



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

Ritual & Repentance

This week's Torah reading with its details of the Mikdash sacrifices reminds us, that when the Reform movement began, it attacked Orthodoxy for allegedly performing rituals by rote without any spiritual purpose.

The allegation was appealing to those who found the commandments too demanding and looked for a way of life that could brush aside the traditional sancta such as kashrut, the Shabbat laws, tefillin and others.

The suggestion that Orthodox Jews carry out these commands as an end in themselves is unfair and incorrect. The Orthodox keep the mitzvot lovingly as symbols and ways of their yearning to come close to God.

The accusation was foreseen long ago by the rabbinic sages. Rabba says that anyone who imagines he can bring a sacrifice and go through the motions without repenting of his sins and seeking God's forgiveness is merely a fool. The Midrash even quotes God as wondering why they bring sacrifices if their hearts are not in it (Yalkut Shim'oni).

Another Midrash says that anyone who has a proud heart and doesn't believe in the action he is performing is insulting God.

Residents & Tourists

The sidra tells us that the fire on the altar shall be left to burn continuously and must never be allowed to go out (Vayikra 6:6).

There is a comparison between the fire and the human being. King David said in Psalms (27:4) that he yearned to dwell in the House of the Lord all the days of his life. He said a similar thing at the end of the famous Psalm 23.

The fire should be in the sanctuary continuously; the believer should be blessed to be present there every moment of every day.

But there is a problem with the verse from Psalm 27. It speaks of dwelling in the Mikdash but also of coming to visit - "to frequent His holy place". Which is more important - to dwell in the sanctuary or to visit?

There is an argument in favour of each. To dwell means to be constantly in the Divine Presence. To visit means to be there whenever possible but not all the time. The dweller can take it all for granted; the

visitor can enjoy the moment but then move on to other things.

There is a challenge for each. The dweller must learn to see the sanctuary with fresh eyes every day of his life, never letting himself become blase.

The visitor must try to increase the frequency of his visits so that the day will come when he will no longer be a tourist but a resident. -OZ

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH