

# Rav Kook Torah



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## The Olah Offering and Prophecy

The ultimate objective of the Temple service is HASHRA'AT SH'CHINA, bringing the Divine Presence into our physical world. This goal is clearly connected to the unique phenomena of divine inspiration and prophecy. God's Presence in the Mikdash parallels on the national level, the dwelling of prophecy in the mind of the prophet.

In particular, the Olah offering that is completely burnt on the altar, corresponds to the highest level of communication between us and God, a sublime level in which the material world is of no consequence. Just as the altar fire utterly consumed the physical aspect of the offering, so too, this type of spiritual encounter completely transcends our physical existence. By examining the Olah service, we can gain insight into the prophetic experience.

### Beyond the Physical Realm

The daily Tamid offering was completely consumed by fire on the altar during the night. What was done with the ashes? The following day, a

kohen placed one shovelful of ashes next to the altar. To dispose of the rest, he changed into less important clothes and transported the ashes to a ritually clean spot outside the camp.

Thus, we see that the Olah service involved three different locations, with descending sanctity:

The fire on top of the Altar.

Next to the Altar, where a shovelful of ashes was placed.

A ritually clean place outside the camp for the remaining ashes.

### Three Stages

The prophetic experience is a blaze of sacred flames inside the human soul, a divine interaction that transcends ordinary life. This extraordinary event corresponds to the first stage, the nighttime burning of the offering in the fire of the holy Altar.

However, the prophet wants to extend the impact of this lofty experience so that it can make its mark on his character traits and inner life. This effort corresponds to the placement of some of the ashes, transformed by the Altar's flames, next to the Altar. This is a secondary level of holiness, analogous to those aspects of life that are close to the holy itself, where impressions of the sacred vision may be stored in a pure state.

The lowest expression of the prophetic vision is in its public revelation. Informing the people of the content of God's message, and thereby infusing life and human morality with divine light – this takes place at a more peripheral level. Outside the inner camp, bordering on the domain of secular life, the kohen publicly brings out the remaining ashes.

Even this area, however, must be ritually pure, so that the penetrating influence of the holy service can make its impact. For the sake of his public message, the kohen-prophet needs to descend somewhat from his former state of holiness, and change into lesser clothes. In the metaphoric language of the Sages, "The clothes worn by a servant while cooking for his master should not be used when serving his master wine" (Shabbat 114a).

## **The Constant Altar Fire**

The Torah concludes its description of the Olah service by warning that the Altar fire should be kept burning continuously: "The kohen will kindle wood on it each morning" (Vayikra 6:5). Why mention this now?

Precisely at this juncture, after the kohen-prophet has left the inner nucleus of holiness in order to attend to life's temporal affairs, he must be aware of the constant fire on the

Altar. Despite his involvement with the practical and mundane aspects of life, the holy fire continues to burn inside the heart.

This is the unique characteristic of the Altar fire: from afar, it can warm and uplift every soul of the Jewish people. This sacred fire is a powerful, holy love that cannot be extinguished, as it says, "Mighty waters cannot extinguish the love; neither can rivers wash it away" (Shir HaShirim 8:7).

Yet, it is not enough for the holy fire to burn only in the inner depths of the heart. How can we ensure that its flames reach all aspects of life, and survive the "mighty waters" of mundane life?

The Torah's concluding instructions present the solution to this problem: "The kohen will kindle wood on it each morning." What is the purpose of this daily arrangement of kindling wood? New logs of wood nourish the Altar's holy flames.

We find a similar expression of daily spiritual replenishment in Yishayahu 50:4 - "Each morning He awakens my ear to hear according to the teachings." Just as renewal of the Altar's hearth each day revives the holy fire, so too, daily contemplation of God's wonders and renewed study of His Torah rejuvenates the soul. This renewal energizes the soul,

**giving strength for new deeds and aspirations, and awakening a new spirit of life from the soul's inner fire.**

*Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 182-184*

*Adapted from Olat Re'iyah*

*vol. I, pp. 122-124*