

The Land of Israel in the Parsha & Our Lives

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Parashat Tzav

What is the Connection Between the Eternal Fire and the Land of Israel?

How Can we Keep Our Fire Going While Constantly Breathing Continued Life into Others?

"I don't know how I can go on anymore – everything is just too much," cried a student (let's call her Sarah) at my kitchen table. "I just want a simple life, enjoying the closeness with Hashem experienced here in the Holy Land in peace and quiet," she continued. "There are so many demands on me – everyone wants my attention, and to engage in deep heart-to-heart conversations with me, it's just all too much!" Sarah's words reflected my own feelings of being overwhelmed with demands, dealing with various emergencies, and tedious administrative tasks on top of all the Pesach cleaning. I wish I could just peacefully settle on my land, softly playing my harp, prayerfully tending to the garden, and writing my books without all the interruptions. Sarah's words, "I need a break; I can't go on anymore!" couldn't have reverberated more in my own heart. How can I keep my fire going when I am constantly having to breathe continued life into my institution? How many years have I had to write new rules? Dealing with challenging students and staff, ensuring we have enough money to pay our bills and avoid going into minus, tossing and turning in bed about losing a staff member, and trying to shift staff roles to make sure all the vital chores would be covered? For nearly 30 years, I have nursed and diapered, pulsating my blood, heartbeat, and essential life force to keep everything going. I, like Sarah, longed for peace and quiet to serve Hashem without interruptions. Yet, how do we grow in the Torah way and in our relationship with Hashem? Perhaps our understanding of serving Hashem is topsy-turvy. "What does it really mean to serve Hashem without interruptions for a Jew?" I asked Sarah. "Doesn't the name Yisrael mean, 'You have struggled with G-d and with people and you have prevailed' (*Bereishit* 32:28)? Don't we learn from this that it is precisely through the interruptions to our 'peace and quiet' that we serve Hashem in the highest way?" So perhaps we need to exchange our mindset – from assuming that the challenging drama with people and with figuring out the way of G-d are interruptions to our Divine service – to realizing that it may be the 'peace and quiet' that interrupts our true Divine service of continuous struggle.

The Eternal Fire on the Altar: A Flame Burning in the Soul of Every Jew

Reading the opening in *Parashat Tzav* describing the eternal flame of the altar encouraged me to keep my own fire burning. It is only when we allow the *chametz* (ego) of Amalek to inject the poison of doubt into our bloodstream that we feel our strength ebbing out. Our fire will remain steadfast, as long as we keep strengthening our *emunah* that whatever challenge we are undergoing, it is 100% designated from our Creator to help us grow. There is no greater way of serving Hashem than keeping the fire of *emunah* going. Perhaps this is why the Torah repeats how the fire on the altar must never be extinguished:

סַפֵּר וַיִּקְרָא פֶּרֶק לְ פִסְוֹקָהּ וְהָאֵשׁ עַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ תִּוְקַד בּוֹ לֹא תִכָּבֶה וּבֵעֵר עָלֶיהָ הַכֹּהֵן עֵצִים בְּבֹקֶר בְּבֹקֶר וְעֶרְבַּי עָלֶיהָ הָעֵלָה וְהִקְטִיר עָלֶיהָ חֲלָבֵי הַשְּׁלֵמִים: פִּסְוֹקָהּ וְאֵשׁ הַמִּזְבֵּחַ תִּוְקַד בּוֹ לֹא תִכָּבֶה:

"The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not be extinguished. The kohen shall kindle wood upon it every morning, and upon it, he shall arrange the burnt offering and cause the fats of the peace offerings to go up in smoke upon it. "A continuous fire shall burn upon the altar; it shall not go out" (*Vayikra* 6:5-6).

The repetition of keeping the fire of the altar burning suggests that this fire did not simply serve to cook the sacrifices offered to Hashem upon the altar. Rather, the eternal burning of the flame was crucial in

and of itself, as an independent value, to arouse our internal flame – to keep going against all the odds – and burn away the doubts that weaken our spiritual determination.

A Sacred Tool for Spiritual Endurance

This eternal flame is not merely a technical detail of ritual worship. It symbolizes the ever-present relationship between Israel and Hashem. The fire and flame that must never be extinguished reflect the spark of divine connection that is meant to burn constantly within the heart and soul of every Jew. The Maggid of Kozhnitz, author of *Avodat Yisrael*, quotes a teaching from the *Siddur haAri*, citing a tradition from the prophet Eliyahu, that a spiritual remedy for distracting thoughts, is to recite the verse: **אֵשׁ תָּמִיד עַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לֹא תִכָּבֵה** / *Aish tamid tukad al hamizbeach lo tichbeh* – “A constant fire shall burn on the altar; it shall never go out” (*Vayikra* 6:6). This verse serves as a spiritual tool to remove impure thoughts and ignite inner holiness. The Maggid takes this further, identifying the *Yetzer Hara* – the evil inclination – as one who schemes “to kill his fellow,” meaning the *Yetzer Tov* (good inclination), through devious and misleading thoughts. These words seem to speak directly to Sarah and me, reminding us, as Rebbe Nachman is famously known to say: **כִּי אֵין שׁוּם יְאוּשׁ בְּעוֹלָם כָּלֵל** – “There is no despair whatsoever in the world” (*Likutei Moharan Mahadura Batra* 78). When the yetzer hara gets the better of us (G-d forbid), making us feel that we can’t go on, reciting, **אֵשׁ תָּמִיד תּוֹקֵד עַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לֹא תִכָּבֵה** pulses renewed emunah into our spiritual arteries, strengthening our determination and stamina to keep going – as the old proverb says, “When the going gets tough, the tough gets going!” (Joseph P. Kennedy). The Maggid interprets the verse, “From My altar you shall take him to die” (*Shemot* 21:14), to mean that by invoking this verse about the eternal flame, we awaken the soul’s passion for holiness and dispel impurity – let me add: the impurity of despair. (*Avodat Yisrael, Parashat Mishpatim, v’Chi Yazid Ish al Re’ehu l’hargo b’Ormah* etc.). This teaches us that the inner fire of the Jewish soul, sparked by Torah and mitzvot, is deeply connected to the fire on the altar. The eternal flame thus becomes a metaphor for our spiritual endurance – a fire that must be safeguarded, fed, and kept alive.

Eretz Yisrael – The Only Home for the Eternal Mikdash

The eternal flame, though kindled through divine service everywhere, reaches its full brilliance only in Eretz Yisrael. Although *Parashat Tzav* takes place during the Israelites’ wilderness period, the mitzvot surrounding the offerings and the constant fire are destined for ultimate fulfillment in the final *Beit Hamikdash* (Temple). According to Ramban all the details of the Mishkan are essentially a blueprint for the Temple in Jerusalem. Scripture alludes to this when it says, “For I have not dwelt in a house from the day that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all places wherein I have walked among all the children of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the tribes of Israel whom I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying: ‘Why do you not build for Me a house of cedar?’” (*II Shemuel* 7:6–7; see Ramban on *Bamidbar* 16:21). This reveals a deeper truth: the Mishkan was a temporary vessel for the eternal Temple, which could only find permanence in the Land of Israel. The Shechinah accompanied Bnei Yisrael in the desert, but her true home is in the land that Hashem chose. As it states, “For Hashem has chosen Tzion; He has desired it for His dwelling place” (*Tehillim* 132:13). This makes Eretz Yisrael not only our homeland but also the spiritual address for divine presence, and for the fire that must never go out. Just as the offerings must be brought only in the place that Hashem chooses, so too the ongoing spiritual service of the Jewish people reaches its apex only in the Land of Israel.

The Fire of the Soul – Kindled in the Land

The spiritual air of the Land makes one wise (*Babylonian Talmud, Baba Batra* 158b). It also deepens our connection to Hashem, heightens our awareness of His presence, and attunes us to the inner fire.

Parashat Tzav reminds us that true divine service is not sporadic or seasonal – it is constant. The eternal flame is not just on the altar but within us. The fire that must never go out reflects the spark of divine connection that is meant to burn constantly within the heart of every Jew. That flame finds its fullest expression only in the place where it was divinely kindled – Eretz Yisrael. The *Zohar* teaches: “A constant fire on the altar – this is the Torah, about which it says: ‘Is not My word like fire?’” (*Yirmiyahu* 23:29; cited in Rav Tzaddok of Lublin, *Pri Tzaddik, Parashat Tzav* 4). The eternal flame on the altar alludes to the inner fire of the Jewish soul – a flame kindled through Torah and mitzvot. Each act of divine service fuels that fire, like a new log placed on the altar of the heart, keeping the inner fire alive and glowing, especially in the sacred atmosphere of Eretz Yisrael. During the ongoing challenges of Israel’s current war, we witness the holiness of the Jewish flame of endurance. It is only through the eternal flame of emunah that our brave soldiers get their strength to keep fighting for everlasting peace. The *Shelah HaKadosh* writes that although the fire descends from heaven, it is still a mitzvah to bring fire from below. This teaches us that our earthly effort to maintain a spiritual flame invites divine response – our inner fire awakens the heavenly flame (The *Shelah Hakodesh, Mesechet Pesachim, Matzah Ashira*). *Shelah’s* message comes to life in the way the IDF and world Jewry are aroused to keep the flame of emunah burning – drawing down the Divine response of protection and miracles as never before.

Returning to the Place of the Flame

Just as the altar’s fire in the Mishkan was a continuation of the fire from Sinai – where the mountain burned with divine presence – so too did this fire descend from heaven and rest specifically on the altar of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. No other place was worthy of it. In our days, as we continue to yearn for the rebuilding of the Beit Hamikdash, we must remember that the foundation of that eternal house is built by our daily commitment to keep our inner altars alive. Living in Eretz Yisrael, learning her Torah, loving her holiness, and praying for her redemption – these are our logs and oil. The altar fire is not only a divine gift, but also a human calling. The faithfulness of the Temple fire is an invitation: keep your own flame burning. By nurturing the flame of emunah, we can overcome the temptations of despair and despondency. Just as the altar must be stoked daily, so too must we cultivate the fire of faith within us, until our inner flame becomes an everlasting light. In a world that seeks to dim the Jewish flame, the Land of Israel stands as the place where we can keep it burning – with faith, with love, and with tenacity. Just as the fire of the Tabernacle altar was never extinguished, and continued to burn upon the Temple altar, so too will it burn eternally in the final Temple we await. May we soon see the fire return to its rightful place – and may the holy flame within each of us rise up to meet it.