

Parashat Lech Lcha details Abraham and Sarah's journey from Charan to the land of Canaan. The Torah tells us that on several occasions Abraham built altars to God and called out to Him by name. What was so special about these altars and why was it necessary to inform us of all of them?

The Mishna in Masechet Sukkot (5:4) says the people in the Temple on the Holiday of Sukkot would say "We are to God and our eyes are to God", *אנו לקה ועינינו לקה* – an expression of acceptance of the yoke of Heaven, *קבלת עול מלכות שמים*, during the Simchat Beit HaShoeva. The altar was surrounded with willow twigs to beautify it and when they parted from the altar on Hoshana Rabbah they said *יופי לך מזבח* – Beauty to you, the altar. What do these ceremonies mean? These statements do not refer to the decorations. But rather they express the idea, or the concept, that the *מזבח* represents and conveys beauty.

What was that prospective convert looking for when he said teach me all of Torah on one foot? What is the quintessence of Torah Judaism? The answer is *יופי לך מזבח*, Jewish life is beautiful. You can see and discern that beauty in our private and social lives, our laws that govern marital relations, helping the needy, our laws of charity. They are all beautiful. Beautiful and difficult. *מזבח* is a central idea of Judaism precisely because Judaism is difficult. If it were not difficult to adhere to, ipso facto it would be insignificant and lack the redemptive effect it has on us. If we would not be required to sacrifice for Shabbat, for example to close our businesses, to be careful with whom we partner, then Shabbat would be just another day. Shabbat was not given to the Jew to provide financial success. One of its characteristics is it requires or leads to the acceptance of financial loss! Why does the Chazan who leads the High Holiday Services usually lead the first Slichot? Because he cannot charge the community for davening on the High Holidays, so they give him an opportunity to collect a fee for Slichot. Payment for a service rendered on Shabbat or Yom Tov is prohibited. For example, baby sitting on Shabbat for free is permitted but if you charge for it, it is prohibited. Earning any money on Shabbat is prohibited. (Rabbis are not paid for speaking on Shabbat, but rather for not speaking! They are permitted to present a sermon from the pulpit on Shabbat as they receive no remuneration for it).

Shabbat expresses *יופי לך מזבח*. If Shabbat was not associated with the idea of Mizbeach, it would be worthless. Shabbat has a redemptive positive affect on us precisely because it involves some aspect of self-sacrifice. The more integrated we become in society, the more difficult the observance of Shabbat and the greater the reward for keeping it. It gives meaning to our lives, dispelling the sense of loneliness in a cruel world. Only Torah and Mitzvot can accomplish that. No secular act can accomplish that. The more I must give up and submit to some hardship and difficulty, the more redemptive, sacred, cleansing that act becomes.

As far as ritual is concerned, marital life is a field where the Torah has taxed human perseverance and patience to the limit, The Torah requires abstinence as the required sacrifice to overcome and defeat natural passion and exhibit self-control and restraint. The Torah emphasizes Taharat Hamishpacha, the laws of family purity, precisely because of its level of difficulty. It is the epitome of יופי לך מזבח.

Usually, an individual who is personally lax in the observance of Shabbat but resides in a community where Shabbat is observed, will observe the Shabbat out of peer pressure, at least in public. Perhaps we observe Shabbat because we don't want to expose ourselves to our neighbors. Taharat Hamishpacha is different. It requires us to step back, to retreat from our desires. No one will know about or comment on a lack of observance of the laws of family purity. Yet the Jew observes these laws. Our laws do not revolve around a desire to make Orthodox Judaism comfortable. Torah doesn't simply want to make our lives miserable. But it does insist on sacrifice. To appropriately fulfill the commandment of Tzedaka, you must give more than what you can afford. If you can easily afford the amount you give, it doesn't hurt and doesn't have the dynamic redemptive effect on the personality. When someone reaches to achieve an objective he has yearned for his entire life, the Torah tells him to stop and retreat. This is an example of יופי לך מזבח.

The Festival of Sukkot requires the Jewish Community to offer many sacrifices. The modern world has forgotten the idea of sacrifice, of self-defeat. One who observes Shabbat and suffers financially because of it, exemplifies Korban and יופי לך מזבח. Take Jewish Education. If one doesn't have the courage to pursue it, he will raise assimilated children. Unfortunately, we see today the loss of several generations because of a lack of Jewish Education. Jewish Education is very expensive. It would be much easier financially to send our children to public schools. Yet despite the exorbitant cost, Torah Observant Jews insist on sending their children to Yeshivot. Proper education of a child requires bringing a sacrifice on an altar. Sukkot with its many sacrifices coupled with our acknowledgment of יופי לך מזבח reflects this idea, the very substance of Torah.

Nowadays there is a trend towards nihilism, not only among Jews in American Jewish communities, to abandon and destroy everything. The new left is more than a political movement; in fact, the movement is not yet crystalized. It is a movement simply to deny and destroy everything for the purpose of destruction. We don't know yet what results this movement will lead to. It will likely embrace antisemitism using anti-Zionism terminology. Anti-Zionism is equated with anti-imperialism. This is in reality a deep hatred of Jews knowing that Jews support the State of Israel. If I hate the Zionists, I hate the Jew. There is

temptation on the part of youth to surrender and give in to the new left. I read speeches by presidents of universities who surrendered to the new left and their destructive mission. Western society is less than ideal but Communist Russian society, advocated by the new left, is worse. The new left will either bring about communism, or fascism will result as a reaction to the new left. (The Rav said this Sukkot of 1968.)

Nowadays, we lack the courage, wisdom or fortitude to protect our principles. Even in Judaism we hear voices calling to reappraise our principles. For example, a campus Hillel director, a graduate of an Orthodox Yeshiva, said we must reappraise our view of sex morality. Why use fancy language of reappraisal? Just come out and say you want to eliminate Hilchot Isurei Biah!

Modern man has rejected the idea of **יופי לך מזבח**. Modern man thinks you must explore every facet and physiological instinct of human desire. The new left rejects all restrictions, checks or bounds. You are free to enjoy every opportunity, hence you are free to destroy humanity. Judaism advocates the opposite. And a Jew who understands the concept of **יופי לך מזבח** has the right to enjoy Simchas Torah.

Let us return to our original question about the altars Abraham built. Abraham was commanded to distance himself from his father's house. When he arrived in Charan he was surrounded by his family. Indeed, his father had repented as Rashi points out (15:15 **אל אבותיך**). Why couldn't he stay with them or at least bring them along with him? Because to become the great Abraham, **אב המון גויים**, and to lay the foundations for the Jewish People, God required him to terminate all previous familial ties. He had to bring the sacrifice of leaving his past completely behind him and forge a new chapter on his own with together with his beloved Sarah. He had to undergo various tests and trials, especially when he thought he finally attained at modicum of stability and separate from those around him. He forged friendships with Aner, Eshkol and Mamre, but in the end he had to sacrifice those as well on the altars he built, to follow God's will. Abraham established the precedent of **יופי לך מזבח**, retreating and withdrawing when he was about to realize a long-desired goal, bending his will before God in order to fulfill his mission and destiny.

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