



“The fire of the mizbeiach shall be kept aflame on it”

A Fantastic Combination of the Segulah of Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk with the Segulah of Eliyahu HaNavi to Eliminate Untoward Thoughts

This week, we read parshas Tzav. The Torah cautions us several times that the fire on the external mizbeiach, where the korbanos were offered, should burn constantly; it should never be extinguished (Vayikra 6, 1): **“וידבר ה' אל משה לאמר, צו את אהרן ואת בניו לאמר, זאת תורת העולה היא העולה על מוקדה על המזבח תוקד בו.”**—**Hashem spoke to Moshe, saying: Command Aharon and his sons, saying: This is the law of the Olah. It is the Olah that stays on the flame on the mizbeiach all night until the morning; and the fire of the mizbeiach shall be kept aflame on it.** Further on, after the Torah teaches us about the mitzvah of “terumat hadeshen”—placing a shovelful of ashes from the previous day’s service on the floor of the courtyard—it concludes once again with the warning (ibid. 5): **“והאש על המזבח תוקד בו לא תכבה, וביער עליה הכהן עצים בבוקר בבוקר, וערך עליה העולה והקטיר עליה חלבי השלמים, אש תמיד תוקד על המזבח לא תכבה.”** **The fire on the mizbeiach shall remain aflame on it, it shall not be extinguished; and the kohen shall kindle wood upon it every morning; he shall arrange the “olah” on it and shall cause the fats of the “shelamim” to go up in smoke from it.**

Rashi comments (ibid. 6): **One who extinguishes the fire of the mizbeiach transgresses two prohibitions** (mitzvos lo ta’aseh). The first: **“והאש על המזבח תוקד בו לא תכבה”**; the second: **“אש תמיד תוקד על המזבח לא תכבה”**. Additionally, Rashi cites the elucidation in the Gemara (Yoma 45b) regarding the passuk: **“אש תמיד תוקד על המזבח”**—that it is coming to teach

us about the mitzvah of kindling the lamps of the menorah, about which it says (Shemos 27, 20): **“להעלות נר תמיד”**—**to light a lamp continually**—that it is to be kindled from the fire of the mizbeiach.

Now, this admonition not to extinguish the fire on the mizbeiach applies at all times throughout the day—even when korbanos are not being offered. So, why does the Torah caution us about this specifically with regards to the “korban-olah”? Additionally, we must endeavor to comprehend the practical significance and vital importance of having a constant fire ablaze on the mizbeiach. As we learned from Rashi, it is so important that someone who extinguishes the fire is liable for transgressing two prohibitions.

The Korban-Olah Atones for Improper Thoughts

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by presenting Rashi’s comment at the beginning of the parsha. Citing the Toras Kohanim, he writes: **“Command Aharon”—the term “command” is only used as an expression of urging on—for the immediate moment and for future generations. Rabbi Shimon said: There is a greater need for Scripture to urge in a situation involving the loss of money.** Simply understood, he is referring to the fact that the kohanim incur a monetary loss in the case of a “korban-olah,” because it is entirely consumed on the mizbeiach; the kohanim do not eat any of the sacrifice. Therefore, it is

necessary to urge the kohanim to have sincere, proper intent when sacrificing a “korban-olah” and not to be lax.

The commentaries are perplexed by this, since most of the mitzvos of the Torah involve some sort of monetary loss. It costs money to purchase tefillin, or a mezuzah, or the four species, and the like. So, why was it necessary for the Torah to urge the kohanim to fulfill their duties properly specifically with regards to the “korban-olah” more so than with regards to any of the other mitzvos that involve monetary expenditures? Furthermore, we are talking about Aharon and his sons, who were holy and pure, and served Hashem diligently. It is even conceivable that they would neglect to perform their priestly duties scrupulously because of a monetary consideration?!

The great author of the Chiddushei HaRim, zy”a, provides us with a wonderful answer. He interprets the words of Rabbi Shimon by dint of “remez”: **There is a greater need for Scripture to urge in a situation involving the loss of money.** He refers to the following Midrash (V.R. 7, 3): **אמר רשב”י, לעולם אין העולה באה אלא על הרהור הלב. אמר רבי לוי מקרא מלא הוא .” Rashbi (Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai) said: The “olah” always comes only for deliberations of the heart. Rabbi Levi said: An explicit passuk states (Yechezkel 20, 32): “As for what enters (‘olah’ ahl) your minds, it shall not be!”** Thus, we learn that the “korban-olah” is meant to atone for foreign, improper thoughts and misguided deliberations of the heart.

Now, consider the fact that all human organs have a protective covering to help prevent them from being the instrument of sin. The eyes are protected by eyelids that can prevent a person from looking at and seeing things that are indecent or improper. Similarly, the ears can be covered to prevent a person from hearing prohibited, unworthy things. In the words of the Gemara (Kesubos 5a): **”שאם ישמע אדם דבר—שאינו הגון יניח אצבעו באזניו”** **if a person hears something improper, he should insert his finger in his ears.** As the Gemara (Arachin 15a) explains, the tongue is also protected; HKB”H surrounded it with two protective barriers—the teeth and the lips—to prevent a person from speaking “lashon hara.”

No such covering or protection exists for the deliberations of the heart; they can burst forth instantaneously at any time. Hence, a person must be constantly on guard lest untoward thoughts, chas v’shalom, lead him astray. Therefore, specifically with regards to the “korban-olah,” which is brought for improper deliberations of the heart, does the Torah admonish: **“Command Aharon and his sons, saying: This is the law of the ‘olah.’”** And Rabbi Shimon emphasizes that urging on is required specifically with regards to the “korban-olah,” because it involves **“chisaron kis”**—literally, the lack of a covering. In other words, the “korban-olah” is brought for misguided deliberations of the heart, which are not prevented by any covering or protective mechanism.

“This is the Torah of the ‘olah’”: Torah Study Is a Magnificent Protective Mechanism

It gives me great pleasure to apply the insight of the Chiddushei HaRim to the passuk: **”זאת תורת העולה”—this is the Torah of the “olah.”** According to the Be’er Mayim Chaim, this passuk is speaking about Torah-study, which is analogous to a “korban-olah” in that it must be totally devoted to Hashem. Here are his sacred words: **”זאת תורת העולה, כלומר: שהתורה שאדם לומד, צריך להיות דוגמת העולה שאין בריה טועם ממנה, אלא עולה כולה להקב”ה, וכן עסק התורה צריך האדם להעלות הכל להקב”ה, ולא יהיה בה חלק לאדם כלל, כי אין בריה טועם ממנה רק לכבודו יתברך באהבה.”** The Torah that a person learns should resemble an “olah”; it should ascend in its entirety to HKB”H. Similarly, a person should devote his study of Torah exclusively to HKB”H; it should not be for anyone else. It should be exclusively for His honor, with love and reverence. Thus, it will ascend to the heavens like an “olah,” purely for HKB”H.

In keeping with the insight of the Chiddushei HaRim, we can suggest a reason as to why the Torah alludes to the fact that Torah-study should resemble a “korban-olah.” He explained that since the “korban-olah” atones for deliberations of the heart, and there is no protective mechanism covering the heart—i.e., there is no “kis”—a “korban-olah” is associated with a “chisaron kis.” Therefore, the Torah provides us with a wonderful solution: **“This is the Torah of the ‘olah’”—study Torah sincerely, purely for the sake of Hashem, like**

an “olah” that ascends entirely to Hashem; this will afford protection from untoward thoughts.

This is also evident from the teachings of the Rambam (Hilchos Isurei Biah 22, 21): **More importantly, they said: “A person should always turn himself and his thoughts to the words of the Torah and expand his knowledge in wisdom, for the thoughts of forbidden relations (immorality) grow strong solely in a heart which is devoid of wisdom.”** According to the Maggid Mishneh, the Rambam’s source is the Gemara (Kiddushin 30b): “תנא דבי רבי ישמעאל, אם פגע בך מנוול זה משכהו לבית המדרש, אם אבן הוא נימוח, אם ישמעאל, אם פגע בך מנוול זה משכהו לבית המדרש, אם אבן הוא נימוח, אם ברזל הוא מתפוצץ.” **A Baraisa was taught in the Academy of Rabbi Yishmael: If this despicable character engages you, draw him into the Beis Midrash. If he is like a stone, he will dissolve; if he is like iron, he will shatter.** It was clear to the Rambam that the despicable character referred to is the yetzer hara; it infects man with improper, undesirable thoughts and deliberations. Therefore, the solution is to go to the Beis Midrash and engage in Torah-study.

Thus, we learn from the Rambam that the holy Torah is a wonderful covering, protecting the heart from negative, untoward deliberations. In this regard, it is superior to a “korban-olah.” After all, a “korban-olah” atones for deliberations of the heart after the fact. Torah-study, on the other hand, is a fantastic, protective mechanism safeguarding the purity of the heart, so that a person will not entertain negative thoughts to begin with.

This explains the continuation of the text beautifully: **“Command Aharon and his sons, saying.”** We learn in the Gemara (Yoma 4b) that the term “לאמר”—**“saying”**—means that what has just been commanded or said is to be transmitted to others. This is true here, as well. Aharon and his sons are being instructed to inform Bnei Yisrael, who are offering a “korban-olah” for untoward deliberations of the heart: **“This is the Torah of the ‘olah”**—there is a wonderful way to avoid untoward deliberations of the heart; study Torah with sincerity and devotion like an “olah” that ascends entirely to Hashem.

Then, the text continues: **“It is the ‘olah’ that stays on the flame on the mizbeiach”**—the Torah that a person

studies surpasses the benefits of a “korban-olah” that is offered on the mizbeiach, because it protects a person from even having improper, negative deliberations. This is in stark contrast to the “korban-olah” itself, which is only beneficial after the fact. This then is implied by Rashi’s comment: **Rabbi Shimon said: There is a greater need for Scripture to urge a person on to study Torah in a situation involving “chisaron kis,”** where a protective mechanism is absent. Therefore, untoward thoughts can only be avoided by engaging in Torah-study.

Auspicious Advice from Eliyahu HaNavi and Rabbi Elimelech

Continuing onward, we will proceed to explain why the Torah specifically cautions us with regards to the “korban-olah”: **“אש תמיד תוקד על המזבח לא תכבה”**—that the fire on the mizbeiach should burn constantly and should not be extinguished. Let us refer to the writings of the Shela hakadosh (Sha’ar HaOtiot, the letter “lamed”). He writes that he found a handwritten document of the divine master, Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, z”l. He writes that they were taught by an elderly man that if one wishes to eliminate an undesirable thought, one should repeat the following passuk over and over many times: **“A fire shall burn continually on the mizbeiach.”** Then, the Shela adds that it his opinion that this elderly man was none other than Eliyahu HaNavi; but due to the master’s extreme humility, he chose not to reveal the man’s identity.

We have now been enlightened and have cause to rejoice! We can now understand why HKB”H chose to reveal this mitzvas lo ta’aseh—not to extinguish the fire that burned continually on the mizbeiach—specifically in connection with the “korban-olah.” For, we learned from Rashbi: **“The ‘olah’ always comes only for deliberations of the heart.”** Hence, HKB”H wanted to teach us this amazing segulah—auspicious practice. To protect oneself and rid oneself of untoward thoughts, one should repeat this passuk: **“אש תמיד תוקד על המזבח לא תכבה.”**

It now behooves us to explain the nature and rationale for this amazing segulah: **1.** Why does reciting this passuk repeatedly eliminate untoward thoughts? **2.** What is the connection between the fire that burned continually on

the mizbeiach and the elimination of untoward thoughts?
3. What intent should we have in mind when uttering this passuk to assist us in eliminating these thoughts?

I was struck by a wonderful idea. To understand the segulah advised by Eliyahu HaNavi, let us refer to another amazing segulah described in the incredible teachings of the great Rabbi Elimelech of Lizhensk, zy”a (whose yahrzeit, the 21st of Adar, approaches auspiciously). He begins the work Tzetel Katan as follows:

THESE ARE THE MATTERS WITH WHICH A PERSON SHOULD CONDUCT HIMSELF AND LIVE BY THEM: Every moment when one is free from Torah study, specifically when one is sitting idly alone in his room or lying on his bed and is unable to sleep, he should ponder this mitzvas asei (Vayikra 22, 32): “And they shall be sanctified in the midst of Bnei Yisrael.” Then he should imagine to himself and picture in his mind as if there was a large, awesome fire burning before him to the heart of the heavens. For the sake of sanctifying the blessed name of Hashem, he is defying his nature and casting himself into the fire for the sake of (“kidush Hashem”) sanctifying the blessed name of Hashem. HKB”H will view this good thought as if he actually did the act. Thus, in reality, he is not lying or sitting idly; rather, he is fulfilling a mitzvas asei from the Torah.

Further on (paragraph 3), he explains how imagining an awesome fire rising to the heavens, which he is willing to dive into for the sake of “kidush Hashem,” is propitious for abolishing the yetzer of desire. As we know, every Jew who believes in Hashem and His Torah, even if he is not a scholar, is willing to sacrifice his life for the sake of “kidush Hashem” rather than submitting to avodah-zarah.

Therefore, when a person is overwhelmed by the yetzer of lust and desire, he should picture in his mind a huge, mighty fire ascending to the heavens; and if they were to coerce him to worship avodah-zarah, he would be willing to sacrifice his life by jumping into the fire for the sake of “kidush Hashem.” In this manner, he can withstand the temptations of the yetzer hara with regards to evil, improper desires. For, he can then say to himself, “If I am willing to suffer extreme pain and torture for the sake of ‘kidush Hashem,’ all the more so

should I be willing and able to refrain from this improper desire which will not involve any significant suffering.”

The commentaries note that this incredible advice is actually mentioned by one of the Tosafists, Rabbi Yehudah HaChassid, in Sefer Chassidim (155):

”כשיבוא לידך שום דבר שלא ברצון הקב”ה... או שיש לך יצר הרע שמתגבר עליך לעבור או לעשות, תחשוב אילו היית בשעת השמד, הרי היו לך כל היסורים או מות בעבור הבורא שנאמר (שיר השירים א-ג) על כן עלמות אהבוך, ואם היו רוצים להרוג אותך או יסורים לעשות לך שנבחר מות מחיים היית סובל, וכל שכן זה הדבר שאיננו כל כך גדול שמתגבר עליך יצרך.”

The Focus of Krias Shema according to the Author of the Tanya

This incredible idea is also presented by the author of the Tanya in Likutei Amarim (Chapter 25). He discusses the practical significance of reciting Krias Shema lovingly twice every day. He explains that it is a wonderful segulah for overcoming the yetzer hara. He refers to an interpretation earlier in Likutei Amarim (Chapter 18) of the passuk (Devarim 30, 11): “כי קרוב אליך הדבר מאד בפיך ובלבבך לעשותו”—**for the matter is extremely close to you, in your mouth and your heart, to perform it.** Every Jew has at his disposal a tactic for defeating the yetzer.

As we have seen, during the most trying episodes in our history, even the simplest of Jews and sinners, who failed to withstand the yetzer of desires, were willing to sacrifice their lives and endure torture and suffering to sanctify His name. They refused to abandon their religion and to worship avodah-zarah. This is indeed curious! Where did they find the courage and resolve to endure this suffering, especially since they were unable to withstand the temptations of Olam HaZeh, which do not involve much conviction or suffering?

Yet, the truth is that every Jew, even the simplest among us, possesses a deep love for Hashem, concealed within the innermost chambers of his heart, which he has inherited from our holy forefathers. So, when we see Jewish sinners who neglect to observe Hashem’s mitzvos, it is because that love is in a state of slumber and concealment, since it is covered by the cloak of Olam HaZeh’s nonsense. Yet, when that Jew is subjected to a test, denying Hashem’s sovereignty and

existence, which constitutes avodah-zarah, his deep-seated love is awakened from its deep slumber. It bursts forth with a passion that cannot be extinguished. Consequently, even the simplest of Jews are willing to sacrifice their lives for the kedushah of Hashem.

Accordingly, every Jew is capable of overcoming the yetzer of desire easily. He simply needs to consider how much suffering he is willing to tolerate not to deny the oneness of the Almighty. With that knowledge and perspective, he will realize how capable he is of withstanding the temptations of the yetzer, which does not involve much suffering at all. This is the implication of the passuk: **“For the matter is extremely close to you, in your mouth and your heart, to perform it.”**

Based on this premise, the author of the Tanya explains why HKB”H commanded us to recite Krias Shema with love and devotion twice daily. As we know, when uttering the word “אחד”, we are supposed to have in mind the willingness to sacrifice our lives for Hashem. This is taught in the Tikunei Zohar (Introduction 10b): **“הו אהבו של הקב”ה, מי שמוסר נפשו כאחד כגלל אהבת בוראו”**—**a person who loves HKB”H is one who sacrifices his life with the utterance of “אחד” for the love of his Creator.** Thus, as a result of our intent to sacrifice our lives when reciting Krias Shema, we are able to overcome the yetzer hara throughout the day.

“Let the waters be gathered beneath the heavens into one area”

Krias Shema Abolishes All Improper Desires

Applying this notion, the Agra D’Kallah (Bereishis) suggests a beautiful interpretation of the passuk (Bereishis 1, 9): **“ויאמר אלקים יקוו המים מתחת השמים אל מקום אחד”**—**G-d said, “Let the waters be gathered beneath the heavens into one area.”** According to Rabeinu Chaim Vital in Sha’arei Kedushah (Part 1, Sha’ar 2), all human desires emanate from the element of water; it gives rise to and nurtures all sorts of worldly pleasures.

Thus, we can interpret the passuk as follows: **“Let the waters be gathered”**—let all human desires emanating from the element of water be gathered together and eliminated by having a person focus **“into one area”**-- **“אל מקום אחד”** —

on the utterance of **“אחד”**. At that moment, he accepts upon himself the willingness to sacrifice his life for the oneness of the Almighty, even if he must endure suffering. If he is able to do that, then how much more so is he able to deprive himself of the desires and pleasures of Olam HaZeh.

Now, this sheds light for us on the segulah proposed by Rabbi Elimelech for abolishing the yetzer of desires. He suggested that a person imagine a huge, awesome fire extending up to the heavens and his willingness to jump into it for the sake of “kidush Hashem.” Recognizing that inner strength and conviction, he will realize that he has the strength to endure the discomfort and suffering associated with refraining from improper desires. In this manner, he will eliminate the yetzer hara in his thoughts.

This explains very nicely the allusion inherent in the passuk: **“A continual fire shall burn on the mizbeiach; it shall not be extinguished.”** As suggested by the great Rabbi Elimelech, zy”a, he should picture in his mind at all times an enormous, awesome fire extending upwards to the heavens; he should acknowledge his willingness and readiness to be a korban on the mizbeiach for the sake of sanctifying the name of Hashem. Thus, he will be able to easily resist the temptations of the yetzer enticing him to commit an aveirah, which does not involve much suffering.

In this light, we can explain why HKB”H appeared at the revelation of Har Sinai through fire, as it is written (Devarim 4, 11): **“ותקרבו ותעמדון תחת ההר וההר בוער עד לב השמים”**—**so you approached and stood at the foot of the mountain, and the mountain was burning with fire up to the heart of heaven.** He wished to teach us how to fulfill the precepts of the Torah and overcome the yetzer that haunts the hearts of man. By always remembering the mountain ablaze with a fire that reached the heavens and his willingness to sacrifice his life for the sake of “kidush Hashem,” a person will realize that he has the power to overcome the desires of the yetzer.

Rabbi Elimelech Learned This Segulah from Eliyahu HaNavi

With the utmost reverence and adoration, I would like to add an interesting tidbit. We can propose that Rabbi Elimelech learned this segulah from the segulah that Eliyahu

HaNavi revealed to Rabbi Moshe Cordovero. To ward off untoward thoughts, he advised uttering the passuk: **אש תמיד תוקד על המזבח לא תכבה**. So, let us consider, what indeed is the benefit of having the fire burn on the mizbeiach continually, even when no korbanos are being sacrificed? We will suggest an answer based on the Ramban's (Vayikra 1, 10) explanation regarding the rationale for offering korbanos. He writes that the person bringing the korban is supposed to imagine that everything being done to the sacrificial animal—the slaughter and the incineration—should deservedly be done to him.

Accordingly, when a person brings a “korban-olah” to atone for his improper deliberations of the heart, he is to picture in his mind that the creature being burned on the mizbeiach should have been him; however, HKB”H was merciful and chose to accept his “korban-olah” as a substitute. Nevertheless, the ideal situation is that a person will not sin at all by entertaining untoward thoughts. Therefore, HKB”H commanded: **“A constant fire shall burn on the mizbeiach; it shall not be extinguished”**—that even when a “korban-olah” is not being sacrificed, the fire should burn continually on the mizbeiach as a positive influence over the people of Yisrael. Knowing that the fire burns there constantly, every Jew will have in mind that he is always ready and willing to

sacrifice his life for “kidush Hashem.” Thus, they will realize that if they can do that, it is not so difficult to resist desires and temptations and avoid untoward, improper thoughts.

Now, we can genuinely appreciate the practical value of the segulah advised by Eliyahu HaNavi. To ward off negative, untoward thoughts, we should utter the passuk: **אש תמיד תוקד על המזבח לא תכבה**. By repeating this passuk to ourselves, we elicit the kedushah of the fire ablaze on the mizbeiach. This enables a person to picture in his mind the fire of the “olah” rising to the heavens and to acknowledge his willingness to sacrifice his own life for the sake of “kidush Hashem.” This process will save him from untoward thoughts.

Thus, it is not so far-fetched to conclude that the great Rabbi Elimelech learned this practice for overcoming the yetzer of improper desires from Eliyahu HaNavi. He suggested that a person, when he is not learning Torah, imagine a mighty fire ascending to the heavens and acknowledge his readiness to jump into the fire for the sake of “kidush Hashem” in order to overcome the yetzer of desires. This mirrors the segulah of Eliyahu HaNavi to utter repeatedly the passuk: **תמיד תוקד על המזבח לא תכבה**. Indeed, the segulah of Eliyahu HaNavi and the segulah of Rabbi Elimelech go hand in hand magnificently.

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