

In this Torah portion, Tzav, we learn how the High Priest was given the job of removing the ashes. He was to dress in full regalia and every morning remove the ashes from the Tameed. The daily sacrifice which was given morning and evening on behalf of the Jewish people. Everyone shared equally in the Tameed. We can understand how the High Priest would represent the people on Yom Kippur but what is this about his having to lift up the ashes? Actually people misunderstand the sacrificial system. It was not meant to forgive people who had committed a sin on purpose. For what we now call sin it had no function. Its purpose was to make people feel psychologically pure. After they would run up against things that were not their fault but for which they would still feel guilty. For example, if a little boy would run in front of a person's car and he did everything he could to prevent a collision a person would not have done anything wrong but he would still feel terrible. Sacrifices were meant to rid a person of this psychological bad feeling. Lifting up the ashes is important. We have to put back the enthusiasm and optimism and hope and joy in life. This was the High Priests' role. Unfortunately, today many people try to pretend that they are not psychologically affected by different events. A mother I knew when her husband died suddenly refused to let her son mourn. She made him do everything he usually did. In a few years he wound up in a mental hospital. We need to feel psychologically whole and religion helps us do this. It helps us remove the ashes. The High Priests' role was not just ceremonial. It was also to give the people hope and turn the ashes into enthusiasm and warmth.

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The story about a man who was walking down a dark alley and was accosted by a robber. They fought for over an hour. Finally the robber pinned the man down and took his wallet. Inside he found \$1.00. The robber looked at the man and said, "You mean you fought so hard all this time for just a dollar?" The man said, "Oh, I thought you wanted the \$500 bill in my shoe." Many times in life it is the hidden things that count much more than the open things. It is the slights and trampling on your rights, feelings of being had, etc. This we have to watch out. That's why it says, "Speak to the Sons of Israel saying, 'A soul who will sin by accident in all the Mitzvahs of G-d which should not be done.'" If it is a Mitzvah, why shouldn't it be done? This is to teach us that Mitzvahs also have to be done properly. The hidden attitude, the internal attitude of a human being must be present. There are two aspects to doing a Mitzvah: the subjective act and the feelings. The feelings must be pure and holy, too. The act is still a Mitzvah, but not as great a Mitzvah as it could have been if it had been done with the right attitude.

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In the Torah portion, Tzav, we learn something very strange. We learn how the High Priest was commanded to dress in white linen garments and to remove the ashes every morning from the Altar. This seems very strange. The High Priest was only commanded to do two special things in the Torah. All the rest of the things he could delegate. He was commanded to officiate at the High Holiday services and he was commanded to remove the Doshin, the ashes from the Altar. What type of job was this for the High Priest? Also, the whole Temple service was strange in that the people were denied access to the holiest part of the Sanctuary. We are a democratic religion. We always have been, yet in the Temple services the people could only come to the Altar and even the priests could only go into the holy part of the Sanctuary. The holy of holies the High Priest could only enter on Yom Kippur and only then with his sensor burning so that his vision should be blurred. The whole service of the Temple really revolved around the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments were in the holy of holies. This whole emphasis on the limitations of Temple services, I believe, stressed the fact that our knowledge is limited. We cannot know everything. In fact, modern science tells us that today. The whole idea of black holes speaks about the limits of knowledge. Since the Van Heisenberg principle, we do not even know what reality is. The very act of observing reality changes it. We are all limited in our knowledge and understanding. The whole Temple service revolved around the Ten Commandments. The Rabbis ask the question, why were the Ten Commandments given on two tablets? Why weren't they given on one tablet? The answer they give is because the tablets are compared to the bride and bridegroom, to heaven and earth, to this world and the next world, and to the groomsmen, Michael and Gabriel. What kind of answer is that? If we look carefully at Michael and Gabriel we can get a clue to what we are talking about. Michael is the Guardian Angel of Israel. He stands for kindness and compassion. Gabriel is the Angel of Justice. In this world we need both kindness and justice. It is very difficult to balance these two things. We want kindness and compassion and we need it. However, we are not going to go to a brain surgeon who is a nice guy if he is also not a skilled surgeon. We are not going to go to a lawyer who loses every case even if he is compassionate. In this life we have to learn how to reconcile differing views, both of which are right. We have to reconcile heaven and earth. Some people are so filled with ideals and plans to make things

perfect that they forget that they are dealing with human beings. We do not just live in a world of ideals and human beings are not ideals or logical principles. We have to reconcile this world and the next world. In this world in order to live we have to kill other creatures, whether they are animal or vegetable. The very act of eating is a violent act. Finally we have bride and bridegroom. Marriage is a reconciling of differing viewpoints both of which are equally valid. It is not an easy task. The Ten Commandments were given on two tablets because we cannot just look at one thing at a time. We must learn how to reconcile differences. I was struck when I went to Israel by the high pitch and volume of the arguments there. Everybody knew, though, that ultimately they would have to compromise so they were just staking out positions. In Judaism we do not believe in the killer instinct. We have to know when to stop. We never go for the jugular. If the marriage is to last then different points of view must be allowed and, obviously, each party must not go for the jugular. They must know that they have to stop at a certain point. Unfortunately, many young couples do not realize that. They seek an identity of views. This is impossible and not even desirable. Each of us can only see part of the truth. The hardest job of a Rabbi is to deal with people both of which are absolutely right based upon their own perceptions and assumptions. The important thing is that they reconcile their viewpoints and that they do not overstep their bounds and go for the jugular. This ultimately does not serve them and it does not serve truth. The story about a man who came into the bank and he saw a security guard jump a man, handcuff him, and throw him to the ground. Other clerks came hovering around making sure the man did not get up. The man looked at the bank president and said, "My goodness, I have just witnessed my first bank robbery". The president said, "No, you haven't". The man said, "I saw that man handcuffed, etc". The president said, "Oh, no, this is just our substantial penalty for early withdrawal". We must all learn where to stop and how to reconcile conflicting opinions both of which are right.

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Are You Depriving Your Children of their Yetzer Tov?

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Sacrificing is an essential ingredient in the human makeup. We are all born with the urge to sacrifice. The rabbis tell us that a person is born with a Yetzer HoRah but does not get the Yetzer Tov until he or she is Bar or Bas Mitzvah. The Yetzer HoRah is usually interpreted as the "evil inclination," but what it really means is the urge towards self-gratification. The Yetzer Tov, which is usually translated as the "good inclination," really means the altruistic tendency of human beings.

↓ In the Shema we say "You should love the Lord your G-d with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might." The rabbis interpret the expression "with all your might" to mean "with both your inclinations," with your self-gratifying and altruistic inclinations. In fact, they say that in the beginning of creation when G-d refers to His creation as "Tov M'od," it means that G-d saw that both inclinations, the self-gratifying inclination and the altruistic inclination, were good. We need both in order to function in the world, and when the Torah speaks about the creation of man it says "Vayee'tzer" "and G-d created." The word is spelled here with two Yuds, which means that G-d created us for His purposes and for our own good with both these inclinations.

It is not true that the altruistic inclination is always the best inclination. A person can act very altruistically and still be one hundred percent wrong and do a lot of damage. Denying oneself does not always lead to happiness for yourself or for the people you are trying to help. The Nazi stormtroopers thought they were being very altruistic when they gave up their lives for Hitler, when they selflessly

threw themselves into battle taking great casualties. They were, of course, not furthering good in the world. They were creating and helping the forces of evil. In Abraham's time when all the people around him were sacrificing their children to Molach and other pagan gods (After all, what could be a greater form of altruism than to sacrifice that which you love the most?), Abraham refused to do this, and G-d confirmed that He was right in the story of the Akedah. After Abraham had thought that G-d had commanded him to sacrifice his son, G-d emphatically forbade it. Child sacrifice is an abomination, a horror. Altruism is not always good, and self-gratification is not always immoral and wrong. People have a distorted sense of what religion is. They feel that if you deny yourself, you are being religious, and if you do not deny yourself, you are being selfish and sinful. This is not true.

The rabbis tell the story that after the destruction of the first Temple, the Jewish people complained to G-d. They said, "G-d, it is Your fault that the first Temple was destroyed. You gave us the Yetzer HoRah, the evil inclination. If You would not have given us the Yetzer HoRah, we would not have committed the acts which brought upon us the destruction of the Temple. We would not have stolen and robbed or killed. We would not have acted sexually immoral by participating in licentious idol worship, etc." G-d told the people, "O.K., you are right. I will removed from you the Yetzer HoRah." All of a sudden nobody got married, nobody was working, nobody had any ambition. The society started to fall apart. The people once again complained to G-d. Businesses were not operating. People could not get enough food and shelter. Children were not being born.

The future was not assured. Something had to be done. G-d again listened to them and returned to them most of the Yetzer HoRah, not enough, though, to cause them to again worship idols. The point of this Medrash is to teach us that ambition and desire for the material, sensual things in life (food, shelter, sex, etc.) ^{are} ~~is~~ not bad. They are necessary for a human being. Without ambition and the desire to make a reputation, making a living, etc., nothing gets done. Even scholars would not learn because the acquisition of knowledge is, in itself, a form of self-gratification.

Altruism can be evil as well as being good; so can self-gratification. It can be good or bad depending upon how it is used. We Jews have never believed in self-denial for self-denial's sake. We have been an anti-ascetic religion. Self-denial can lead to terrible consequences if it is carried too far. It really then becomes the worship of a person's willpower. A person can learn to steel himself to all sorts of horrors. You can steel yourself by worshipping your willpower to deny compassion and humanity. That's what the Nazis did when they threw Jewish children directly into the fire to save a few cents of gas. They denied their own feelings for the sake of the Fuehrer. The rabbis tell us that anybody who denies himself anything which he can legally and halachically enjoy in this world has actually committed a sin for which he will be held accountable. The worship of the will, irrespective of its moral consequences, is a form of idolatry.

The rabbis tell us that until a person is Bar or Bas Mitzvah he or she has only the Yetzer HoRah, the urge to gratify himself or herself.

Children need a lot of care. They must be nurtured. A little baby cannot take care of himself, much less others. Until a person is Bar or Bas Mitzvah, he or she really concentrates on receiving from others, not on giving to others. It really is not possible for them, in most instances, to do significantly altruistic acts. Of course, there are exceptions, but the growing and maturation process takes up all of a young person's energy. After Bar or Bas Mitzvah, there is a great urge for teenagers and young adults to be altruistic. There is a great need for them to give, to sacrifice. That's what is known as the idealism of youth, and many experts say that the reason so many Jewish youngsters are being drawn into the cults is because they are not being given an opportunity to express their altruistic impulse.

Their altruistic impulse is being squelched by a materialistic society which does not recognize altruism as a valid expression of a person's personality. A person is supposed to just concentrate on himself, to get a very good professional education so he can earn a lot of money. There is in our community Yetzer Tov deprivation. Because of this, many young people rebel, join cults, become radicals, etc. A generation ago many of these young people would have gone to Israel to be Chalutzeem, pioneers, or become social activists here in America. For some reason this is not happening any more. Maybe their families are discouraging them. Others used to go on to yeshivas to dedicate their lives to serving their people by serving as rabbis, cantors, etc. This, many times, too, is now discouraged. This deprivation of the Yetzer Tov is a very serious matter which has caused a lot of problems to our generation. We have not let our young people

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express their Yetzer Tov. We have not explained to them the Jewish concept of altruism.

Recently someone came to me who said that if her husband would recover from an operation, she would never wear jewelry again. I looked at her, stunned. "What has that got to do with your husband's recovery? You must believe that G-d is a very cruel G-d. Do you believe that G-d only will help you or your husband if you punish yourself, if you deny yourself?" This is not a Jewish concept. We Jews do not believe that there is any merit in self-denial per se; however, I told this woman, "If you ^{would have said} ~~would say~~ that you would give your jewelry or its value to charity if your husband recovers, then you would have done a Jewish altruistic act. Just swearing never to wear jewelry again by leaving it in a safety deposit box does nothing. It is probably even a sin. However, saying that you will give its value to charity to help others is a great Mitzvah." Sacrifice must help people. It must better other people's lives otherwise sacrifice is of no use. Sacrifice then becomes the worship of the will and an agent of evil, as it was with the Nazi stormtroopers.

This point is emphasized in the Torah portion Tzav where we learn about the different sacrifices that were offered when the Temple stood. We learn that the highest form of sacrifice was the peace offering, not the burnt offering. The burnt offering was an offering in which all except the skin of the animal was offered. There was no offering in which the whole animal was consumed. Sacrifice should never consume us entirely. The burnt offering was usually a preparatory sacrifice or the community's sacrifice, and it was not considered

the highest form of sacrifice. The highest form of sacrifice was the peace offering in which very little was offered on the altar, but most of it was eaten by the person who brought the sacrifice, by the priest, and by the poor. The rabbis teach us that in Messianic times all the sacrifices will cease except for the peace offering, or the thanksgiving offering. It will always be continued because by sharing things with others, we ^{give} will joy not only to ourselves but also to others. That's why to this very day when a person wants to celebrate a happy occasion, he gives a kiddush, not just so that he can eat and be happy, but so that all the members of the community can share his joy or happiness with him and become happy themselves.

To take what you have and share it with others, to relieve the plight of the poor, to clothe the naked, to assure education for deserving youngsters, these are great Mitzvahs. To deny yourself things is no Mitzvah at all if the money you saved by denying yourself is not given to worthy causes. Sacrifice for sacrifice's sake alone is, in most instances, not only not a Mitzvah, it is a sin. It is important that we teach our youngsters this unique Jewish concept of sacrifice. Ambition is good, but it is not everything. We should stop depriving our youngsters of their opportunity to exercise their Yetzer Tov. We all need to sacrifice but to sacrifice in the right way. The denial of the need to sacrifice brings great aberrations as does the misuse of the desire to sacrifice. Unless our youngsters learn how to exercise their Yetzer Tov in the proper way, they will suffer personality aberrations and their Yetzer HoRah will be perverted, too, and their lives will become completely selfish, selfcentered,

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~~and ultimately not~~ ^{unhappy and} ~~fulfilling~~ ^{un} ~~and unhappy.~~ ^{ed} May our youngsters and each of us always live lives in which the Yetzer Tov and the Yetzer HoRah can act in harmony so that, indeed, as G-d said when He created us, "Both the Yetzer Tov and the Yetzer HoRah are Tov M'od, very good."

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This Shabbos is Shabbos Hagadol. On this Shabbos we read a special Haftorah from the Prophet Malachi whose theme is, "And He shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children and the heart of the children to their fathers." We also read the Torah portion Tzav. This Torah portion tells us how Aaron and his children were commanded saying, "This is the law of the burnt offering. The burnt offering will burn on the altar all night until the morning and the fire of the altar should always be kept burning. And the Kohen should dress in linen clothes and should lift up the ashes which the fire has consumed on the altar and should put it next to the altar." We then learn that the Kohen Godol was to change his clothes and take the ashes outside the camp to a clean place. The question could be asked, is this a fitting job for the High Priest? The Torah only commanded two jobs for the High Priest. One was to officiate for the Jewish people on Yom Kippur. He was to conduct the service. He was to enter the Holy of Holies. This, of course, was a very fitting job for a High Priest, but why should the High Priest every morning have to come to the altar and remove the ashes and then remove them to another place outside the camp. The rabbis tell us that from the fire on the altar the menorah was lit. Still, it seems strange that this should be the job of the High Priest.

The rabbis explain that here the word for "ashes - deshen" which does not mean "cold ashes" but "embers". The Kohen Godol was to fan these embers to make them come alive again. In this Torah portion Aaron and his children are commanded that this should be their responsibility. We learn that Aaron's children assumed

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important and significant roles in the Jewish people after Aaron died, but Moshe's children do not seem to have held any kind of position at all. Why should this be? Why should it be that Aaron's children continued to serve the Jewish people in high places for generations while Moshe's children were more or less lost among the masses of the Jewish people. It is true that Moshe's children are mentioned sometimes in the chronicles but in a very minor position. Most of Moshe's children did not assume positions of leadership as did Aaron's. Why should it be that Aaron's children assumed positions of responsibility and Moshe's did not?

Perhaps we can understand this question if we realize that Moshe and Aaron were two different type of people. They were brothers but different. Moshe never spent a day in slavery. Moshe was raised in Pharaoh's court and even led Pharaoh's army and captured Abasini in Ethiopia for Pharaoh. Moshe, the rabbis, say was disgusted with the Jewish people because it was when he heard two Jews arguing and saying, "Are you going to kill us as you killed the Egyptian?" that he said, "Olchain Adov Hanoda - And now this thing is known", which means that, "Now I understand why the Jewish people are in slavery. They deserve it. They are always fighting among themselves." So when he escaped to Midian he did not say he was Jewish; he said he was an Egyptian. Moshe, after he married Zipporah, according to the rabbis, even agreed to raise his first child, Eliezer, as a gentile, let him attend gentile schools, let him attend gentile happenings. Anything we have to teach him we teach him at home. Moshe, only later, was able to have a positive influence over his children.

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Moshe also had a different type of personality than his brother. Aaron had a warm personality. Moshe was more cerebral. Moshe, of course, was a greater man. After all, G-d gave him the ten commandments and spoke to him most of the time. But Moshe did not have the empathy with the people that Aaron had. Moshe was a person who came to G-d after many struggles while Aaron had a kind of natural inborn faith. Aaron related easily to people while Moshe did not relate easily to people. In fact, the rabbis tell us that when Aaron died the people mourned for 30 days willingly and with great wailing, but when Moshe died the perfunctorily performed the 30 day mourning period. Moshe was a great man, a greater man than his brother, but he did not know how to relate to others as his brother did. That is why Aaron was given the job of the High Priest. It was he who could fan the embers of faith in the people's heart. He knew how to relate to people, to take the wild fire of the altar and convert it into the steady stream of the menorah. There is an argument which has been going on years about what is more important? Nature or nurture? When we raise children, what is more important? Heredity or environment? Actually, the latest scientific research has come down squarely on the side of nature. Nature has an awful lot to do with what a person is and how his personality develops. They have done experiments with identical twins and have found that twins separated at birth and raised by different families, separated by thousands of miles, cultures, speaking different languages and having different languages sometimes, have the same characteristics, by and large. Whether a person is an extrovert or introvert seems to be determined by nature and not nurture. When all things are said and done, about 70-80% of a person's personality is dependent upon his genes and

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only about 20% upon environment. Anyone who has had more than one child knows this, that your children from the day they are born have a separate and distinct personality which never changes. Of course, it does not mean that if a person is born with a very clever mind and is diligent in many activities and who has a good memory, nature cannot determine whether he will use these things for good or bad. That is where the home environment comes in. We have to take the flames of the fire and convert it into a steady light of the menorah. Aaron was able to relate to his children and they could bring their problems to him. His children knew that their father would take the embers, take the crushed experiences they had, and cause these embers to flame up again so they would have confidence to go on. They knew their father was interested not only in his problems but also in their problems. In the case of Moshe Rabbeinu, Moshe Rabbeinu was more interested his problems than those of his children. Aaron knew that in order to raise a future generation you had to relate with them, listen to them, be with them, be concerned about their problems and accomplishments, too. You had to take their disappointments and show the good aspects that could come from these disappointments. Aaron had a knack for doing that. He could turn the hearts of the fathers to the sons and the sons to the father. Therefore, his children continued to play a prominent role in the Jewish community because they understood the ups and downs of life because their father was always there backing them and helping them.

Today is Shabbos Hagadol and we might think we should start preparing our children now for the seder with ringing declarations of freedom, with ringing declaration of how we are

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to help the poor and oppressed, but instead we prepare them by having them ask questions. It is important what questions they ask. The parents and children should be concerned about the same questions. If parents do not give the right questions to their children, then their children will not remain Jewish and will not be concerned about the same problems in life. We must teach our children to ask the proper questions. That is how we relate to them. Unless we teach them the right questions there will be difficulty in the future. We must teach them why is it that some people have bread and some people only matzah? Why are some people's life bitter? Why do some people have to lean and other people can stand up straight? Why do some people have enough to dip their food, have entrees, and other people have nothing? We must be concerned about the same questions. Unless children ask the same questions as their parents, even though their answers may differ a little bit, there will be problem generations and Judaism will not continue. So even today, too, we must seriously talk within generations. We must just not assume that these generations will automatically be Jewish. Every generation faces different problems. Even today with those who were born 40, 50, 60 years ago had different problems than those born 20 or 30 years ago. 40, 50, 60 years ago the family was secure. Now the family is under attack. Nobody worried about sexual roles in those days, but we do now. That is why so many young people in their 20's and 30's are more amenable to traditional worship because they know that in order for there to be families there must be men and women willing to assume defined sex roles. Otherwise there will not be children, men who are willing to support children. We all know that we have to ask the same questions if Jews are to continue: how to raise good families;

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how to be committed people; how to alleviate suffering in the world. These are questions we must all deal with. That will cause the hearts of the fathers to turn to the sons and the sons to the fathers.

Aaron had this knack. He knew how to implant in his children the same questions. He was not completely successful. After all, he lost two of his children when the Temple was dedicated because he went too far, but he knew how to relate to his children, and, therefore, leadership passed down to him.

I am reminded of the story of a boy who received a terrible report card with all D's and F's. He did not know how to bring it to his father. Trembling, he brought it to his father. His father looked at him and said, "Well, I know at least one thing." The son asked what it was. The father replied, "I know you weren't cheating." We must all know how to relate to our children so that they will be transformed the ashes to bright flames, and we will take their natural characteristics and we take that rough iron and burn it into the steady flow of the menorah, of a candle which will light other candles and a steady flame which can be taken from place to place, not a raging fire which has no direction and only destroys. Let us hope and pray that we will always because we have parents who know how to relate to children, parents who know how to give children the right questions so the children are interested in perfecting this world, not just in making a lot of money but in making beautiful music and are interested in the problems Judaism has always been interested in: how to make this a better world.

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Today is Shabbos Hagodol. Today we read a special Haphtorah, but we do not read a special maftir, so, therefore, we only take out one Torah. We do not take out two Torahs like we did at Shabbos Parah or Shabbos HaChodesh. It seems strange that Shabbos Hagodol, the Great Sabbath, is not celebrated by taking out two Torahs, by reading a special maftir. What's more, it is hard to understand why we have Shabbos Hagodol at all. The rabbis tell us we have Shabbos Hagodol because on this day the Jewish people took the lamb that they were going to slaughter. This was a remarkable display of courage because to take a lamb in Egypt in those days was as if a person in certain districts of India would take a cow today. The people would rather kill the person who would touch a lamb or a cow than kill other human beings, so, therefore, it was an act of courage. But the rabbis say that this act of courage occurred on the 10th day of Nisan, five days before they left Egypt. We know that Shabbos does not always fall on the 10th of Nisan. Why is it that we do not celebrate this great act of courage on the date that it occurred? Why do we celebrate it on Shabbos? After all, we do not celebrate any other event on a Shabbos or day of the week. We celebrate it on the date that it occurred. For example, Pesach occurred on the 15th of Nisan so we celebrate it on the 15th of Nisan. We celebrate every event on the date that it occurs. We do not care what day of the week it is, but in this particular instance, the rabbis insist that the act of taking the act must be commemorated on Shabbos. Why should this be so?

Usually in most years Shabbos Hagodol falls on the Torah portion Tzav which we are reading today. In Tzav, too, we have many questions. We learn about the fire that burned on the altar. It says, "This is the law of the Olah, the Olah which is Almochna", which really means a conflagration, on a huge bonfire, on a fire which, so to speak, almost rages out of

control, which is on the altar. "It burns all night until morning and the fire of the altar you should keep burning in it." That can also mean "in him". The rabbis explain that that means that the person who offers the sacrifice must continually have enthusiasm also. But then it says something very strange. It says, "The fire on the altar should continually burn and it should not go out, and the Kohen should burn upon it the kindling wood every morning, and they should prepare upon it the Olah and the eternal fire should burn on the altar and should not go out." Why this stress that the "eternal fire should burn on the altar and should not go out", and why does it also say that the Kohen should kindle the wood every morning? If the fire is never going to go out and comes from G-d, so to speak, then why are we so particular that the Kohen should have to treat it every morning with kindling wood?

The rabbis say that we have a conflagration here. We have a burning fire, and this burning fire was on the altar. We also learn that from the fire on the altar they used to light the menorah. The menorah was not lit during the day. It was only lit at night, and the fire that came from the altar is what lit the menorah. There is an opinion that says that the central shaft of the menorah was lit all day but the rest of the menorah was not. There is another opinion that says it was not lit at all during the day, that the fire came from the altar. That is why we mention here that the fire should not go out, which meant that this fire should be transmuted. First it becomes the altar and then it becomes the menorah, but it is still hard to understand what we are talking about here, that this fire that was lit by G-d on the altar, which would never go out.

The rabbis explain that this is the fire of man, the passions that man has, and that man has to be careful he is not consumed by these passions.

He has to make sure that these passions become an altar, that they are hallowed and sanctified because man's passions can go awry and create a huge fire which will burn everything down. After all, what is the gift that man gave man in order to live in this world, in order for him to better this world, to improve this world? That was the gift of fire. When Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden of Eden they were supposed to leave Friday night, but G-d said, "I will let you stay Shabbos, but Saturday night you have to leave." When Saturday night came Adam and Eve were afraid, but G-d said, "I will give you a precious gift. I will give you fire, and with this fire you will be able to subdue the universe." It is true. With fire we can subdue the universe. With fire, with energy, we can overcome our problems. We can warm our food and build our houses and build our civilizations basically based upon fire, based upon energy, but we have to control it. If we do not control it we will consume ourselves. It will, of course, destroy us. There is a famous essay written by a famous poet who wrote in an essay that when he was once asked what he would say from his house after his house had burned down from fire and everything was destroyed, what would he have saved if he could have saved anything? He answered, "The fire." We all need this enthusiasm. We all need this fire in order to overcome the inevitable problems of life. When a person becomes depressed what happens is that his inner fires no longer function, that he turns against himself. His anger is directed against himself and he smothers his own fires. Therefore, he cannot live a happy and joyous life.

We have to always rescue the ashes. We always have to realize these ashes are embers, and we have to rekindle them constantly. Man's passions are essential in order for us to actually live, but they have to be controlled. If they are not controlled then they will destroy everything. That is,

of course, one of the problems that we face today. People have left religion and, therefore, they do not actually know how to control their passions. There are many Jews today who are only Jews negatively. They are Jews because they cannot accept other religions and philosophies. They know that, for the most part, these other religions and philosophies do not correspond to the truth and, therefore, they cannot agree with them. However, they also cannot seem to agree with Judaism either. They are Jews negatively because they cannot accept any other type of religions. They, of course, are having a lot of problems dealing with their own passions in life because they have no religious infrastructure with which to deal with it. They have no structure for their passions. Their passions have gone wild. We see now how divorce rates have climbed to almost 50%. We see now how there is child abuse and wife abuse where there never used to be those in the Jewish family home. There may be many things about the ultra-orthodox with which we disagree, especially some of their actions in Israel, but we have to give them credit. They have the lowest crime rate in Israel. They have the highest fidelity rate, the highest care and support of family values in Israel. They take good care of their children and families. They are upstanding people who are honest and sincere and compassionate and percentage-wise give more charity than any other group. We have to agree that some of the values that others have taken in their place have not led to good results. Israel now has a lot of crime where before there was no crime in Israel. Israel has a lot of problems that she never had before because the passions of man have been loosened. There is not a structure in which to have the passions operate in a proper and correct way. The fires are consuming everywhere. Of course, we all realize that. In business now people have a compassion. They have an ambition, an ambition for money, and,

therefore, they are willing to do anything for money. They cheat on their income tax and on insurance policies. They swindle other people. They have fires that they, themselves, have set. There are all sorts of ways, especially in America, where people come in America and judge everyone by how much money they have. There is so much pressure and passion to take shortcuts. Look at the savings and loans. They say now that it may cost 5 hundred billion dollars, a complete swindle of the American tax payer. There is a passion, of course, for all sorts of things that are not controllable. People do not know how to use them, and, therefore, we end up with many, many different types of problems, problems of interpersonal relationships, problems in business. There are all sorts of stock swindles. We have problems even in politicians taking bribes, etc. Man's passions get out of control. They are not structured in the correct and proper way.

That is, of course, what this Torah portion is teaching us. The Torah portion is teaching us that the fire is good, but it must be transmuted into an altar. It must be sanctified. It must be hallowed. When these passions are hallowed then man can live a good and decent life, and he will not be consumed by his own internal fire. Once he has hallowed his passions, then these passions can serve as a light to others. You can have a stable family life. We do not believe in suppressing the emotions. The Germans tried that with their Prussian discipline. All they ended up doing was creating a boiler where the pressure got so excruciating that it exploded. That is, of course, what happened under Hitler. Then, of course, our people were the recipients of their explosion, of their wrath. They did the most barbarous things imaginable releasing the tension of these repressed passions. We say it is good to have passions, but they have to be done in a moral and decent way. Therefore, we have

never said that the fires should go out. The fire should continuously burn. G-d gave us the fire, but we have to feed it measuredly by feeding it kindling every morning, and we have to transmute it and turn it into sanctified passions, passions which were offered on the altar. Then we can also use them as a light, as a model, for others throughout the whole universe.

We today in Russia the passions of nationalism, the fires of nationalism, have gotten out of hand. They are threatening once again to burn up our people. Anti-semitism is a terrible, terrible force in Russia today, and our people are in danger. Everyone should help and make sure they support Operation Exodus. The ashes, themselves, are not bad as long as they are sanctified and hallowed and knows its limits. Then it can be a light unto the nations. Every nation has its own particular culture that it can share with others, but if it gets out of hand, nationalism, it ends up with killing and violence and hatred. Let us hope and pray that we will know how to handle our passions, that the G-d-given passions that we have which are good have to be structured and have to be structured through religion so they will not destroy us but help us build a happy and decent life.

This is the same thing on Shabbos Hagadol. Shabbos Hagadol, the important thing was not the rejection of idolatry. That, of course, is essential, and that is important, but after you reject idolatry, what are you going to do? How are you going to handle your passions after you have rejected idolatry which, of course, tells you to use your passions in a terrible way? You then have to structure your passions so they will be positive. That, of course, is one of the lessons of Shabbos. Shabbos is a symbol of how we structure our passions, how we devote one day to our family,

how it is a day of joy and happiness, of togetherness of husband and wife, a day of togetherness with the family, a day of being man the appreciator where we moderate the terrible passions and ambitions of the week. It is important that we recognize this, that we recognize that we have to have structure in our life always. We cannot just say that that can wait. It cannot wait because if we put off structuring our passions we will end up destroying ourselves and our society.

I am reminded of the story about a duchess who called in one of her employees. She said, "Mortimer, it says from my records that you have worked for me a long time." He said, "That is correct, madam." She said, "Mortimer, it says here that you were hired to take care of the dog." He said, "Yes, madam." Then she said, "Mortimer, it says here that the dog died 27 years ago. Is that true?" Mortimer said, "Yes, ma'am, what would you like me to do now?" We cannot wait. We need to structure our passions now because otherwise within a generation of two they will destroy everything, just like you cannot wait in order to structure fire, if you do not control it it will eventually destroy everything. Let us hope and pray that we will control our passions and use them in the correct way so that the Mashiach will come. Amen.

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In the Torah portion Tzav we learn about the duties and responsibilities of the high priest. We learn how one of his prime duties was to remove the ashes from the altar. We also learn how he also was supposed to bring a daily meal offering of his own in order that he should understand that his service as high priest had great responsibilities with it, that he had to make sure that he lived up to these responsibilities.

Today is Shabbos Hagodol. Many times it happens that the Torah portion Tzav coincides with Shabbos Hagodol. The question can be asked, why should this be so? Why did the rabbis arrange the calendar so the Torah portion Tzav and Shabbos Hagodol should fall so often together? What's more, why is this called Shabbos Hagodol? After all, we do not take out two Torahs, and we do not seem to have a lot of ceremony on this holiday yet this is called Shabbos Hagodol. In fact, the story is told about a knight, a Jewish man who had made his mark in the sciences in England and who had been knighted by the queen, and he was told he should come before the queen, kneel, say some words in Latin, and she would touch both his shoulders with a sword and he would become Sir Goldberg. Well, he came before the queen and he got so excited that he kneeled but he could not remember the words so he said Manishtan Halel, etc., and the queen looked at her lord chamberlain and said, "How is this knight different from all other knights?" So, how is this Shabbos different from all other shabboses? Why should this shabbos be singled out as Shabbos Hagodol?

One of the answers that is given is because on this shabbos the Jewish people demonstrated great courage. They took the lamb and tethered it to their bedposts, and four days later they announced to all the Egyptians that they were going to slaughter it. This was unheard of. The Egyptians believed in spirit worship. The sign of the zodiac during this time of the year was Aries, which meant that

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all the malevolent spirits that you would use to wreak havoc on your enemies were incarnate, would inhabit a lamb. You had great power if you could control this spirit which was now embodied in the lamb. Anybody who would kill a lamb would endanger Egypt, and, yet, the Jewish people, in spite of their knowledge of this belief, still took the lamb. They displayed great courage. The only problem with this interpretation is that the day upon which they took the lamb was the 10th of Nisan. It is true that in that year the 10th of Nisan happened to come out on a shabbos, but all Jewish holidays we do not celebrate by the day of the week they come out on; we celebrate them by their calendar date. We do not celebrate the exodus from Egypt on a Thursday, although we know it happened on Thursday; we celebrate it on the 15th of Nisan, so why don't we celebrate also this event of taking the lamb on the 10th day of Nisan? Why on shabbos? What does shabbos have to do with it? What's more, why is it that we remember this act of courage and only this act of courage? The Jewish people throughout history have done many acts of courage. Why specifically was this Shabbos Hagadol?

There are some people who say that the reason why we do not use the 10th of Nisan as the date upon which to celebrate the Jewish people's taking of the lamb is because on the 10th of Nisan two other events occurred. One event was the death of Miriam, and with her death the disappearance of the well which accompanied the Jewish people as they wandered through the desert. The second event that happened on the 10th of Nisan was the splitting of the Jordan so the Jewish people could walk on dry land into the land of Israel. Of course, that was not a miracle on the power of the splitting of the Red Sea because the Jordan is a very small stream which is comparable, and probably less so, than the bayou right across the street from our shul. The rabbi, however, thought that the people would confuse the events, and they would think that we are celebrating

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the 10th of Nisan because of the yahrzeit of Miriam and the disappearance of the well or because of the splitting of the Jordan so the Jewish people could walk across into the land of Israel. What difference would it make, though, even if we would? So? There would be many events to celebrate on the 10th of Nisan. After all, many events happened on other days on the Jewish calendar and we do not defer the practice of the holiday because of these other events.

It seems to me that the reason why Shabbos Hagodol was chosen to be the day upon which we remember this act of courage was because this was the first mitzvah that was given to the Jewish people as an individual. Before we had another mitzvah, to declare the calendar, but that was really directed to the elders. Only they could declare the calendar, but the first mitzvah that was directed to the individual Jew, who had to assume responsibility for himself and for his people and for his religion, and this was the first mitzvah. It was given to us on this shabbos. It was to teach us something very important. When is a person Hagodol in Jewish life? A person is Hagodol when he assumes responsibility. That is why a bar mitzvah is a joyous event because on this day a young man assumes responsibility. We all know that we are born incomplete. Therefore, we have to complete ourselves. One of the ways we complete ourselves is by getting married, the rabbis say. The rabbis say that originally man was hermaphrodite, androgenous. Man was both male and female, and G-d separated the male and female. When it uses the word Sella, according to many rabbis, it does not mean rib but side. G-d divided man in half and, therefore, man, in order to be complete, has to be married, but besides that, we all know that we have within us a sense of incompleteness, that in order for us to be whole we have to assume responsibility for others and especially for ourselves. Other religions have other philosophies and other ways which they feel a person must undertake in order to feel fulfilled. One religion says you have to just passively accept love and you will be transformed.

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We do not believe this. We do not believe you can be transformed by just being passive. We believe that you have to be active, that you have to assume responsibility for yourself, for your family, for your people, for your religion, and the more responsibility you assume the greater person you are and the happier you are. Happiness comes and completeness comes from assuming responsibility. On this shabbos the Jewish people assumed responsibility for themselves and for their people and for their families and for their religion. That is why they gathered together in families. This was a great thing. Therefore, this was called Shabbos Hagadol. This is the shabbos they really became mature because only a mature person can assume responsibility for himself and for others and for his family and for his religion. That is why this is such an important date.

You know that in our religion it is more important, it is a greater mitzvah to do something because you are commanded than to do something just because you want to do it. I always pose this problem to the Hebrew school classes and almost always I get the wrong answer. The problem I pose is, what happens if a little old lady came up to a man and asked him for \$10, and from the goodness of his heart he took out the \$10 and gave it to the little old lady with a smile. Then the second case: what happens if a little old lady came up to a man and asked for \$10. He also reached in his pocket and gave it to her with a smile. However, in his inner heart he was troubled. He really did not want to give it to her. She did not know that and never could feel that or sense it, but he remembered that in the lessons of the Talmud Torah and the lessons in his father's house and, therefore, he dug into his pocket and gave her the \$10 with a smile. Who did the biggest mitzvah? Of course, most times the Hebrew school classes say the first man because he did it with a full heart, but Judaism says no. It is the second man, because many times we have to do things even though we do not want to do them but they are the right thing to do so, therefore,

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we do them. The baby is crying in the middle of the night and you do not want to get up but you get up and take care of the baby. Your friend needs help, needs a loan and you do not want to give it to him but you do give it to him because he is your friend. The synagogue needs workers and you do not want to spend your free time and Sundays working for the synagogue but you do anyway because it is the right thing to do. Therefore, assuming responsibility for yourself and for others is a prime principle of Judaism. It was on this Shabbos Hagodol that the Jewish people assumed responsibility.

Why couldn't we use the date of the 10th of Nisan? One of the reasons is because when Miriam accompanied the Jewish people throughout the desert she gave them hope and comfort. The Jewish people were still a slave people. The Jewish people when they were in Egypt had no sense of responsibility at all. That is one of the problems with slavery. It is easier to take the slaves out of slavery than take the slavery out of the slaves. The Jewish people had to learn how to be responsible, how to take care of themselves, how to do things for themselves. Miriam did things for them. The same thing was true when they entered the land of Israel. G-d was the one who split the Jordan. The Jewish people still had not assumed full responsibility for themselves until they entered the land of Israel. Once they entered the land of Israel then they had to assume full responsibility for themselves. It says assumption of responsibility, that is the message of Shabbos Hagodol. You want to be free? Then you have to assume part of the responsibility. G-d will help you but you must assume part of that responsibility. You must make the initial effort. You must do things. You want to enjoy a shabbos? You want to enjoy the benefits of a shabbos? Remember, you cannot have a shabbos unless you prepare for it beforehand. Unless you have prepared during the week you cannot have a shabbos. That's why the rabbis insisted that we remember this assumption of responsibility on shabbos because

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speaks about accomplishment, about enjoying what you have already done before, enjoying your family, enjoying your meal. On shabbos we do not prepare anything. We do not do anything. We are supposed to enjoy what we have already done. If we have done nothing then we are not going to enjoy anything. Therefore, the concept of shabbos and the concept of assumption of responsibility is linked together. A boy when he is bar mitzvah assumes responsibility. He says that I am now going to undertake to take care of myself. I cannot put the blame on my parents and brothers and sisters. I now am partially responsible for my actions. I am responsible, too, to help my family and my religion and my people. I cannot defer these things forever. I cannot say I am only a kid. Now you have to start to assume responsibility. It is the assumption of responsibility which transforms us into mentchen, makes us into mature human beings. We should never say I am not needed. My contribution is nothing. I am just a little cog in the wheel. You may be a little cog in the wheel but every little cog is necessary if the machine is to work right. That is, of course, what we learn on Shabbos Hagadol, that this was the shabbos upon which the Jewish people became mature, became Hagadol, because they assumed responsibility for themselves. Normally on shabbos we do not do things, but on this shabbos it was important that they take the lamb as a sign that they could then taste the shabbos. They could have a sense of accomplishment. They could become man the meditator because they had become first man the creator. It is very, very important that we all recognize this because nothing will ever change in the world, nothing will ever get better in the world unless we assume responsibility for ourselves, for our families, for our people, and for our religion.

I am reminded of the story they tell about a man who just stayed around the house and did not do anything. He did not even talk. His wife was getting disgusted. She insisted he see a psychiatrist. To please his wife he went

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to see a psychiatrist. He went there the first day and the psychiatrist told him to make himself comfortable on his couch and told him if he felt like talking to talk. The man made himself comfortable and immediately fell asleep. After the end of an hour the psychiatrist nudged him and he woke up. The psychiatrist told him that would be \$100. He gave the psychiatrist \$100 and walked out. He came Tuesday and Thursday for three weeks and the same thing happened. On the fourth Tuesday he laid down and started to make himself comfortable. All of a sudden he jumped up. The psychiatrist said, "Well, do you have something to say now?" The man said, "Yes, you need a partner." When it comes to life we all have to be active. We all have to do because we have assumed responsibility for ourselves, for others, for our people, and for our religion. If each of us would assume responsibility for ourselves, for others, for our people, and for our religion then soon the world would be a much better place and we would make it possible for the Mashiach to come quickly and in our day. Amen.

Nov 2003

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