

To Ignite the Fire, To Remember Freedom

Meditation for After Seder Pesah

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Regarding this verse, “*A continuous fire shall burn upon the altar, do not extinguish it*” (Lev. 6:6), Rabbeynu Yosef Haim writes in his Ben Ish Hai, Drashot:

“It appears to me, with the help of Heaven, that the [human] heart is called [an] altar. Therefore, the altar was the heart of the people. In addition, the treasury of Torah lies within the heart.

Therefore, the [middle letters of the] written out form of [the word] Lev (heart), Lamed, Bet, like this: (Lamed spelled: Lamed, Mem, Dalet), Bet spelled: Bet, Yod, Tav) spell out [the word] Tamid (continuous), spelled Tav, Mem, Yod, Dalet. This is a hint that the Torah should be placed within the heart continuously.

It should never disappear from there. Even at times when one is asleep and is dreaming, one should speak word of Torah [within one’s dreams]. This is the meaning of the verse, “I am asleep, but my heart is awake” (S.S. 5:2).

The Torah is called fire (Ta’anit 7a), as it is written, “Behold, all my words are fire, says HaShem” (Jer.23:29). This is why it says, “a continuous fire shall burn upon the altar” [upon the altar] of the heart. It should never be extinguished. Of this the verse says, “she reasons that her merchandise is good, her light is not extinguished by night” (Pr.31:9).”

The important point made here is that the Torah should always be placed within one’s heart. This means that one’s entire being, one’s thought processes and one’s emotional status should continually be based upon Torah principles. Yet, this concept is not new. Countless Rabbis, in numerous books, have repeated this for centuries. However, the Ben Ish Hai, reveals something here which is most profound and unique. One is to have control over one’s dreams and to inject into them the same words of Torah that one studies by day.

The study of Torah by day still proves to be difficult for the masses, how much more so must it be difficult for one to learn how to control their dreams. Yet, the importance of doing this is apparently great. The Ben Ish Hai compares this to the continual burning of the altar flame. This is a positive commandment of the Torah. Therefore, to be able to learn Torah in our dreams might be considered a modern way of fulfilling this commandment, all the while that we do not have a physical Temple.

In order for the fire of Torah to burn in one’s heart, one must have more than just an intellectual connection with it. In order to create fire there must be a great deal of heat and something to burn in order for combustion to occur. Mere warmth is not enough! As it is with the physical reality of fire, so it is with the metaphor of the fire of Torah. It is not enough merely to study its words, or observe its mitzvot in lukewarm fashion. One must have a passion for Torah, for HaShem and for His Shekhina. The



heat of passion causes the combustion of the fire of Torah in the heart of man. The heat of passion burns the dross of the klipot.

Without heat, there is no fire. Without fire, nothing burns. Without burning, klipot grow in thickness and one becomes even further detached from our beloved Creator. Unless we are on fire for HaShem, continuously, without cessation, then like physical fire, the flame will eventually burn out. This sad state of affairs has already happened in the hearts of far too many good people.

We do not have the right to be lukewarm about our relationship with our blessed Creator. We must be passionately in love with Him at every moment. This is expressed in our everyday ideas, attitudes, feelings, and actions. No one has right to take a temporary vacation from the Torah. No one has the right to say that they integrate Torah into “their” lives. For our lives and everything else, belong to our blessed Creator. In essence, we do not have “our” lives,” we only share in His blessed One Life, that permeates everything in creation. Our lives are the Torah and the Torah is our lives. Anything short of this absolute commitment extinguishes the fire of the Torah from the altar of the heart.

When HaShem led the Benei Yisrael out of Egypt, He did so with a very specific agenda. Throughout the Torah and TaNaKh, Yisrael are reminded that they are HaShem’s firstborn child, His son, and His servant. The entire Jewish people share a common soul that itself is bonded to HaShem and His Torah in the most integrated and united of ways. The Jewish nation, therefore, have no choice but to live the life chosen for them and chosen by them. Our exodus from Egypt not only released us from physical bondage; it also released our souls from the shackles of bondage to the limitations of an entrapped mind.

Freedom is much more a psychological state than it is a physical one. Yes, it is correct to say that freedom is a state of mind, before it is a state of being. Because the Benei Yisrael who left Egypt could not embody the mindset of freedom, HaShem had no choice but to let them die in the wilderness. In their minds, they were born slaves and that they remained. Although they witnessed the hand of G-d and received His Torah on Sinai, the mindset of slavery was still too strong within them. They could not resolve themselves to think like free men and live a life of faith, which is the ultimate goal of freedom. Thus, an entire generation died. Their children, who were born into freedom, knew nothing else. They were the mighty warriors who fought the great battles and conquered the Holy Land by the Word of G-d.

In the Pesah Seder it is written, “in each and every generation, one is required to view himself as if he himself left Egypt.” The reason why we perform such an elaborate ritual as the Seder is to instill deep within the recesses of our minds a reminder that we are already free. We are free from bondage to the Egyptians in all the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual forms that this can be applied. We are free human beings, emancipated from slavery to our limited minds and our lustful natures. We are free to be what we are - human beings created in the image of G-d.

Only a free human being reflecting the image of G-d in which he/she was created can be said to have a heart on fire, thus fulfilling the above verse. Only freedom releases the entrapped embers and allows them to ignite and burn bright. On Pesah night, we are commanded to remember our freedom, a freedom that we already have, but maybe have forgotten. Our main mitzvah of this evening is to remember! When we remember who and what we are as truly free human beings, individually and collectively we will awaken from the slumber of slavery. When the sleeper awakens within each of us, we will awaken to a greater, new world.

I know that a transformation of consciousness is not an easy thing. Therefore, rather than just share with you these lofty words, I feel bound to also reveal to you a Kabbalistic secret. Within the above verse there is concealed certain Holy Names, that when used in a certain manner enables one to open one’s heart to ignite the Divine fire and for one’s mind to remember and grasp freedom.

In Hebrew, the above verse is, “Esh Tamid Tukahd Al HaMiz’be’ah Lo Tikhbeh.” According to the Mispar Katan form of Gematria the initial letters of the words of the verse numerically equal 28 (Alef=1, Tav=4, Tav=4, Ayin=7, Hey=5, Lamed=3, Tav=4. $1+4+4+7+5+3+4=28$). 28 is the numerical value of the Hebrew word Koah, which means “power.”

Not by any coincidence, but the final letters of the words above (according to the Mispar Katan form of Gematria) also numerically equal 28 (Shin=3, Dalet=4, Dalet=4, Lamed=3, Het=8, Alef=1, Hey=5. $3+4+4+3+8+1+5=28$). Again we have Koah, power.

Hidden within the initial and final letters of this verse are two Holy Names that generate the spiritual power that ignites the fires of the heart for Divine service. These Holy Names are made up from the initial letters and the end letters. The vowels are those of the verse, when applicable and the basic vowel is added when needed. Thus the Holy Names are:



Ey'Tah'Tu'Ah'Ha'Lo'Tih and Shih'Dah'Dah'Lah'Heh'Ah'Heh

There are 14 syllables in these two Names. 14 is the numerical value of the Hebrew word for Hand, Yad. A Yad (hand) also means a memorial, a remembrance. An example of this is the name of the Israeli Museum of the Holocaust "Yad V'Shem." 14 is also the numerical value of the name David, who as we all know is the King of Israel and the embodiment of Jewish freedom.

On Pesah night, after the Seder is complete and all the guests have left and one is finally alone, one may recite the following prayer:

"Ribbon Kol HaOlamim (Master of the Universe), I thank you for making me a free man/woman. I thank you for the mitzvot of Pesah. I thank you for reminding me and all Yisrael that we are indeed free, free from our evil inclination and free from all distractions that separate us.

I pray that You continue to shower down upon your children, the Jewish people, Your spiritual power and Divine light, that we may observe all your commandments in love, awe, and truth. Empower us that we may shine Your Divine light throughout the world that You have created. Empower us that our hearts be ablaze for You.

May your Holy Names enter into our minds and melt away all dross, all forbidden and mistaken thoughts, all foolish and improper feelings, all inappropriate speech and wrong actions.

Bring true redemption upon us the children of those who left Egypt and let us leave our present exiles, both the exile within us, and the exile surrounding us. Amen, may it be Your Will."

As you recite this prayer, silently in your mind, contemplate the Holy Names. This is simply done by repeating them over and over in your mind as a chant. Apply a tune to them, if you wish.

Allow yourself to fall asleep as you silently chant these Names and then, WATCH OUT! HaShem may speak to you in your dreams. You may hear words of Torah in your dreams, as you sleep. As the Ben Ish Hai has said, the fire of the altar must never go out, even when we sleep. Now you know the secret of the Divine fire. Keep it burning.

Shabat Shalom, Hag Sameah and Shalom Al Yisrael.