

Kol Mevasser

PARASHAT PARAH

22 Adar II 5768

March 29, 2008

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Rekindling the Fire

Rabbi Haim Ovadia

"Rekindling the Fire" is being concurrently published in the Jewish Journal of this week, March 27, 2008

One of the events that shocked and reshaped Judaism was, no doubt, the destruction of the Second Temple almost two thousand years ago. For almost three hundred years following that calamitous event, the Jews still entertained hopes of rebuilding it, hopes that were translated into two nearly successful attempts of construction and several disastrous rebellions against the mighty Roman Empire.

When it finally dawned on Zealots, Pharisees, Rabbis and priests alike that the Temple would not be rebuilt anytime soon they had to look for substitutes for the central role the Temple occupied in Jewish life. The result of their understanding and efforts was that prayer became the new sacrifice, which must have caused great joy among Israel's dwindling population of domesticated animals.

While the rabbis created this new system to replace the sacrifices, they also pondered the question: Why were we deprived of the Temple, and their conclusion was that we did not deserve it. The Temple and the sacrifices were only the means to achieve spiritual growth through thanking God for His blessings, reflecting on our sins and changing our ways. Once people lost sight of the goal and concentrated only on the sacrificial ritual, the Temple lost its meaning and purpose.

PRAYER SCHEDULE

SHABBAT SHEMINI

Parashat Parah

21 Adar II / Friday, March 28th

Shabbat Candlelighting6:54 pm
Minhah & Arvith6:30 pm

22 Adar II / Shabbat, March 29th

Shaharith8:30 am
Minhah & Arvith6:15 pm
Motzei Shabbat7:57 pm

23 Adar II / Sunday, March 30th

Shaharith7:30 am
Talmud Torah10:00 am

Monday through Thursday

Shaharith6:30 am
Talmud Torah Tues./Thurs.4:00 pm

SHABBAT TAZRIA

Parashat HaHodesh

29 Adar II / Friday, April 4th

Shabbat Candlelighting6:58 pm
Minhah & Arvith6:30 pm

Fast forward two thousand years and here we are with our prayers, perfectly substituting the sacrifices and the Temple service with all their flaws. Regardless of denomination, the majority of shul goers treat prayer pretty much like the ancient Temple. *It is some kind of a deal between me and God. I came to Your House, I offered prayers, now You do Your part.*

Many Jews measure one another by how often they frequent the Synagogue and have created a gauging system of Jewishness per year: the once-a-year Jew, the two-days-a-year Jew, etc. How many devout worshippers read their sid-dur diligently cover to cover, including page

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numbers and index, spend hours in shul every day, and go to the Netz (sunrise) Minyan yet live everyday life almost devoid of spirituality? Not only congregants fall into the ritualistic trap, rabbis and community leaders join them by turning synagogues into centers of power, rather than spiritual centers.

I recall one of my first meetings in Los Angeles with the rabbi of a leading conservative synagogue, a meeting which I initiated in order to bridge the factional gap and find ways of cooperation, since I believe that in order to achieve peace with other nations we have to start by pursuing inner peace within the Jewish people. The distinguished and scholarly rabbi, it turns out, was much more pragmatic than I was. He told me to abandon my naïve dreams. In his words: “The Rabbinate is all about money, you don’t upset your congregants, and I won’t upset mine.”

Since that conversation I have come across so many rabbis and shul leaders who profess different shades of this ideology. But whether money, power or prestige dictate their leadership style, the main victims are their congregants.

The sin of distorting the purpose of the shul and turning it into a self aggrandizing device was maybe the sin of Nadav and Avihu, Aaron’s two elder sons. On the day of the Tabernacle’s inauguration in the Sinai desert, they proceeded into the sanctuary to offer their frankincense without being commanded to do so. They were immediately punished by a Divine fire that consumed their souls. The harshness of the punishment astonished and perplexed not only the Israelites then present, but all commentators for generations to come.

But if we understand that what they did was an attempt to establish the Tabernacle as their own power base, bypassing Moses’ authority,

their own father’s honor, and even God’s will, then their death was meant to serve as a symbolic admonition to all future generations of synagogues, a.k.a. Mini-Temples, to let these temples serve their true purpose, the spiritual benefit and growth of the people, enhancing our ability to come closer to God, to our inner self and to other human beings.

Unfortunately, millennia later, synagogues still fight each other, vying for people and money. Rabbis are still struggling to establish themselves as mini-dictators, zealously guarding their territorial rights, and shul-goers are still substituting the sacrifices with prayers, thinking that the mere recital of prayer suffices. I sometimes want to tell people, for God’s sake, if this is why and how you come to shul, don’t come, it is not that important and a shul like that is already destroyed. Stay home, spend time with your family, create and say your prayers in a way that will answer your individual needs and will help you grow spiritually through the process of meditation, self judgment, and positive change.

Then, and only then, let us all come back to shul, with a pure and genuine spark rekindling our fire. *Shabbat Shalom*

TORAH READINGS

Special Reading, Parashat Parah p. 652
Parashat Shemini p. 443 *Haftara* p. 999

THANK YOU

Molly Jalali & Jonathan Kelly
for organizing & managing
KJ’s 3rd Annual Purim Carnival.

Thank you Rifka Mangoli & Rafi Itzhaki
for assisting and coordinating the
volunteers at the carnival

And thank you to all our wonderful
volunteers who staffed booths & rides
and made the carnival a reality.

In Memoriam

These anniversaries occur from Shabbat, the Shabbat, the 22nd of Adar II (March 29, 2008) to Shabbat, the 29th of Adar II (April 5, 2008). It is customary to light a memorial candle in the evening and donate tzedakah. Family members are encouraged to attend services in honor of loved ones. *Entries with an asterisk lack contact names, to add information please call 310-474-0559.*

Sunday / 23 Adar II

Rachel bat Chana
Moshe Ezra ben Rafael Moshe

Tuesday / 25 Adar II

Sarah bat Gurjiyee

Wednesday / 26 Adar II

Shlomo ben Messod Emquies

Thursday / 27 Adar II

Nissim ben Yaakov
Shaul ben Hacham Moshe Yaakob

Friday / 28 Adar II

Tefaha bat Salima

Shabbat / 29 Adar II

Lulu bat Matooka
Mordechai ben Yehuda

Refuah Shlemah

Please include these people in your prayers for health.

Khayah Noa bat Sara • Matilda Louisa
Victor ben Pauline • Haim ben Mordechai
Shaul Chai Gavriel ben Sara
Shamuel Eliyahu ben Hannah

To update this list e-mail dafna@kahaljoseph.org

*Shabbat Kiddush
is sponsored by
Tooraj Yaakov Aghalar
& Family
in memory of
Nissim ben Yaakov, z"l*

*Oneg Shabbat
is sponsored by
Ramah Mingail*

*in memory of
Lt. Col. Joseph H. Mingail
z"l*

*We offer our heartfelt condolences
to the family of
Nurit Ishaaya, z"l
to her husband, Morris
and her children
Revital, Vardit, and Avi*

*We offer our heartfelt condolences
to the family of
Lt. Col. Joseph H. Mingail, z"l
to his wife, Ramah, daughter Rachel,
son Haim, grandson Brandon, and
the Mingail & Cohen families*