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Fire of The Avodah In The Beis HaMikdash, and Fire In Our Own Soul

In the blessing of **רצה** we ask Hashem **ואשי ישראל ותפלתם תקבל ברצון** that Hashem should accept the *korbonos* (the offerings in the Temple) and our prayers, with desire.

Tosafos^[1] states that this part of the blessing is a continuation of the previous part of the blessing, in which we ask that the *Avodah* (the Temple service) be returned.

In the *Beis HaMikdash* we had *korbonos*, the animal sacrifices, which are called *ishei Yisrael*, from the word *ish* (fire). There were several fires that were lit in the *Beis HaMikdash*. There was a fire of the *Menorah*, the fire of the *Ketores* (the incense), and the “constant fire” of the *Korbon Tamid* - which was considered the main kind of fire in the *Beis HaMikdash*, for it was constant.

The *Avodah* of the *Beis HaMikdash* mainly involved fire. The *Beis HaMikdash* is on *Har HoMoriah*, which is the “highest” point in Eretz Yisrael, the “highest” country of the world. The fact that the *Beis HaMikdash* is in a high place symbolizes the nature of fire, which rises to a higher place. The *Beis HaMikdash* was the Gate to Heaven. There was always a fire there that ascended to Heaven. It was a place of constant ascension.

We do not have the actual *Avodah* now, due to the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*. But the Sages state^[2] that there is still a Heavenly *Beis HaMikdash*, and the angel Michael brings the souls of the Jewish people there as *korbonos* on the Altar. In slightly different terms, Michael brings fire-offerings in Heaven, and that is the meaning of how he offers the souls of the Jewish people on the Altar.

Thus, being that there is a *Beis HaMikdash* that is in Heaven right now even though we don't have the *Beis HaMikdash* on this physical earth, in terms of our own **soul** as well, we can have the “fire of the *korbonos*” going on.

A Ben Aliyah: One Who Always Seeks Spiritual Improvement

One of the Sages said, “I have seen *bnei aliyah* (those who ascend spiritually), but they are few.” In other words, there are only a few people who have an inner fire in their souls to ascend in their *ruchniyus* (spirituality).

A *ben aliyah* is not someone who sometimes ascends in his *ruchniyus* and sometimes he doesn't; nor can he be someone who does not have a nature of fire in his soul. A *ben aliyah* is rather someone of which *aliyah* (ascension) is part of his very nature, and not just because he recognizes this

intellectually. He has an *aish tamid*, a “constant fire” in himself, which demands growth all the time in his *ruchniyus*. A ben aliyah is one who constantly seeks spiritual growth; aliyah is part of his nature.

Most people, by nature, do not push themselves to go higher. The words of the Vilna Gaon are famous: If a person is not going higher in his level, he is falling down from his level.

A person might have had a period of idealism in his life, especially when is in younger, and he reads stories of great people, and he feels full of aspirations. This can be a temporary feeling of inspiration, and most people can identify with it.

But there are some individuals who are aspiring for growth because it’s their very nature. They are involved with constant growth, and they have the resilience to be involved with growth and improvement for the entire year, long after they first get inspired; and they can hold onto their idealism for even more than a year or two.

But most people, even after they get inspired, eventually reach a point in which they feel that they can’t get grow any further; there comes a certain point where a person says to himself, “It was nice. Now I have to move on with my life.” Some people are growing before they were married, and they stopped growing after they are married. Others continue to grow for a little bit after they get married. But there are very few people who continue to grow on a constant basis.

A person might be a growing person at the age of 20, or 30, and maybe even at 40 or 50, or even 60 or 70. But it is not common for a person to grow after he gets older and demand more growth from himself. Even someone who was a growing person will stop at a certain point and not push himself any more.

When we are younger, our inner fire in the soul is more dominant, but as we get older, the fire begins to dim as time goes on. When we are younger, we are more active, more energetic, and more fiery. Thus, we are more idealistic when we are younger. But when we get older and we are less active, we quiet down, and our inner fire begins to go as time goes on.

So most people, even those who were considered “*bnei aliyah*” when they were younger, are usually not able to keep growing at a certain point in their life.

We Need Constant Growth

Constant growth is an inner and true way to live life. If one doesn’t demand for himself growth every day, his lifestyle is the opposite of the purpose of life that we are created for.

Every day, Hashem renews Creation – therefore, every day, we can seek to go higher than the day before. If we don’t grow in our *ruchniyus*, there is no point to our life. As the Vilna Gaon says, if a person doesn’t work to break his *middos*, he has no purpose in living.

Not only does it cause a person to live a deathlike kind of existence, but even his very life becomes like bones that have begun to decay, as the Vilna Gaon writes. If a person doesn’t demand from himself more growth each day, such a life is lacking the meaning of life, and it is a life which lacks real vitality.

At the beginning of our way, we serve Hashem as our *daas* grows stronger, and we have inspiration in our heart. But when a person lives a life of *emes* (truth), he realizes that life is not about more inspiration alone. It is about being a “constant fire on the Altar”. Such a person is truly alive; growth in *ruchniyus* is a part of his nature.

If one doesn't feel this inner push, he needs to work on himself to bring out this point from within himself. He must gain this ability of demanding more growth from himself.

If a person truly works on this, he can get up from all his failures and he doesn't give up, and he continues to pursue more and more improvement. If he makes sure not to give up and to keep growing, at a certain point, he will be able to uncover in himself the "constant fire" that will keep him growing, as opposed to inspiration that comes and goes. After a person reaches the constant fire, his failures will be a lot less.

Of course, we all have difficulties, sometimes big ones and sometimes small ones. But we can acquire a nature in which we are always growing spiritually, and when this becomes our nature, we can get by life correctly.

No Exact Instructions On How To Get There

There is no direct method we can use in order to acquire this nature. It requires constant hard work and perseverance on your part, which purifies your being; along with praying to Hashem about this, that your life be a life of constant growth. Don't just ask Hashem that you should merit to learn Torah, do the mitzvos, do chessed, and to daven; rather, you should be concerned about demanding more growth from yourself.

That's what an inner kind of life is about.

When Our Life Doesn't Go As Planned

Even more so, we know that the Jewish people went through 42 encampments in the desert before they got to Eretz Yisrael. So too, we are taught that every one of us goes through 42 major journeys^[3], which spans a lifetime.

We go through various changes in our life. Not only do we go through the stages of childhood and adolescence, but we our nature changes as we go through life; every year brings with it more changes to our nature. The Mishnah in Avos lists the stages of life which brings changes to our nature. Even more so, a person changes due to his surroundings. Our soul goes through massive changes from all that we go through; we get totally turned over from the way we were as children.

Some people are aware of this and some aren't, some a little more and some a little less, but we all change. We never remain the same; we always are changing. The times and the places we are in are always changing, and our soul changes with this.

Naturally, when a person always seeks growth, like "a constant fire on the Altar", he seeks for himself a way in which he can have permanent growth. He wants a certain schedule that will assist him in his quest for growth, and he thinks about this sensibly.

This can certainly help him become a *ben aliyah*. However, even though he is thinking correctly, Hashem, who runs in the world, might have other plans for him.

Hashem arranges the events in a person's life, and therefore, there is no "set" situation a person can be in. There is no situation which you can plan out exactly. And usually, the way your life turns out is very far from what you had in mind.

Sometimes a person's entire life is totally turned around in an instant. Even if it's not such an extreme change, there are definitely times in a person's life in which everything comes out different than what he planned. He had his plans, but Hashem had a different plan in mind.

For example, a person wants to learn Torah in a certain place he had in mind, and Hashem can make it happen that he ends up in a different place. A person might have to take care of his parents, or a child who is ill. He might have different things that come up which don't let him learn as much as he wanted to – something to do with either raising his children, or his health, or his livelihood. Each person has his own story.

A person wants to grow and he sets himself up for a situation of growth, but life brings various tests which uproot him from his plans, and a person is very apt to react with frustration at this, because he has been taken from his situation of growth and instead forced to be in a place where he can't grow.

For this reason, even one who knew of constant growth might get “burnt out”. If someone never had a plan for growth in the first place, he doesn't encounter this kind of frustration. He is not pained at situations like this, because he doesn't feel that something has happened to him.

But if someone is more spiritual, he demands from himself growth for all of his life, and he encounters many situations which don't go his way; this is certainly very painful and frustrating.

Here are examples: He wishes he could get up at a certain time in the morning so he can daven calmly and with concentration, he wishes he learn Torah with a calmer mind, he wishes he could do more *chessed* - and he finds that his situation in life doesn't allow it.

What happens when all of a person's plans to grow have changed and they aren't working out? In order to deal with the changes and not become disappointed, a person needs to acquire the following deep perspective towards life.

How You Can Always Grow Even When You Feel Like You Can't

As we said before, the meaning of a “*ben aliyah*” is someone who acquires *aliyah* (spiritual ascension) as part of his nature, even when he's challenged. A *ben aliyah* is not someone who plans to become a *ben aliyah*; that can definitely help get one started, but it is not yet the meaning of a *ben aliyah*. A *ben aliyah* is someone who knows how to grow in any possible given situation. In any situation he is put into, he thinks to himself how he can grow from it.

Of course, a person should make for himself a fixed schedule in how he can grow the most. But a person also has to know the following condition: you need to be prepared for changes. Everything is up to Hashem, so your plans might not work out.

Many times, a person's life does not go according to his plans. When your plans in life don't work out, you need to know how to react to it properly. Instead of feeling frustrated and hopeless, instead of feeling like the force of evil (the “*Sitra Achara*”) is holding you back, it's really the opposite: Hashem wants you to grow, and He has in mind a different plan for your growth than how you thought you would grow.

There are people who are very idealistic, but they feel like their entire life is spent with fighting the *Sitra Achara*. He focuses all the time on the negative side to his life, which is the fact that he has to constantly fight evil. The true perspective to have, however, is for a person to feel that he always lives with *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, and that should be his focus. It's a totally different perspective than the first kind of person.

A person can't spend his whole life fighting the *Sitra Achara*! Life is not defined solely as a war with the forces of evil, which seeks to prevent a person from reaching holiness. When one lives with the reality of the Creator in front of him, he is able to properly face changes to his situation. We all encounter changes to our situation; there is no one who doesn't. We must learn how to view these

situations with the proper perspective: That somehow, it is possible for you to grow even in the situation which Hashem has placed you in.

Again, to emphasize, obviously a person needs to try to arrange his daily schedule in a way that will lead him to more and more spiritual growth. But when it comes down to practical life, things end up looking totally different than what we plan. When a person wants to grow and he encounters situations which don't let him grow as he planned, he is apt to feel that Hashem doesn't want him and is therefore holding him back from growing, *chas v'shalom*. This is the wrong perspective to have.

The true perspective to have is that Hashem places you in all kinds of situations. As we said, *l'chatchilah*, you need to arrange for yourself a fixed schedule which allow you to grow. But you also need to know that in spite of your plans, there will be unexpected situations, and you can grow too in those situations. You need to know how you can grow in those situations, but you can definitely grow in any situation.

This perspective towards life is an overhaul to your whole life.

Whether a person is involved with learning Torah or with working, or with doing *chessed*, you can always grow from the situation that Hashem has placed you in. You can discover how you can grow from it. A true *ben aliyah* looks to see how Hashem has given him the tools to succeed in any situation he is in. Even when you're in a difficult time in which you feel like you're not growing, you are able to see how you can grow right now from your situation right now.

Chas v'shalom should one turn to the streets for seeking how he can grow higher. In the past, there were individuals who were able to go out into the world and grow from their experiences. That was their *Avodah*. *L'chatchilah*, one has to try to find himself in the Beis HaMidrash, learning Torah. If a person tries to do this but he finds that Hashem has different plans for him (and sometimes this is due to a person's own negligence towards learning that he has to end up going to work), then he has to see how he can grow from his situation that he is in right now, as opposed to wishing that he could leave work and go back to learning.

This is a subtle point, because it's not always so clear how exactly you can grow from any situation. Sometimes you grow by leaving the situation, and sometimes you grow by handling the situation correctly and seeing how you can grow from it.

There are situations which Hashem has placed a person in and he really has to learn how get out of those places, and that is how he can grow from those situations. Trying to grow from the situation itself won't help, because it is really his *avodah* to get out of that situation.

Other times, however, Hashem places a person in a situation which he can't escape from. This is due to either his nature, or because his Rebbi has told him that he needs to stay in the situation he is in. What should he do in such a situation? Instead of hoping that the situation will cease, he can learn how to grow from his current situation.

Sometimes we serve Hashem from joy and love - and sometimes we have to serve Him through our suffering. But whatever situation we are in, we are always able to utilize it for spiritual growth.

The Two Abilities We Need In Order To Always Grow

When we acquire this perspective deeply, along with revealing our fire of the soul for constant growth - this is what will uplift us all the time. We need both of these factors.

If a person only has the deep perspective towards life described here, but he doesn't have the inner

fire, he will feel a push to grow, but he won't be able to constantly grow.

If a person only has an inner fire but he doesn't have the deep perspective here, then he will be ambitious for more growth, but he will constantly encounter disappointment in his life from all the times in which he feels like he can't grow.

When both factors are combined (inner fire\constant demand for growth, along with seeing how one can grow from any situation), this is the true and inner kind of life. Such a person, no matter what he does, can see Hashem in his life all the time.

Reflecting On The Lives of Our Avos

Take a look at the life of Avraham Avinu. He is born into the house of the wicked Terach, who serves idols. He is told to go to a land he doesn't anything about. He is tested again and again. Avimelech abducts Sarah. He had to fight the four kings. Then he is tested with the Akeidah. What kind of difficult life he had!

Think about the like of Yaakov Avinu. He had to deal with Esav and with Lavan. He had to deal with his daughter Dinah getting kidnapped; then Shimon is abducted. His beloved son Yosef is sold. Then Binyamin is abducted. He had to go down to Egypt at the end of his life.

Look at the life of Moshe Rabbeinu. He grew up in the house of the evil Pharaoh. He had to run away to Midyan, where there was much idol worship.

Think about the life of Dovid HaMelech. He was lowly in the eyes of others. Look at Sefer Tehillim and you see how much suffering he went through. (His life contained every problem that every Jew will ever go through, and you can find it all in Tehillim).

If one has a true perspective and he looks at the tzaddikim of our past, he knows the truth: our Gedolim did not have easy lives. Yaakov Avinu sat in the Beis HaMidrash and then he was forced to leave it all and deal with Lavan and going down to Egypt. Our *tzaddikim* had a life of endless difficulties. But one thing they all had: "A constant fire burns on the Altar." They knew that every situation can make them grow higher.

If You Want To Become A True "Ben Aliyah"

If one wants to become a real "Ben Aliyah", he should know that life is a series of endless tests, until our last day. We go through tests from trying to understand our soul, from family members, from our surroundings. We go through many kinds of situations – some of them are pleasant, some are not as pleasant, and some are simply embarrassing. That's life. How can we pass it all while remaining connected with Hashem and His Torah? It is through acquiring these two abilities that was explained here. When a person knows how to grow from any situation – and when our inner fire is demanding growth – he will be a true *Ben Aliyah*.

This is the depth of the words of the Sages: Torah scholars have no rest, not on This World and not on the Next World^[4]. It is because a truly spiritual person is always growing, so he is always moving. There is never rest.

Conclusion

ואישי ישראל - Our own souls are really *korbonos* to Hashem; it is we who are the **אישי ישראל**, the offerings that go up to Hashem in a fire, for as we brought earlier from the words of our Sages, the angel Michael offers the souls of the Jewish people as *korbonos* to Hashem in a Heavenly fire. The

words of the Torah of Hashem are compared to a fire. Torah scholars are compared to a fire. The nature in the Jew's soul to ascend higher and higher in growth of his *ruchniyus* is a fire in the soul.

May we merit from Hashem to always seek constant growth and to always see how we can grow in any situation, and that it can be applied to us the possuk, "*A constant fire on the Altar.*"

[1] In the end of Tractate Menachos

[2] *ibid*

[3] A statement of the Baal Shem Tov

[4] Berachos 64a

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