

PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	KETUVIM
Tzav	4 Apr. 2020	10 Nisan 5780	Lev. 6:8-8:36	Mal. 3:4-4:6	Matt. 17:9-13

The exodus of Yisralites occurred on the fifteenth of Nisan, 2448. And forty years later, they entered the Promised Land, but the exact date is not known which is very unusual. The sages explain that the exile has not ended yet for the Yisraelites in Hashem's eyes. They derive from the verse, "Be their arm every morning" (Isa. 33:2). In Hebrew, הָיָה זְרוֹעַם לְבִקְרִים (*he-yeh ze-ro'am lab-be-ka-rim*). The word *be-ka-rim* has been translated to a singular form "morning," but in Hebrew, it is "mornings" in plural. So, the verse means that a maximum of two mornings will pass once the Yisraelites go into exile; after the passage of the second one, at the latest, the Redemption will surely begin.

How do we count the millennium? The sages say that the current exile began with the destruction of the Second Temple in the year of 3830 (70 CE). The first "morning" after that was the year 4500 (Scriptural calendar) or 740 CE. The second "morning" was the year 5500 or 1740 CE. However, the Redemption did not occur at that time. Nonetheless, the process of redemption did begin, with the dissemination of the secret insights of Kabbalah which is the inner light of the Torah. Although the Kabbalah was taught by R' Yitzchak Luria (the Arizal; 1534-1572) within the exclusive Torah students, it was not until the Baal Shem Tov (1698-1760) who began to teach publicly that made relevant and inspiring to people from all walks of life.

In the year 5750 (1990 CE), midway through the second half of the millennium, corresponded to high noon. If the "dawn" (1740 CE) brought with it added light that started on the path to redemption, we entered the radiance of the "afternoon," redemption is surely imminent. This knowledge should invoke our intense yearning for the Messiah to return, as well as encouraging us on to meaningful preparation for His arrival through performing additional acts of goodness and kindness.

It is written (Lev. 6:9), "This is the Torah of the burnt offering: This is the burnt offering, because it is burned on the altar all night until morning, and the fire of the altar is kept burning on it." The fire on the altar must be kept burning even on Shabbat even though starting or stoking a fire on Shabbat is prohibited. The ritual defilement precludes a person from entering the Tabernacle and performing sacrificial rites. However, if no undefiled *kohanim* (priests) are available, then ritually defiled *kohanim* are allowed to enter and perform the rites, including tending the fire on the altar.¹

The Divine fire within our hearts desires to cling to Hashem through studying His Torah, fulfilling His commandments, and revealing His Presence in the world, must also be constantly stoked and kept alive. The law that the altar-fire must be kept lit even on the Shabbat and even in times of defilement teaches us that the essence of the Shabbat is the ascent of consciousness of changing the world into Hashem's world, into experiencing the world as already being Hashem's home. This is why we are forbidden to engage in weekday work on the Shabbat, as the worldly affairs contradicts the higher quality of the Shabbat.

Knowing this fact, whenever our minds enter into a "Shabbat" experience, that is our minds become one with His Presence and bask in this revelation, we are not only allowed to detach ourselves from the world but encouraged to do so. The Torah, therefore teaches us that the fire of heart must be kept aflame even "on Shabbat." Our connection with Hashem must never become a purely intellectual affair, but must always set our hearts aflame, as well.

¹ Yerushalmi, Yoma 4:6

Quiet often, we feel so distant from the Torah's expectations of us or encumbered by negative spiritual baggage that it is hard for us to imagine how we could even begin to live in accordance with such ideals. In such times, we are told to keep our Divine fire burning also in times of "ritual defilement," even when we feel unqualified or unable to enter realms of holiness. We need to keep our enthusiasm "fired" even such times, the Divine flame within us will burn away all impediments to joyful, holy living. It is said, "with *bren* (fervor, *hitlahavut*) be burning with the *Ruach Hakodesh*...have *simcha* in *Tikvah* (hope; or Good News)" (Rom. 12:11-12, OJB)

As the Maggid of Mezeritch interpreted this verse, "If the [inner] fire [of the heart] is kept burning continuously, it will extinguish all negativity." But the fire can only work its magic if it is kept burning continuously; any lapse in enthusiasm is an opportunity for pessimism to creep in. An intermittent fire or the memory of recent flames is therefore not enough; we must become adept at keeping our inner fires burning no matter how our moods may vary.

Today's Shabbat is known as Shabbat HaGadol which means the Great Shabbat. So, what is so "great" about this Shabbat? The reason is very simple. Today, we learn in detail about the upcoming *Pesach Seder* (Passover order) about the laws of upcoming Pesach. The Shabbat HaGadol comes out in the Shabbat immediately preceding Pesach. It is called the Great Shabbat because the sermon would take so long. A question is raised, "What is so great about knowing the laws of Pesach?" The answer is that "*gadol*" doesn't just mean "great" but it also means "big."

The Pesach Seder contains many do's and do not's, such as not eating leavened food or eating mandated *matzot*. This tradition comes from Ashkenazi that came from Eastern European communities. This extension resulted in a vast amount of food being off the table for the entire week-long festival. The Mishnah which was written 2,000 years ago is contains the present-day Seder. Over the next 15 centuries, the material was supplemented by various passages and teachings from many ancient Yehudi sources.

Like the "inner fire" that continues to burn in our hearts, we keep this upcoming Pesach with fervor and desire to be closer to Him, open our hearts to Him who has "*Gadol*" heart. Let's begin with Pesach Seder.