

## CJL PERSPECTIVE

### **The Outdoor Altar**

#### **Yanki Tauber**

Rabbi Elazar would give a coin to a pauper and only then he would pray (Talmud, Bava Batra 10a)

The Holy Temple in Jerusalem was a human-like structure: its chambers and furnishings corresponded to the various organs and faculties which make up the human being. As our sages point out, when G-d tells Moses, "they shall make for Me a Sanctuary, and I shall dwell within them" (Exodus 25:8) He does not say, "I shall dwell within it" but, "within them." In other words, while the Holy Temple was the focal point of man's service of his Creator and the place which most expressed G-d's presence in our world, the objective of the Temple service was that man apply the awareness and experience of the Divine which pervaded the Holy Temple to all aspects of his daily life. So each of the Temple's vessels and the services which were performed with them has its equivalent in the manner in which man lives his life and serves his Creator.

The services performed in the Temple fall under two general categories: the "inner services" in the Temple proper (the heichal), and the "outer services" in the Temple courtyard (the azarah). On the individual level, this translates into the two basic domains of human endeavor: (a) a person's inner spiritual development, and (b), the more external areas of his life - his efforts to refine his material self and his involvements with his fellows and the world about him.

#### The Path of the Flame

A person's instinctive feeling may be that he ought to work his way from the inside out. First, he will deal with the internal needs of his soul; then, he will turn his attention to "outside" matters. Having achieved an inner peace and perfection, he will be in the position to truly influence his surroundings. Tend to the home fires, he tells himself, before concerning yourself with the illumination of the outside.

But in the Temple, things are done the other way around. The day begins by lighting the fire on the mizbeich hachitzon, the "external altar" which stands in the Temple courtyard. In fact, Torah law specifically stipulates that the "internal altar" and the menorah (candelabra) which stand in the Temple's inner chamber, are to be lighted from the fires of the external mizbeich.

The menorah's seven oil lamps represent the Divine wisdom of Torah; the "internal altar" corresponds to man's refinement and perfection of his higher, spiritual faculties. But spiritual gluttony is no less selfish than the physical sort, and one who focuses solely on self-realization and self-fulfillment -- be it in the most positive and lofty sense -- is turning his Holy Temple inside out.

True, the more one himself possesses, the more he has to give to others. It is also true that as long as a person is himself lacking in a certain area, it is extremely difficult for him to rectify such a failing in his fellow. Yet certainly the needs of others cannot be ignored until such time as one has attained perfection.

Furthermore, we often find that in reaching out to others, the primary beneficiary is oneself: an idea explained to others is now more fully and deeply understood, helping another in a crisis opens up reserves of faith and fortitude one hardly knew existed. This is the lesson implicit in the fact that the menorah and the "internal altar" were lit from the fire out in the courtyard: reach out to others - the "other" within you (i.e. your material self) and the literal others to whose lives he can contribute some light and warmth. These selfless acts of illumination will, in turn, ignite the "home fires" of your Temple's inner chambers in the true and ultimate sense. Your study and prayer will imbue your mind and heart with a true appreciation of and attachment to the Almighty.

**30 March 2012**

**Tzav & Hagadol**

**Shabbat Begins: 7:16pm**

**Shabbat Ends: 8:20pm**