



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

## **FIRE FROM ABOVE, FIRE FROM BELOW**

The sidra deals in detail with the fire on the Altar.

According to rabbinic teaching (Talmud, Yoma 21b), there was fire that came from Above as well as fire that was lit on earth with flames that danced upwards.

Looked at homiletically, this tells us that man and God, earth and heaven, constantly yearn for one another.

Man is nothing without God; whilst God, for His part, has a need for man. Otherwise He is a king without a kingdom, a ruler without subjects, a teacher without pupils, a doctor without patients, a lawyer without clients.

Biblical history is the account of the sometimes uneasy relationship between them. God is often disappointed in man; man has his moments when he feels disappointed in God.

The ideal is for both parties to the eternal covenant to work together and seek to satisfy each other, the model being the story in Sh'mot 19 of

God descending, as it were, upon Mount Sinai and Moses ascending to the sphere of the Divine.

## **LIFE WITHOUT SACRIFICES**

The Book of Vayikra is largely concerned with sacrifices.

So important was the sacrificial ritual in the Temple that one wonders how Judaism survived when the Sanctuary was destroyed. The question greatly exercised the Talmudic rabbis. The fact is that Temple or no Temple, Judaism did survive.

But the rabbis were concerned with a different issue: "now that we have no Temple, how can we obtain atonement?"

The Midrash Tanchuma gave a typical answer: "While the Temple stood, atonement came through the sacrifices; without the Temple, we have the Torah."

There are many such statements. How do we replace the sacrifices as a means of atonement? By having a humble spirit (Sanhedrin 43b). By doing kindly deeds (Avot D'Rabi Natan 4:5). By modesty within one's house (Tanchuma). By hospitality (Chagiga 27a). By controlling one's instincts (Sanhedrin 43b).

Some sages felt that we had an even better means of atonement than before: "Charitable deeds are better than all the sacrifices" (Sanhedrin 49b).

"Atonement" indicates "at-one-ment". Sacrifices, korbanot, from the Hebrew root for coming near, were not the only way to be at one with God. The same result could come from living a good and righteous life.

This does not mean that the sacrifices would be unnecessary when the Temple was rebuilt, but they would have to be accompanied by the sacrifice of the selfishness that gets in the way of a life with God. -OZ

**Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH**