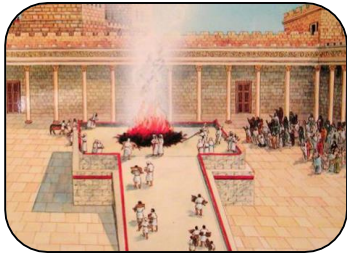


Parshat Tzav - The Persistence of the Altar's Fire

By Rabbi Mayer Freedman

During the days of the ancient Jewish kingdom in Israel, the focal point of the nation was the Temple. The



Temple was a place where the glory of God was revealed on a daily basis; our Rabbis teach us that ten ongoing miracles took place there. One of those miracles was that

regardless of how much it may have rained, the rain was never successful in extinguishing the fire that was always present on the altar.

Rabbi Chaim Ickovits (Volozhin, 1749 -1821) points out that this miracle is puzzling, since God is omnipotent. Why would He choose to cause rain to fall on the altar and then prevent the rain from extinguishing

the fire, instead of not allowing it to rain in the area of the altar in the first place?

Rabbi Ickovits explains that God wanted us to learn an important lesson from the altar's fire; despite any deterrents thrown at it, the fire refused to be extinguished and burned as brightly as before. So too, in our own lives, we may decide to institute important projects and promote important

causes. But then the rains begin; be it simply naysayers or actual challenges that must be overcome, we often find ourselves with numerous excuses not



to follow through on our plans. The altar's fire teaches us that come what may, we must make sure to persevere.

Parshat Tzav - In the Wake of the Brooklyn Tragedy: Hugging our Children

One of the karbanot, offerings, brought in the Temple was the Korban Todah - the Thanksgiving Offering. If a person was in a dangerous situation and managed to survive, he would travel to the Temple in Jerusalem and bring such an offering. Nowadays, when one survives a situation in which his life was in danger, he or she recites a special blessing called Birchat HaGomel in place of the Thanksgiving Offering.

We have all heard of the tragedy this past week in Brooklyn, in which a fire broke out in the middle of the night, leaving seven children from the Sassoon family dead and their mother and the eighth child in critical condition. It is beyond belief and the pain is tremendous.



Losing one child is a colossal tragedy in and of itself; losing seven in one shot? Unimaginable.

There have been numerous perspectives offered concerning this tragedy. Some were from a practical point of view - what can we do in the future to prevent such a horrific event from occurring? Some were from a spiritual point of view - what message may God be trying to send us?

I would like to offer another perspective based on the words of Gabriel Sassoon, the father of the family. At the funeral in New York, the father of these children reportedly encouraged the participants that when they return home that day they should make sure to hug their children.



We often don't appreciate what we have until it is threatened to be taken away from us, or until it actually is taken away from us, God forbid. Well, much to our horror, seven of our children have been taken away from us. We must follow the instructions of Mr. Sassoon. We have to take a moment, a day, a month, a lifetime and appreciate the gift of children and of family that God has given us. We must reprioritize our time and make sure that we are focusing on our family as much as we should be. We must realize the blessings that we have received and we must thank God, not only with the Birchat HaGomel when surviving a dangerous situation, but every day, for not even putting us into that dangerous situation to begin with.