

פרשת צו

Day and night the sacred flame is to rise in the forecourt of the temple. Judaism is not a religion that entertains a philosophical distinction between "bright" and "gloomy" periods of time. Whatever the circumstances, the luminous clarity of the Divine Word instills in us the courage and determination to lead the fight for the good.

The challenge will be less formidable when circumstances favor us ("day"). But even when we are subjected to harsh trials, when oppression and danger becloud our minds and will ("night"), we must look towards the radiant beacon of the altar-fire to help us maintain our moral course. In this context it is of profound significance that shortly before nightfall the fire had to be re-kindled with fresh wood. Standing at the threshold of a painful period in time, the Jew must gird himself with heightened strength of will and trust in Divine assistance.

The homage-offering (מנחה)

"This is the law of the homage-offering the priest shall lift out of it his handful of the fine flour and of its oil and all the incense which is on it, and he shall give its memorial portion to the altar to go up in smoke, as an expression of compliance to G-d" (Lev. 6:8). Flour, oil, wheat and olive are the appropriate symbols of our material prosperity. As in other instances, the Torah gives man the opportunity to convey his gratitude and recognition to Him Who is the sole

source of our wellbeing. While there are limitless varieties in the ways to sanctify our materialistic existence, the most perfect sacrifice is performed with our bread and oil. One need not suppress physical enjoyment in order to live in peace with one's conscience - for our table is compared to the altar.

Symbol of peacefulness and harmony, this sacrifice is consumed jointly by the priest and the donor. It signifies the unity between the sanctuary and the people. This offering is brought on various occasions and by members of all social levels. Everyone must have the chance of approaching the altar. The sacrificial offering of the poor has no less weight than that of the wealthy.

When bread is offered, the law requires that it be unleavened, fully identical with the Matzah. As the Matzah on Passover displaces Chametz, symbol of haughtiness and boundless independence, so the Jew acknowledges the truth that it is not he who is master over his life and fate. He recognizes that it is G-d Who is the all-powerful architect of his life's structure and future and that it is his own role and responsibility to do his share in the construction of the Divine edifice on earth.

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