
Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

“TZAV” AND “MITZVA” are related. “Tzav,” a verb, means to assign a mitzva – to outline, to bequeath. Mitzva is a divine precept which calls for an expressive human response by way of man’s actual deeds and attitudes, reflecting his totality—his mind, heart and body. The concept of mitzva points to the significance of human activity and creativity, stressing the inherent virtue of actual physical deeds. Mitzvot outline, in practical details, patterns of human behavior, leading to the realization of the basic truths of Torah. Indeed, a mitzva is a vessel for conveying the light of Torah (Proverbs 6:32): “A mitzva is likened to a lamp; Torah to light.” Shabbat Hagadol heralds the Passover. The similarity between the words “matzot” and “mitzvot” is treated by the Rabbis (Mekhilta): “When a mitzvah faces you, asking to be fulfilled, do not delay it, but immediately and dynamically fulfill it, lest the mitzvah turn “hametz”—fermented and spoiled by delayed and inefficient performance.”

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MITZVAH, commonly translated commandment, stems from the root-word *tzav* (and *kav*) meaning line; a *mitzvah* is an outline, a guideline, of right conduct. The biblical term *mitzvah* also conveys the idea of heritage and bequeathal, in a line of succession from generation to generation; the word *tzava'ah* (from the same root-word) means will and testament. In Judaism, *mitzvah* represents the Divine Will as bequeathed to the people in the revealed, ever-living, Torah. Torah and *mitzvah* are thus inseparable, neither having meaning without the other. Interlocked "as a flame and its ember" (to use the Hebraic idiom), Torah is the Divine Teaching in general and *mitzvo*t the tangible vessels bearing and radiating it—the "lamps" of the light of Torah. Fulfilling a *mitzvah* is adhering to the Divine Will as outlined in the Torah.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

...THE CONCEPT OF MITZVA is rooted in its verb, "tzav," meaning to outline, direct, assign, bequeath. The Hebrew "tzav" (like "kav"), indicates a "line" aiming towards a destination, a purpose. Mitzvot are concrete rules of human conduct reflecting and manifesting the Divine legacy of Torah. Mitzvot point to man's sense of responsiveness and commitment, involving his totality: his mind, heart and body. They illustrate the significance of human activity and creativity, stressing the inherent virtue of actual physical deeds. They are links binding people to their heritage and destiny -- vessels conveying and cherishing the light of Torah: "A lamp is the mitzva; the Torah is light" (Prov. 6:32).

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda.

IS SACRIFICIAL RITUAL DIVINELY ORDAINED? Jeremiah (7:22) asserts in the name of God: "For neither did I speak to your forefathers, nor did I order them, at the time I brought them out of Egypt, concerning any whole-offering or sacrifice. But this I did order them: 'Listen to My voice, and I will be your God and you shall be My people.'" The drastic contrast between this week's Torah portion, its content and name "tzav" ("order!") in the imperative, definitely ordering sacrifices, and the Haftarah, its thrust and motto, "velo tzivitim" ("I didn't order them"), openly denying such an order, is intentional and indicative. The historical tradition, known to the people and recorded in Torah, that the sacrificial ritual was indeed an integral part of the Exodus saga from its very beginning, could not be altogether dismissed by the prophet. He deplores, however, in rigorous and shocking style, the false assumption that ritual is primary; that it supersedes and surpasses morality and decency. What is the supreme divine demand? Adherence to God's will. When ritual is used as cover-up or expiation for illicit and corrupt indulgence, a carte blanche for evil, it is spurious and outrageous. But within the proper context of worship, leading to and expressing devotion to God's will — ritual has its place and order.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK: *The message of the Shabbat reading opens with the word "tzav." The words "tzav" and "mitzvah" are related. "Tzav" is a verb meaning to assign a mitzvah. Mitzvah is a divine precept which calls for an expressive human response by way of man's actual deeds and attitudes, reflecting his totality — his mind, heart and body. The concept of mitzvah points to the significance of human activity and creativity, stressing the inherent virtue of actual physical deeds. A mitzvah outlines in practical details patterns of human behavior leading to the realization of the basic truths of Torah. Indeed, mitzvot are vessels for conveying the light of Torah. "A mitzvah is likened to a lamp; Torah to light." (Proverbs 6:32). This Shabbat, Shabbat Hagadol, heralds the Passover. The similarity between the words "matzot" and "mitzvot" is treated by the rabbis thus: "when a mitzvah faces you, asking to be fulfilled, do not delay it, but immediately and dynamically fulfill it, lest the mitzvah turn chametz — fermented and spoiled by an inefficient performance (Mecchilta).*

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

BRIDGING THE GENERATION GAP is the ultimate message of prophecy (Malachi 3:23-24):

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the Day of the Lord, the Great and the Awesome. And He shall turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the hearts of children to their parents.

This idea of generational reconciliation, of unity and continuity between the old and the young, is in the core of *Pesach* (Ex.10:9): "With our young and our old shall we go, with our sons and daughters." This is also the essence of the haggadah: interaction between parents and children. Rather than "tell" their children, the parents' role is to be open, listen and respond to their offspring's questions and concerns. The prophet mentions first the change of heart of the parents: First the parents will turn to their children, then the children to their parents.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

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RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

BLESSING ON HUMAN WORK, in Jewish tradition, is modeled after Moses' blessing and the people's response, at the *mishkan* (holy ark) dedication (Sifra, Lev. 9:23). Moses' prayer is echoed in Psalms (90:17):

Moses:

May it be God's will to reveal Divine Presence

Upon the work of your hands!

May the God of your ancestors

Increase your numbers a thousand fold,

And bless you as God has promised you.

The People:

May the sweetness of our God be upon us!

Let all the work of our hands prosper!

Let it be firm and established!

Let all the work we do succeed!

There is a blessing for everything in Judaism, in particular, for human work and efforts, which constantly depend on Divine inspiration and blessing.

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

EISH-TAMID – “constant fire” (Leviticus 6:6) – was kept burning on the Altar in the ancient Jewish Temple, never to be extinguished. This sacred fire, according to legend, initially descended from Heaven. Nonetheless, it had to be supplemented by ordinary fire from mundane sources. Human duty is neither abrogated nor abridged by the provision of Divine intervention. As much as we gratefully welcome the fire from above, we must continue to produce and supply our own fire.

Heavenly gifts are not a substitute for human creativity. Our spiritual enthusiasm, the fire of devotion burning on our inner Altar within ourselves, even if divinely inspired, must be kept alive by our human initiative and resourcefulness.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

FIRE AND LIGHT were kept in perpetuity in the ancient Jewish Temple: Constant fire ("esh tamid") of the Altar (Lev. 6:6); and steady light ("ner tamid") of the Menorah (Ex. 27:20). The light of the Menorah, says the Talmud (Yoma 45b), was kindled from the fire of the Altar. The Altar is a symbol of worship; the Menorah, of wisdom. Worship must be experienced with "fire," with the flame of devotion; wisdom, with "light," with the enlightenment of reason. The two, however, must enrich each other: worship refined with the clarity of reason; wisdom enlivened with the passion of devotion. Devoid of lucid logic, religious fervor turns into eruptive and disruptive fanaticism. Untouched by spiritual enthusiasm, scholastic brilliance remains stagnant and sterile. The two, the burning flames of the Altar and the lit lamps of the Menorah—the enduring fire and light of the sacred—remain forever interdependent; the light of wisdom reflecting the fire of devotion, the flame of worship radiating the light of reason. Thus the fire and the light are kept "tamid"—forever.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

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RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

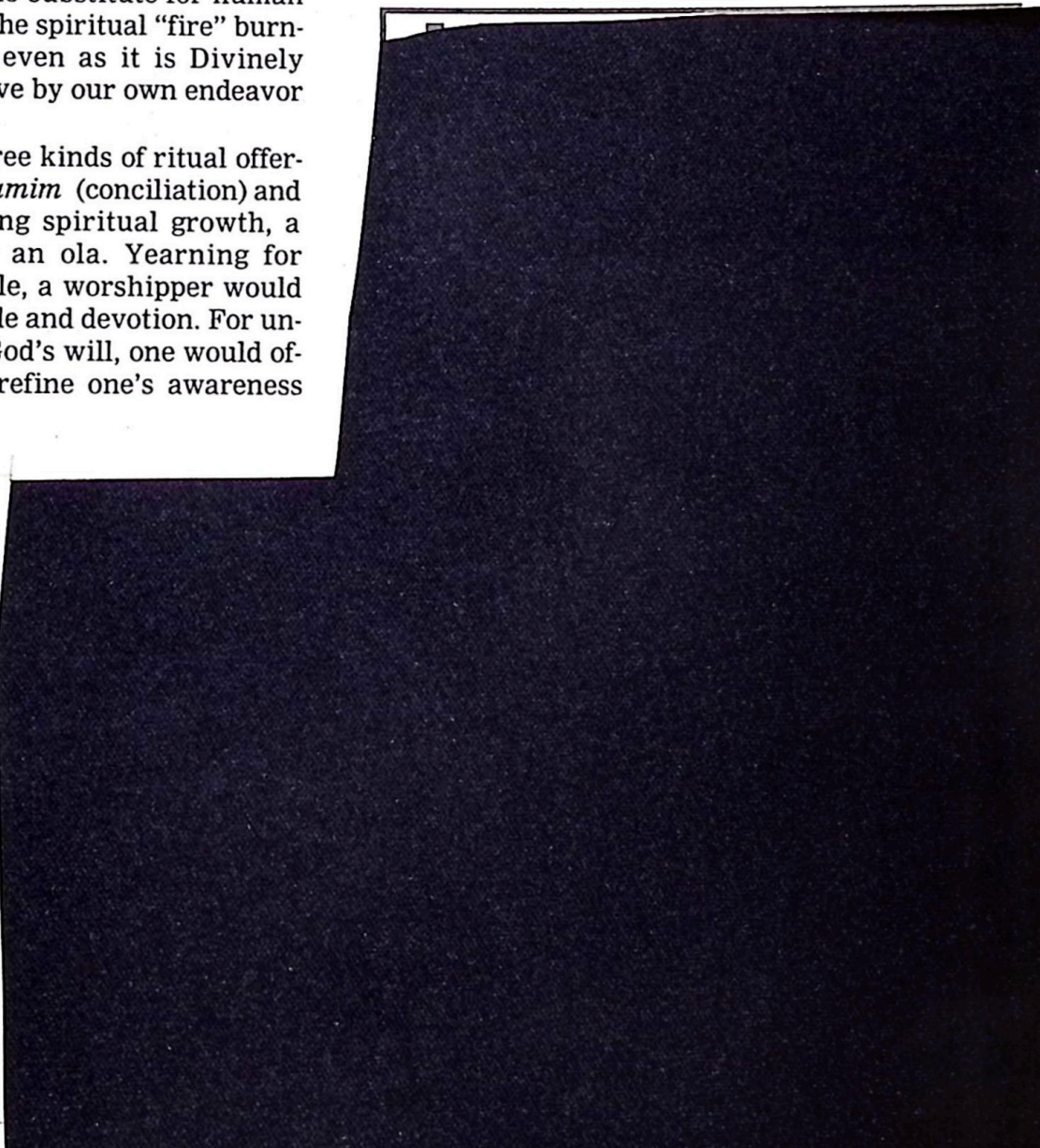
EISH-TAMID "constant fire" (Leviticus 6:6) was to be kept burning on the altar in the ancient Jewish temple. According to legend, this sacred fire initially descended from heaven. Nonetheless, Jewish law required that it be supplemented by ordinary, "mundane" fire. Human duty operates within the physical realm and is neither revoked nor abridged by Divine intervention. Heavenly gifts are no substitute for human initiative. Symbolically, the spiritual "fire" burning on our inner altar, even as it is Divinely sparked, must be kept alive by our own endeavor and resourcefulness.

Leviticus mentions three kinds of ritual offerings: *ola* (elevation), *shelamim* (conciliation) and *hatat* (expiation). Seeking spiritual growth, a worshipper would offer an *ola*. Yearning for peace with God and people, a worshipper would offer *shelamim* in gratitude and devotion. For unintentional failure to do God's will, one would offer *hatat*. Its purpose is to refine one's awareness and responsibility. For intentional wrongs, no offering can effect atonement.

Bridging the generation gap is prophecy's ultimate message (Malachi 3:23-24): *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the Day of God, the Great and the Awesome. And He shall turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the hearts of children to their parents.*

This idea of generational reconciliation is the core of the Pesach story. This is also the essence of the

haggada: Interaction between parents and children. More than to "tell" their children, the parents' role is to be open, to listen and respond to their offsprings' questions and concerns. The prophet mentions first the change of heart of the parents: First the parents will turn to their children, then the children to their parents.



Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

ENTHUSIASM (*hitlahavut*) is emotional “fire” (*esh*). Like physical fire, it must be contained and controlled. Integrated into one’s experience, this “fire” may be constructive and enriching. But if one ignores the limits and rules of reality, this unleashed “fire” may become destructive and consuming.

The “foreign fire” (*esh-zara*) offered by Aaron’s sons (Leviticus 10:1), symbolizes misused enthusiasm. The “constant fire” (*esh-tamid*) burning in the Temple (6:6), symbolizes disciplined enthusiasm. Emotional fervor induced from without, by drugs or even by mystic experiences, is a form of *esh-zara*, fire of alienation. Genuine fervor, kindled by Torah study, worship and good deeds, is sacred *esh-tamid*, fire of enlightenment and persistence.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

WISDOM, MIGHT AND RICHES are highly desirable attainments. But are they reliable? Jeremiah (9:22) impeaches their presumed supremacy: "Let not the wise person glory in his wisdom, nor the mighty person in his might, nor the rich person in his riches." Kohelet (9:11) tells of his own realization that "the race is not won by the swift, nor the war by the strong, nor a livelihood by the wise, nor riches by the shrewd . . . for misfortune and failure come to all alike." Our sages offer new definitions of wisdom, might and riches (Avot 4:1): "Who is wise? He who learns from all. Who is mighty? He who controls his desires. Who is rich? He who derives joy from his lot. What brings true joy and satisfaction is not what one has but one is."

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

TZAV

March 28, 1986

NEDER AND NEDAVAH (Lev. 7:16) are two forms of verbal commitment to donate to the Temple: The former is a promise, the latter a pledge. "I obligate myself to give a gift or offering to the Temple" is neder, a votive, a general vow, whether conditional or outright. "This property (inanimate or animate) is dedicated to the Temple" is nedavah, a freewill, specific consignment (Kinnim 1:1).

What if the objects were lost, stolen, or the animal died, while at the donor's home? In the case of neder, a personal commitment, the obligation must still be fulfilled, by providing a substitute. But nedavah is a property dedication; at the moment of verbal commitment, the item has already entered the Temple's domain. Legally, the obligation has been fulfilled.

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By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

KORBANOT: the ritual offerings of Leviticus are of three kinds: Elevation (ola), Conciliation (shelamim), and Expiation (hatat). In biblical days the worshipper would bring to the ancient Temple an offering of ola, when he felt a sense of regret for his shortcomings; he was reaching out for spiritual growth and ascent -- for elevation. Shelamim, when he was touched by gratitude and devotion; he was yearning for harmony with God and people -- for conciliation. Hatat, when he unintentionally failed to heed God's will; he was seeking ritual purification -- expiation. For intentionally committed wrongs, no offering can bring atonement. The hatat is offered to atone for an unwittingly committed "mistake" (het), thus leading to more refined moral sensitivity, to higher moral awareness and responsibility.

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By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THREE TYPES of sacrifices ("korbanot") are: "ola" (ascent offering), "shelamin" (peace offering) and "hatat" (betterment offering). "Ola" expresses man's regret, either for neglecting to do the right or scheming to do the wrong. Brought not for any commission of wrongdoing, it expresses desire for moral improvement and elevation. "Shelamin" manifests man's sense of self-commitment, gratitude and comradeship; it is voluntary and combines thanking God with sharing joy with people. "Hatat" demonstrates man's strivings for inner refinement. "Hat," wrongly translated as sin, truly means missing the mark, erring. "Hatat" is brought for intentional failings. The Jewish concept of human responsibility calls on man to increase the area of his mental watchfulness and carefulness. Even deeds unwillfully done evoke man's accountability; man is called to apply higher awareness in order to avoid any "het" (mistake). "Hatat," which also means cleansing, symbolizes man's striving toward spiritual heights, purification and perfection which permeates the whole "korbanot" system.

Thought of the Week

Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

TZAV

March 20, 1992

KORBANOT -- the ritual offerings in the ancient Temple -- are of three kinds: **Elevation** (*ola*), **Conciliation** (*shelamim*), and **Expiation** (*hatat*).

Elevation: One would bring an *ola* offering, when one felt a sense of regret for, and dissatisfaction with one's moral shortcomings and failings. Reaching out for moral growth and **spiritual elevation**, one would offer an *ola*. The term relates to the idea of "going up" -- as in *aliyya* (to Torah or to Israel).

Conciliation: The *shelamim* offering one would bring when one was touched by a sense of gratitude and devotion. Yearning for harmony with God, oneself and others, for **comprehensive conciliation**, one would offer a *shelamim*. The term relates to the idea of appeasement and contentment, as in *shalom* and *shelemut* (completeness).

Expiation: The *hatat* was offered by one who unintentionally and inadvertently failed to heed God's will. Seeking ritual purification, **divine expiation**, one would bring a *hatat*. The term relates to *het*, meaning both mistake (not "sin") and purification. For intentional, deliberate transgressions, no offering could effect atonement. The *hatat* atones only for inadvertent wrongs. Thus *hatat* promotes a more refined moral sensitivity, leading to a higher level of moral awareness and responsibility.