***The Beis Hamikdash - Why All the Fuss?***

New England Spring Regional 2017

*How often do you think of the Beis Hamikdash (The Holy Temple) on an average day? Do we ever mention it in our daily prayers?*

1. In our daily Shemona Esrei prayers, there is one blessing in which we ask Hashem to rebuild Yerushalayim and the Beis Hamikdash, and another blessing in which we ask Him to restore the Beis Hamikdash service. We then end the entire Shemona Esrei with a short prayer asking for Hashem to rebuild the Beis Hamikdash.
2. When we make Birkas Hamazon after eating bread, there is a separate blessing in it asking Hashem to rebuild Yerushalayim and the Beis Hamikdash.
3. If you look through the Mussaf prayers of the different holidays throughout the year, you will see that the bulk of them are riddled with different prayers asking for the return of the Beis Hamikdash.
4. We sing it in songs, place phrases about it upon the walls of our homes, end off almost every dvar Torah asking it for it to be rebuilt, etc.

*But why? Why the constant emphasis on the Beis Hamikdash in our daily lives? What is so special about it, and why is it relevant to us in today’s day and age?*

**What is the Beis Hamikdash?**

Summary: In the Beis Hamikdash (The Holy Temple) in Jerusalem, animals would be slaughtered and sacrificed daily for the sake of the community, and individuals could bring their own personal sacrifices. Incense would be lit and offered up on one of the altars. The Menorah stood in the middle of the Beis Hamidash, providing light. The back section was called the Holy of Holies and it was forbidden to be entered throughout the entire year, except on Yom Kippur, when the Kohen Gadol (High Priest) entered it to pray, slaughter a sacrifice, and offer incense. On the festivals, the *entire Jewish nation* would gather together in Yerushalayim in order to bring their first fruits, offer sacrifices and eat them in the Beis Hamikdash. There were two different Batei Mikdash, the first standing for 410 years until it was destroyed by the Babylonians, the second being built seventy years later, lasting for 420 years, until it was destroyed by the Romans in 70 C.E.

*Knowing all of this, why is the Beis Hamikdash so central in our faith?*

**Approach #1 - Seeing Hashem’s Hand, Inspiration Lasting All Year**

#1- Devarim Chapter 16 Verse 16

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| Three times a year—on the holiday of Pesach, on the holiday of Shavuos, and on the Holiday of Sukkos—all your males shall appear before Hashem your God in the place that He will choose. They shall not appear before Hashem empty-handed. | שָׁלוֹשׁ פְּעָמִים בַּשָּׁנָה יֵרָאֶה כָל זְכוּרְךָ אֶת פְּנֵי ה' אֱלֹקיךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחָר בְּחַג הַמַּצּוֹת וּבְחַג הַשָּׁבֻעוֹת וּבְחַג הַסֻּכּוֹת וְלֹא יֵרָאֶה אֶת פְּנֵי ה' רֵיקָם. |

#2 Sefer Hachinuch[[1]](#footnote-1), Mitzvah 489

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| The foundational principle behind the (aforementioned) mitzvah is for all of Israel to see and understand (through the action of offering the sacrifice, which awakens the heart) that they are all, young and old, considered the portion of Hashem and His inheritance, a holy and chosen nation, the scions of His testimony, the chosen among all the nations under the heavens, in order to guard His statutes and to uphold His religion. Therefore, they come three times a year to the house of Hashem, as if we are saying ‘Behold, we are now servants to Hashem’, entering under His heavenly shade, and we are in His belonging forever...With this action, their hearts will be awakened and fear of Hashem will enter their hearts, cement the love of Hashem in their thoughts, and they will merit to receive His kindness and blessing. | משרשי המצוה. למען יראו כל ישראל ויתנו אל לבם בפעלת הקרבן המעורר הלבבות, כי כלם מקטנם ועד גדולם חלק השם ונחלתו, עם קדוש ונבחר, נוצרי עדותו, סגלת כל העמים אשר תחת כל השמים, לשמר חקיו ולקים דתו, על כן יבואו שלש פעמים בשנה בית השם, והוא באמרם על דרך משל הננו לא-ל לעבדים, נכנסים ובאים בצל קורתו, ובחזקתו סמוכים לעד לעולם באהבתו וביראתו, וזר לא יבא בתוכנו, כי אנחנו לבדנו בני ביתו. ועם המעשה הזה, תתעורר דעתנו, ונכניס בלבנו מוראו, ונקבע ברעיוננו אהבתו, ונזכה לקבל חסדו וברכתו. |

#3 Mishna Avos Chapter 5 Mishna 5

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| Ten miracles were performed for our forefathers in the Temple: No woman had a miscarriage from the scent of the meat; no holy flesh ever went putrid; a fly was not seen in the room of slaughtering; a High Priest did not have an accidental emission on Yom Kippur; rain did not extinguish the fire of the wood pile; the wind did not overpower the pillar of smoke; there was not found a disqualification in the omer (a special barley offering, offered the day after Pesach, which permits grain harvested in the new harvest to be eaten) or in the two breads (the sacrifice which is brought on the holiday of Shavuos) or in the showbreads; they would stand up crowded and bow down with [enough] space; a snake or scorpion never hurt a person in Jerusalem; and a person did not say to his fellow, "The place is too cramped that I should lodge in Jerusalem." | עֲשָׂרָה נִסִּים נַעֲשׂו לַאֲבוֹתֵינוּ בְּבֵית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ. לֹא הִפִּילָה אִשָּׁה מֵרֵיחַ בְּשַׂר הַקֹּדֶשׁ, וְלֹא הִסְרִיחַ בְּשַׂר הַקֹּדֶשׁ מֵעוֹלָם, וְלֹא נִרְאָה זְבוּב בְּבֵית הַמִּטְבְּחַיִם, וְלֹא אֵרַע קֶרִי לְכֹהֵן גָּדוֹל בְּיוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים, וְלֹא כִבּוּ גְשָׁמִים אֵשׁ שֶׁל עֲצֵי הַמַּעֲרָכָה, וְלֹא נָצְחָה הָרוּחַ אֶת עַמּוּד הֶעָשָׁן, וְלֹא נִמְצָא פְסוּל בָּעֹמֶר וּבִשְׁתֵּי הַלֶּחֶם וּבְלֶחֶם הַפָּנִים, עוֹמְדִים צְפוּפִים וּמִשְׁתַּחֲוִים רְוָחִים, וְלֹא הִזִּיק נָחָשׁ וְעַקְרָב בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם מֵעוֹלָם, וְלֹא אָמַר אָדָם לַחֲבֵרוֹ צַר לִי הַמָּקוֹם שֶׁאָלִין בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם: |

**Approach #2 - Changing how we View the Physical World**

#4 Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik – And From There You Shall Seek pgs. 112-113

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| The animalistic behavior of eating, upon which man’s life depends, has been refined by the Halakhah and transformed into a religious ritual and an elevated moral act. “You shall eat, in the presence of the Lord your God, in the place where He will choose to establish His name, the tithes of your new grain and wine and oil, and the firstlings of your herds and flocks, so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God forever” (Deut. 14:23). A commandment of this sort cannot be understood by Greek moral philosophy. The beast eats; man thinks and cognizes the spiritual, the general, and the ideal. The intellect comes close to God, but the stomach does not. “**You shall eat in the presence of the Lord**” – can there be two more extreme opposites than these? But it is nevertheless so!The Halakhah gave priority to eating in the presence of God over prayer. Eating portions of sacrificed animals, eating the paschal lamb, eating the second tithe and other offerings of lesser sanctity, eating matzah on Pesach, eating of all the special sacrifices on the three pilgrimage festivals – all these are positive commandments that are counted among the 613 commandments according to all opinions, whereas prayer is among the 613 only as counted in Maimonides’ system. The joy of the festivals depends on eating sacrificial meat when the Temple exists, and outside the Temple – or when it no longer exists – eating ordinary meat and drinking wine. This joy is the joy of man in the presence of his Creator. The purpose of eating the sacrifices is the enhancement of one’s awe of God: “You shall eat...so that you may learn to revere the Lord your God forever”. Joy is maintained through eating. Only in the case of one verse do we say that joy is embodied in another action – the verse pertaining to holding the lulav. This verse occurs among the laws of the festivals in Leviticus: ....and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God seven days” (Lev. 23:40). **Here too there is a concrete action** – lifting the lulav. |

#5 Gemara Maseches Bava Basra 60b

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| When the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, many Jews stopped eating meat and drinking wine. Rabbi Yehoshua criticized them, saying, “My children, why are you not eating meat and drinking wine?” They told him, “How can we eat meat, which used to be brought as sacrifices on the Alter, when that practice is now abolished? How can we drink wine, which used to be poured on the Alter, when that practice is now abolished?” He told them, “If so, then we cannot eat bread...or fruits...or water! ...My sons, it is impossible not to mourn at all, but it is also impossible to mourn too much. Therefore, the rabbis taught that when a man plasters his house, he should leave a small space unplastered (as a sign of his mourning).” | תנו רבנן כשחרב הבית בשניה רבו פרושין בישראל שלא לאכול בשר ושלא לשתות יין נטפל להן ר' יהושע אמר להן בני מפני מה אי אתם אוכלין בשר ואין אתם שותין יין אמרו לו נאכל בשר שממנו מקריבין על גבי מזבח ועכשיו בטל נשתה יין שמנסכין על גבי המזבח ועכשיו בטל אמר להם א"כ לחם לא נאכל שכבר בטלו מנחות אפשר בפירות פירות לא נאכל שכבר בטלו בכורים אפשר בפירות אחרים מים לא נשתה שכבר בטל ניסוך המים שתקו אמר להן בני בואו ואומר לכם שלא להתאבל כל עיקר אי אפשר שכבר נגזרה גזרה ולהתאבל יותר מדאי אי אפשר שאין גוזרין גזירה על הצבור אלא אם כן רוב צבור יכולין לעמוד בה דכתיב ([מלאכי ג, ט](https://he.wikisource.org/wiki/%D7%A7%D7%98%D7%92%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%94%3A%D7%9E%D7%9C%D7%90%D7%9B%D7%99_%D7%92_%D7%98)) במארה אתם נארים ואותי אתם קובעים הגוי כולו אלא כך אמרו חכמים סד אדם את ביתו בסיד ומשייר בו דבר מועט |

*What do we see from this source? How did the Jews view physical pleasures when the Beis Hamikdash was in existence? How did their views change when the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed?*

**Trying to Recapture the Beis Hamikdash Feeling in our Day and Age**

*Once the Beis Hamikdash was destroyed, was that it? Do we try to recapture some of its special qualities in our own homes? Do we have any customs or practices in our homes (we already mentioned one) that are meant to resemble what went on in the Beis Hamikdash?*

#6 Gemara Maseches Menachos 97a

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| Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Elazar both said that when the Beis Hamikdash stood, the Alter would atone for mankind, and now that the Beis Hamikdash is no longer standing, a man’s table atones for him. | ר' יוחנן ור' אלעזר דאמרי תרוייהו בזמן שבית המקדש קיים מזבח מכפר על אדם ועכשיו שאין בית המקדש קיים שולחנו של אדם מכפר עליו |

**Rashi** there explains why a person’s table atones for him: “Because there, he distributes food to poor people”.

*Can you think of any examples of practices that we have at our table or during our meals that are meant to resemble what went on in the Beis Hamikdash? Discuss.*

*Why do want to gain inspiration from the physical elements of this world? Why not just use more spiritual methods?*

#7 Rabbi Kalonimus Kalman Shapiro[[2]](#footnote-2) – Bnei Machshava Tova pg. 21

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| If it is impossible to awaken ourselves with thoughts of holiness, let us return to the depths of the body of man and elevate it, beginning with a physical awakening, **for any awakening, even a physical one, is a key to the soul**. Think of the following parable: A man’s son was framed and thrown into jail, and it is impossible for the father to see his son unless the supervisor of the jail lets him into the jail in order to discuss the details of his case and argument in court. The foolish father only speaks with his son concerning legal matters, for that was the purpose for which he was let in. However, the smart father says, “It is true that the supervisor opened the door, but in any event, the door is already open, and my son is in front of me! I will hug him and kiss him and speak with him words of love, like a father is supposed to do with his son!” |

*What practical examples can we think of that would involve taking physical actions or things that we enjoy and injecting them with a little bit of spirituality, to awaken the soul?*

1. This was published in the 13th Century by a prolific scholar from Barcelona, although the author’s exact identity is unknown. Some say that it was either authored by Rabbi Aharon Halevi (known as the Ra’ah), Rabbi Pinchas Halevi, or another of the great students of the Rashba (Rabbi Shlomo Ben Aderet). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Rabbi Shapiro, also known as the Aish Kodesh, was the Rebbe of Piacezna (in Poland) and was one of the most impactful and innovative educators of the 20th century, until he was killed by the Nazis in the Holocaust. He authored Chovos Hatalmidim (Obligations of the Student), an inspirational book that speaks to those in their teenage years, as well as Aish Kodesh (Holy Fire), a collection of heroic speeches that Rabbi Shapiro gave when he and his community were going through the unspeakable while in the Warsaw Ghetto. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)