
 Ma'ariv — 8:13 p.m.

Sunday, 9/6 — 17 Elul
 Shacharit — 8:00 a.m.
 Minchah / Ma'ariv — 7:10 p.m.

Monday — Labor Day, 9/7 — 18 Elul
 Shacharit — 8:00 a.m.
 Minchah / Ma'ariv — 7:10 p.m.

Tuesday, 9/8 — 19 Elul
 Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.
 Minchah / Ma'ariv — 7:10 p.m.

Wednesday, 9/9 — 20 Elul
 Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.
 Minchah / Ma'ariv — 7:10 p.m.

Thursday, 9/10 — 21 Elul
 Shacharit — 6:50 a.m.
 Minchah / Ma'ariv — 7:10 p.m.

Friday, 9/11 — 22 Elul
 Shacharit — 7:00 a.m.
 Candles — 7:01 p.m.
 Minchah / Ma'ariv — 7:00 p.m.