

## **Class on the month of Av – Lesson 2 – More on the Temple**

### **Temple Mount**

So, what is it about the Temple? Why are we supposed to still be in mourning? In order to answer that, we need to go back in time to the biblical stories that point to the Temple mount as the place where G-d was manifest. For not only are we in exile, but G-d is as well. **The Temple was the one place where G-d was actually seen here on earth.**

The first incident connected with the Temple Mount was the binding of Isaac. Abraham, the most loving, kind, and generous person on earth in 1800 BCE was asked by G-d to do the unthinkable – to sacrifice his one and only son. Now remember, he lived in a time when sacrificing your child to a god was very common. Everyone was doing it. But Abraham spoke against this and against all murder. Yet, he took his only son, Isaac up to the mount, before there was a Temple there and bound his son on an altar. Isaac was fully cooperative too – we are told he was in his 30's at the time and a fully willing partner.

At the last minute, an angel of G-d came and stopped him and allowed a ram to be sacrificed instead and so **Abraham said those fateful words, "this is where G-d will be seen". The rest is history.**

Next Jacob, Isaac's son was leaving his parents to escape his brother's wrath for stealing his right to the inheritance of the first born. He was on his way to his uncle's house, which was the worst part of the world at that time, and so this was his own personal exile. Leaving the Land promised to his father with trepidation, he found a place to lay down and sleep. This was the very place that his grandfather, Abraham, bound his father, Isaac to be sacrificed – Mt. Moriah.

While sleeping, Jacob has a dream and in that dream, he sees a ladder with angels going up and down and Hashem standing over him promising that the ground where he is laying will be given to his descendants who will be spread out over the earth and then "I will return you to this soil.." **Jacob says, "surely G-d was in this place" and this place was "none other than the gateway to heaven." These words reflect to us that the Temple mount is a "portal" to the Divine.**

### **Miracles in the Temple**

It was in the time of King David's son, Solomon's reign, that the first Temple was built. It contained the Ark of the Covenant which held the original 10 Commandments that Moses carved in stone. It also had some of the manna that the people ate in the desert. The Ark itself was supernatural – in the Temple, it didn't take up space. The entire space where it was kept in the Temple was 20x20 cubits but if you measured from one

side of the Ark to the wall, you got 10 cubits. This is only one of **many examples of the Temple existing beyond time and space.**

#### **Other miracles in the Temple:**

- the smoke from the incense went straight up in the Temple without moving back and forth
- People could prostrate themselves with room to move even though the place would be packed like sardines.
- The Kohanim (High Priests) wore a magical breastplate with jewels in it that lit up in answer to questions.
- The Cruvim (“cherubs” - 2 baby angels made of gold) sitting on top of the ark would turn and face one another when the community was in alignment with G-d and then turn away when not.
- In the last years of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple, the High Priest of the Kohanim died every year when he went into the Holy of Holies to ask for forgiveness on Yom Kippur because the Priesthood had gotten more and more corrupt.

#### **Sacrifices**

Any discussion of the Temple needs to include an explanation for the animal sacrifices. It boggles the modern mind to even grapple with this concept! Yet, the sacrifices were an essential part of the Temple service. As I said before, **human sacrifice was commonplace at the time and the service in the Temple was unique in that it didn't allow for human sacrifice. G-d didn't want the murder of human beings but he acquiesced to the slaughter of animals for food, as long as it was done in a humane way.** The sacrifice of animals in the Temple was accompanied by a feast – it was kind of like a big bar-b-que of those animals who were sacrificed. The Torah gives us a peek into how G-d views animals:

- In Genesis 1:29, He wants us to be vegetarian.
- In Gen. 7:2, G-d refers to animals boarding the ark as husband and wife, same as humans, instead of referring to them as male and female.
- When G-d permits us to eat meat, it's not because of lack of nutrition but as a concession to our weakness, He equates the animals' blood with its soul in Gen 9:4 and in 4 other verses of the Torah. (Kosher meat has all the blood taken out of it.)
- Then, in Gen 9:9-10 G-d makes a covenant with the animals just as He did with humans.
- And we see in Numbers 11 that while G-d had provided us with vegetarian manna, during our wandering in the desert, we once again demanded meat. G-d sees it as lustful and the people get sick from it.

Interestingly, **there is no meat eating during first 9 days of Av.** It's customary to eat fish though. We are fasting in solidarity with the last remnants of Jerusalem before the Romans destroyed it. All the meat had gone bad by then. Here's a link to some recipes from Jamie Geller for the first 9 days of Av: <https://jamiiegeller.com/holidays/why-we-dont-eat-meat-during-the-9-days-and-what-to-eat-instead/>

The Tanya (foremost book of Lubavitch/Chabad) refers to us as having a G-dly soul and an "Animal" soul. From this we learn that the part of us like an animal is the instinctual part that allows us to survive as a species. In mystical texts, **the animal soul is similar to the ego – the part of us that is self-centered and driven by the needs of the self/body.** When I watch my dog eat, I am reminded of this. She just gobbles down her food. I can't leave any food within her reach because she won't be able to not eat it – even if it isn't hers. **The animal soul is very strong and we need it to survive but the goal is to allow it to be driven by the G-dly soul.**



**The sacrifices were symbolic of the subjugation of our animal soul to our G-dly soul. We take the animal part of us and give it over to a higher purpose and elevate it and ourselves at the same moment.** This is also how we get to the times of Moshiach where the entire world will be surrendered to its Higher purpose and there will be peace on earth, no hunger, nor sickness, and no more war. This is a time when G-d will be revealed in all things - not just in the Temple. G-d will no longer be in exile.