

Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Tzav 5784

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Hashem commands Moshe regarding the status of fire in the Mishkan.

אֵשׁ תָּמִיד תִּקְדַּח עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לֹא תִכְבֶּה:

“An eternal fire shall remain kindled on the mizbeach, do not extinguish it.” (Vayikra 6:6).

What is significant about the fire being kept burning on the mizbeach? Is there a positive commandment (keep an enteral flame kindled) and a negative commandment (do not extinguish it) here? Or are they one and the same?

The previous pasuk says, וְהָאֵשׁ עַל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ תִּקְדַּח בֹּלֵל לֹא תִכְבֶּה וּבֵעֵר עָלֶיהָ הַפְתָּו עֵצִים בְּבֹקֶר בְּבֹקֶר וְעֵרָה עָלֶיהָ הָעֹלָה וְהַקְטִיר עָלֶיהָ הַלְבִי הַשְּׁלָמִים: “And the fire on the mizbeach shall be kindled there and shall not be put out. And the kohen shall burn wood upon it each and every morning. And arrange upon it and put to smoke upon it the fats of the korban shelamim.” (Ibid 6:5). This pasuk also gives the positive command for the kohen to feed the fire every morning. This makes it sound that “keep a fire burning, you shall not extinguish it” is fulfilled by the kohen feeding the fire every morning. The fire is kept burning with the morning replenishment of wood. That allows the fats of the korban shelamim (well-being) to be put to smoke. The fats are not what fuel the fire.

These pesukim, come after the instruction regarding the first category of korbanos. The sefer commenced with Hashem teaching Moshe about the korbanos, starting with the olah (burnt offering) in his tent between visits to Har Sinai (see Ibid 1:1). Then the Torah turns to the instruction that Hashem gave to Moshe on Har Sinai about taking these teachings to Aharon and his sons. (Ibid 6:1; 7:38). The order of teaching about korbanos, like that of the Mishkan, commences with the most holy. In this case, it is the korban olah. That korban olah is meant to burn all night. (Ibid 6:2). That brings the natural connection to having an enteral flame on the mizbeach. However, if there is occasion where no olah is brought that day, and no other korban that required parts to be burned overnight, was there still a need for a flame at night?

This “eternal fire” can be understood by the context given elsewhere in the Torah. There was a korban tamid that was burned twice daily. (Bamidbar 28:6). The korban tamid was brought on the outside mizbeach each morning and afternoon while the ketores were also burned daily on the golden inside mizbeach. Since there was a tamid daily there would have been a fire on the mizbeach daily.

Further, there was fire every night, regardless. When the Mishkan was set up there was a pillar of clouds by day and a pillar of fire by night, covering the entire mishkan. (Shmos 40:38). בֹּרְךְ יְהוָה תָּמִיד הָעֶגְלוֹן וְהַמִּשְׁכָּן וְהַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְהַמִּזְבֵּחַ לְיָמֵינוּ וְהַמִּזְבֵּחַ לְיָמֵינוּ וְהַמִּזְבֵּחַ לְיָמֵינוּ: “So it was eternally, a cloud covering it and the appearance of fire at night.” (Bamidbar 9:16). תָּמִיד “eternally” really means “perpetually.” Clearly, it was not forever. Olam means eternally. Tamid is perpetually,

consistently while it lasted. Yet, the word tamid is used in connection with the fire that came consistently every night. A korban tamid was burned toward the end of the day. Therefore, every evening the mizbeach should have had existing kindling.

The question is, is there a positive command and need to keep that fire burning all night? From pasuk Vayikra 6:5 it seems that there is only a need to feed the fire in the morning. From pasuk ibid 6:6, though, the pasuk adds the word tamid. That means perpetual and that means every night there had to be a fire. Not that some nights it was burning with offerings and others not. Further, looking at the wording, the kohen is not meant to ignite wood in the morning to start the mizbeach fire. He is merely meant to feed the existing fire. An existing fire, then, has to be there. Why is such a fire important?

There are other items that are perpetual. The bread on the Shulchan was perpetual. (Shmos 25:30). The menorah had to be kindled perpetually, daily. (Ibid 27:20). The names of Bnei Yisroel had to be on the choshen to be a mention to Hashem, perpetually. (Ibid 28:29). Clearly, the names on the chosen were not always worn, as the kohen gadol only wore that vestment when conducting avodah. Yet, the names engraved on the choshen were a perpetual mention and reminder to Hashem. Work and items that are there consistently are considered by the Torah to be there always.

The word for extinguish is only used here in the Chumash. In Nach it is used a few more times. When Dovid HaMelech went out to battle and was almost killed, his people told him that he should not go out again. If he were to die, the fire of Israel would be extinguished. (Shmuel II 21:17). King Yoshiahu found a Torah while refurbishing the Beis HaMikdash and he inquired of Chulda Neviah as to its meaning. She said that the anger of Hashem is such that it will not be extinguished. (Melachim II 22:17). The term gives the connotation of a fire burning that cannot be extinguished or should not go out.

The purpose of perpetuality is to keep consistency. A consistency in avodah and faith keeps one close to Hashem. Names that are engraved on stones and service that is done morning and night is a perpetual reminder that consistency matters. It is also a connection of day to day, olehs to shelamims. Consistency keeps Hashem bringing blessing and it staves off bad decrees. It was a negative commandment to extinguish it the mizbeach flame. One who would douse the flames would have sinned. Yet, on the converse, failing to properly feed the flames was also a violation of the Torah. The morning kohen started the avodah by putting wood on the existing flame. That connected that day's service to the previous days.

Part of the pervious days' avodah was to keep that fire burning. The fire had to be there as consistently a Hashem's cloud and pillar of fire, to connect to the next day. Just as the pillar of fire and clouds were guides to Bnei Yisroel, and just as the korban tamid, ketores, and menorah were perpetual services in the Mishkan, so, too, the flame was a perpetual service. The night watch had to make sure the fire did not go out. Allowing it to go out though inaction was just the same as dousing it. Therefore, the Torah says this twice to clarify. Keep the flame going and feed it the morning. (Vayikra 6:5). The flame had to be tamid like any other perpetual avodah.

May our avodah be considered to Hashem as tamid and may all evil decrees be burned up.