

## Drash for Tsav

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In today's Torah portion, Tzav, it describes how and when to conduct each sacrifice. A sacrifice is when you slaughter and burn an animal, in this case for God. Tzav is like an instruction manual for the Kohanim, or priests, to perform the sacrifices and priestly duties. The 5 different sacrifices are the burnt offering, the grain offering, the purification offering, the reparation offering, and the offering of well-being. At the end of Olah, or the burnt offering, chapter 6 verse 6, the last verse, it says "a perpetual fire shall be kept burning on the altar, not to go out." That fire is known as the perpetual, or eternal fire. The eternal fire is where the sacrifices and rituals usually take place, but I believe there's a greater meaning.

The commentaries note that the Hebrew says literally: the fire on the altar is to be kept going "within him" (not "on it"). This language is to be interpreted as the fire within our hearts to be parallel to the eternal fire on the altar. Nowadays, we've stopped sacrificing, for one because the temple was destroyed, and also I'm sure a lot of people (including myself) were not very keen on the idea of burning cattle every week in their synagogue.

Nowadays instead of sacrificing, we do much more prayer. But what about the perpetual fire that God commanded to be kept going at all times since it was destroyed with the temple? There *is* a physical manifestation of it, which is the light behind me called the Ner Tamid. The Ner Tamid is there to remind us of the holy Torah scrolls and God's abiding presence. But it also represents the eternal fire that burned continuously in the western section of the ancient Temple of Jerusalem.

In the commentary for this Torah portion, it mentions that the fire on the altar must be paralleled by a fire in the heart of the officiating priest, whose enthusiasm for the sacred nature of the work must never be lost. In

this synagogue, we believe that everyone is equal. So if we think that priests are equal to everyone else, then everyone must have a fire reflecting the eternal fire that was once in the temple.

Now, I'm sure everyone knows that a fire needs fuel to survive, and our own internal fires are no exception. I mentioned earlier how the priest's enthusiasm for the sacred nature of the work must never be lost. Just like the priest needs to keep being enthusiastic about his work to keep the fire going, so do we. It's always really important to keep enthusiasm burning. If you're never enthusiastic about your work, you'll never do your best. We even have a term for this, called "burn out." One example of this is, at the beginning of the pandemic when we couldn't go in stores, see our friends, or even go outside to get some fresh air, a lot of people struggled with trying to stay motivated or enthusiastic about doing essential things, like exercising or studying. I was one of those people. I remember after realizing we had to do all our school work from home, I was very hesitant to do my work. I was hoping it would just go away, and I even missed an entire math unit from procrastinating. My dad realized this and helped me get back on track by fueling my eternal fire with enthusiasm.

As another example, when I first started preparing for my bar mitzvah, I was realizing how much more I needed to learn. That stressed me out, making learning Torah seem like a much bigger task that I couldn't accomplish, and making practicing seem like so much more of a burden. This approach clearly wasn't going to work out. I tried harder to be more excited about learning Torah and to celebrate even the little accomplishments. It turns out there are many ways to create the enthusiasm that fuels your fire. For some people, it might be exercising, listening to music, or even going to synagogue. For me, it's playing video games. That's not it, though. Another thing that fuels my fire is the 8 week sleepaway camp I go to in the woods in Wisconsin. Even one of their big sayings is "Keep the fires burning."

Life was full of challenges back when this Torah portion took place, and it still is. Sometimes it is hard to remain enthusiastic in the face of

these challenges, but like the priests, we must keep trying. And although we may not be sacrificing animals anymore, we still have an eternal fire within us keeping us going until the next day. Shabbat Shalom!