

# Rav Kook Torah

by Rabbi Chanan Morrison  
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## The Purifying Fire of the Olah

Adapted from Olat Re'iyah vol. I, p. 122

"This is the law of the olah, the burnt offering. It is the burnt-offering which remains on the altar's hearth all night, until morning" (Vayikra 6:2).

What is the significance of burning the olah offering throughout the night?

### Elevating the Soul

The central ceremony when offering a korban is Zerikat HaDam, as blood from the offering is dashed around the foundation of the altar. What is the meaning of this ritual?

Blood corresponds to the nefesh - our soul, our life-force. "For blood is the nefesh" (D'varim 12:23). Dashing the blood on the altar fulfills the primary goal of the offering, purifying the soul and expiating its offenses - "It is the blood that atones for the soul" (Vayikra 17:11). This service elevates the foundations of the nefesh.

However, there is a level below the nefesh, a lower life-force residing closer to the body and its functions. This level of life also needs to be elevated. We seek to refine even our lowest physical tendencies and traits. This refinement is attained through a deep yearning to be close to God - an aspiration that flows

through the entire nation by way of the holy avodah of the Temple.

For this reason, the verse emphasizes: hi ha'olah "It is the [same] offering." The same olah offering which elevates and ennobles the nefesh also refines our baser character traits. The soul is uplifted through Zerikat HaDam, when the blood is dashed around the altar. The lower life-force is elevated when the limbs of the offering are consumed in the altar's fire. The holy fire refines and purifies our physical nature.

### Why burn the offering at night?

During the night, the physical side is dominant and the soul's higher light is hidden. During this time of spiritual dormancy, the altar's fire burns and purifies the physical remains of the offering. This nocturnal service guards life from sinking into the depths of base materialism.

The offering is burnt until daybreak. With the arrival of morning, the soul awakens with all of its strength and light. It is ready to stand before God, alive and vibrant, in renewed splendor.

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## Matza of Love

Adapted from Shemu'ot HaRe'iyah  
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Many years ago at a Seder I attended, one of the guests raised a difficulty in the Torah's account of the Exodus which he felt was insolvable. None of the answers offered to him satisfied him. Over the years I have searched for a solution to this problem; only recently did I discover that Rav Kook dealt with this apparent contradiction in one of his Shabbat meal discourses.

Each year at the Passover Seder we ask: "This matza - what is the reason for it?" And we reply that the dough of our ancestors did not have time to rise before God revealed Himself and redeemed them. As the Torah relates:

"They baked the dough that they brought out of Egypt as unleavened matza, since it had not risen, for they were driven out of Egypt and could not delay" (Sh'mot 12:39).

But is this the real reason that the Israelites ate matza? On the first of Nissan - two weeks prior to their hurried escape from Egypt - they had been commanded: "On the evening [of Pesach], you will eat matzot" (12:18).

So why did our ancestors eat matza? Was it because they needed to leave Egypt in a hurry? Or because God had

commanded them to eat matza?

## Two Types of Matza

The Sages distinguished between two levels in the mitzva of eating matza. On the first night of Pesach, it is obligatory to eat matza. During the rest of the holiday, however, eating matza is optional. According to many authorities, even though one is not obligated to eat matza on these days, by doing so one fulfills a mitzva.

[Chizkuni on Sh'mot 12:18; Ma'aseh Rav, the compendium of practices of the Vilna Gaon]

Now we may answer our original question. There are in fact two aspects to this mitzva: a Divine command, and a commemorative act. We eat matza on the first night to fulfill God's command, "In the evening you will eat matzot." This matza is an obligatory service of God, an expression of Yir'ah - our reverence for God and acceptance of the binding nature of the Torah's commandments.

The optional matza of the rest of Pesach, on the other hand, is a symbol of our hastened redemption. It reminds us of a time when 'the King of kings revealed Himself' and redeemed us. This is a voluntary mitzva, an expression of our Ahava - our feelings of love for God and appreciation for His great kindnesses to our ancestors and to us.

Which service of God is greater - Ahava or Yir'ah? The Ramban (Sh'mot 20:8) concluded that Ahava is greater. For this reason, positive mitzvot - which express our love of God - are greater

than negative mitzvot, which express awe. Thus, if there is a clash between them, the positive mitzva takes precedence (Yevamot 21a).

## Avodat Hashem in the World to Come

We find a very peculiar statement in the Talmud. After the resurrection of the dead, the mitzvot will be annulled (Nida 61b). Does this statement not contradict the fundamental principle that the Torah is eternal and will not change?

In fact, the mitzvot themselves will not change. What will change is how they are performed. They will no longer be observed as obligatory commandments of Yir'ah, but as voluntary acts of Ahava, expressing our love of God and His infinite grandeur.

The Talmud in Pesachim 119b describes a great banquet that God will prepare for the tzadikim in the World to Come. At the end of the feast, God will bestow the honor of reciting the Birkat HaMazon to Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov.

But why should they be given this special honor? The Sages determined that one who performs mitzvot out of obligation is greater than one who fulfills them voluntarily (Kiddushin 31a). Why should the Patriarchs be given this final honor? After all, their mitzvot were on a lower level, performed voluntarily, before the Torah was given at Sinai?

Nonetheless, the mitzvot of the Avot contained a special advantage. They performed their mitzvot out of Ahava, which is higher than Yir'ah. Their

mitzvot reflect the path of the future world, when the Torah will be observed naturally, purely out of love.

The future path of serving God with Ahava is thus rooted in the very inception of the Jewish people - in the spiritual lives of the Patriarchs, and in the voluntary matza which commemorates the redemption from Egypt.

## First Discipline, then Love

The order is significant. We begin with the path of mandatory observance, through the discipline of Halacha. This is the fundamental path of serving God - the service of Yir'ah, obedience and submission. The initial mitzva of eating matza, on the first night of Pesach, is thus mandatory.

But we continue with the higher path, serving God through love and Ahava. During the remaining days of Pesach we fulfill the voluntary mitzva of eating matza - matza that symbolizes God's promise that He will redeem us, acharit k'reishit, elevating us in the end of days just as He did long ago in Egypt. 