

Karbonot – The Temple Sacrifices

In our morning prayers, we recite the verses pertaining to the *Tamid* (daily sacrifice) first, and afterwards recite the verses describing the *ketoret* (incense-offering). The daily sacrifice was slaughtered in the Temple Courtyard and then offered on the Outer Altar. The incense-offering was offered within the Sanctuary itself.

We find in the order of these offerings a hint to a person's own spiritual journey as he begins to come close to God.

When a person begins to serve God, God has compassion on him and allows him to enter the precincts of holiness, even if he is not deserving. As our Sages say, "When one desires to purify himself, he is given Heavenly assistance."¹ This stage of his journey corresponds to the *Tamid*, which is offered in the Temple Courtyard. Inspired by this first contact with holiness, the person will continue to work on himself to attain more and more holiness. Still, relative to what he must accomplish, he is still in the Courtyard. He is still standing outside the Sanctuary.

When he wishes to enter the Sanctuary, however, he will find the entrance barred. For he may not enter until he has completely rectified and refined what he damaged through his sins – namely, the sparks of holiness that he caused to fall into the realm of evil. This stage of his journey parallels the incense-offering. Once he has accomplished this task, he may enter the Sanctuary.

It is only due to God's great compassion that one is not required to do the more difficult work of raising up the fallen sparks at the beginning of his journey. Otherwise he would find it terribly difficult to even enter the precincts of holiness, and might give up altogether.

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Someone once asked the Baal Shem Tov, "How is it that a person can elevate himself in the service of God, only to be pushed away without warning? How is it that at first a person is drawn near, to the extent that the gates of light begin to open for him and he tastes the intoxicating sweetness of being close to God, and then, all of a sudden, he feels distant, rejected and cast out from God's presence?"

The Baal Shem Tov compared this to a father teaching his son to walk. The father holds the child's hand and takes a step backward. The more steps the child is able to take, the more the father steps back and waits for the child to come to him. As the child feels the joy of coming close to his father, the father again moves backward—not to be cruel, but to force his son to

¹ *Shabbat* 104a, *Yoma* 38b, *Avodah Zarah* 58a, *Menachot* 29b.

take a few more steps on his own. He does this many times until the child learns to walk by himself.

God conducts Himself in the same way toward us, His children. He often distances Himself not so we should feel rejected and give up, but so we will strengthen ourselves and work harder to come close to Him.

Pesukei D’Zimra

“Praise God in His Heavenly sanctuary...Let every soul praise Yah, Hallelu-Yah!”

The Midrash states: There are ten archetypal types of song or praise: (1) *Nitzuach*, (2) *Nigun*, (3) *Mizmor*, (4) *Shir*, (5) *Hallel*, (6) *Tefillah*, (7) *Berakhah*, (8) *Hodaah*, (9) *HalleluYah*, and (10) *Ashrei*. The greatest of all is *HalleluYah*, for it includes God’s Name (*Yah*) and His Praise (*Hallel*) in one word. Rav called the entire Book of Psalms *Hallelu-Yah*.²

Hallelu-Yah is the expression of joy and thanksgiving that bursts forth from the human heart when the forces of despondency have been dispelled. In other words, as the Midrash states, *Hallelu-Yah* is the culmination of all ten archetypal forms of song. It is the inner joy that comes when we are rid of frustration and are in harmony with God. Such joy leaves a lasting impression that continues to strengthen us throughout our lives.

Maariv – The Evening Prayer

- ❖ Our Sages teach, “The evening prayer is optional” (*Berakhot* 27b; Rambam, *Hilkhos Tefillah* 3:7, 6:7; *Shulchan Arukh*, *Orach Chaim* 69:1). They made this declaration in order to teach us the following.

Even in the darkest times, we must never give up hope in the power of prayer. Instead, we should arouse ourselves with a powerful yearning for God, awakening the desire to pray to God from within ourselves. This is precisely the meaning of the word “optional” (*reshut*)—to do something because you want to do it, not because you are commanded. The purpose of prayer is to arouse this desire to connect to God, even when we are not commanded (*Likutey Halakhot*, *Orach Chaim*, *Tefillat Minchah* 7:9).

- ❖ “He causes light to recede before darkness, and darkness to recede before light. He causes day to pass away and night to come, making a distinction between day and night. God, Lord of all the hosts [of Heaven and earth], is His Name. He is the Living and Eternal God. He will reign over us endlessly and forever.”

² *Midrash Shochar Tov*, Psalm 1; *Midrash Tehillim* 1:6 end.

Falsehood finds a foothold whenever there is a dramatic time-change, such as when the sun rises in the morning or sets at night. For falsehood derives its energy from multiplicity – i.e., from the fact that things are constantly changing. Therefore, precisely when “He causes light to recede before darkness, and darkness to recede before light,” we praise and bless God. In this way, we reveal and to make known that all change, including changes in time, come from Him alone. For all change is rooted in His Simple Unity (*Likutey Halakhot, Yoreh Dei’ah, Ribit 5:46*).

- ❖ “Therefore, God our Lord, we will meditate on Your statutes when we lie down and speak of them when we rise up, and we will rejoice in the teachings of Your Torah and Your commandments forever. For they are our very life and the length of our days.”

These verses precede the recital of the Shema, when we declare God’s Unity and ask to be included within it. Therefore we ask to receive life through the Torah, as in, “If one is worthy, the Torah becomes an elixir of life for him; if he is unworthy, the very same Torah becomes a deadly potion for him” (*Yoma 72b*). We pray we are worthy for God’s light to descend to us full of life and blessing (*Likutey Halakhot, Orach Chaim, Kriat Shema 4:10*).