

The Altar of Your Mind

*Drash on Parashah 19; Terumah
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"You are to make the altar of acacia-wood, seven-and-a-half feet long and seven-and-a-half feet wide – the altar is to be square and four-and-a-half feet high. Make horns for it on its four corners; the horns are to be of one piece with it; and you are to overlay it with bronze.

"Make its pots for removing ashes, and its shovels, basins, meat-hooks and fire pans; all its utensils you are to make of bronze. Make for it a grate of bronze netting; and on the four corners of the netting, make four bronze rings. Put it under the rim of the altar, so that the netting reaches halfway up the altar. Make poles of acacia-wood for the altar and overlay them with bronze. Its poles are to be put into the rings; the poles are to be on both sides of the altar for carrying it. The altar is to be made of planks and hollow inside. They are to make it just as you were shown on the mountain. [Sh'mot/Exodus 27:1-8]

This week we come to the instructions for the construction of the tabernacle. Since I have written a book that has an entire chapter devoted to the tabernacle, I could talk for a long time on the subject. At the time of Hanukkah, I used part of the book to do a teaching on the menorah. This week I want to focus in on one particular part of the tabernacle, the altar. Shaul/Paul teaches us that the body is a tabernacle of the Holy Spirit of God. He dwells in each Believer just as He did in the tabernacle and later the temple of Israel. It is my belief that today, the tabernacle still exists, but in human flesh, rather than the physical form it had in Israel. It is also my belief that it is more accurate to call the body a tabernacle, which was a tent and a temporary dwelling place, rather than a temple, which is a more permanent dwelling place. This will be the nature of our resurrected body, not the one we have now.

In the Scripture, God gives instructions for the building of the tabernacle from the inside out. He starts with the ark of the covenant and works His way out to the courtyard. In my book I take on a different approach, as if I am taking a person on a tour of the tabernacle, which would start with the courtyard and end up in the Holy of Holies. (Yes, I know this would have been impossible, but it is a hypothetical situation for teaching purposes.) So imagine that we have already gone past the fence surrounding the outer court, which represents our skin, by the way, and my lesson today picks up from there.

In about the center of the courtyard, we see billowing smoke rising upward from an ever burning fire upon an altar made of acacia wood and covered in bronze. As far as the people of Isra'el are concerned, this is possibly the most important part of the tabernacle. This is the one piece of tabernacle furniture the average Israelite could actually come in contact with. Everything else except for the laver is inside the tabernacle where only the priests could enter.

The Hebrew word for altar is *mizbeach*, which comes from *zabach*, which means, "to slaughter an animal". This alludes to the primary use for the altar, which was to

make sacrifices and offerings on. Such sacrifices, or korban, which means to draw close, referring to the primary purpose of the offering, which was to draw close to God, had various functions from giving thanks to atoning for sin.

Where most of the tabernacle furniture was made with or covered in gold, the altar was covered in bronze. The Hebrew word for bronze, *nechosheth*, also means copper. Though I believe the altar was still covered with bronze, it would have had more of a reddish hue than the gold covered pieces of the tabernacle. The sun would have shone off the bronze altar adding to the brilliance of the tabernacle compound. Thus the altar was filled with more irony than any other part of the tabernacle. Though the use of the altar was ugly, the altar itself was beautiful. Though the altar was a place of bloodshed, the end result of its use was joyful, as the offerer coming to the altar would come with the burden of sin, and ideally leave at peace with God and his fellow man.

*I will wash my hands in innocence and walk around your altar, Adonai,
lifting my voice in thanks and proclaiming all your wonders.
(Tehillim / Psalms 6:7)*

It is my intention that the altar is thought of as a positive place, rather than a negative one. The altar of Adonai is the place where people get right with God. It is a place of rejoicing, where peace is established. Sin is ugly, binding, and leads to death. Atonement, which is obtained through the sacrifices on the altar, is beautiful, freeing, and leads to life with the God of the Universe. With atonement made, the offerer is able to be used by God for building His Kingdom. The altar is the place where sin is conquered and Ha Satan is defeated. The bronze altar made of wood, is also a picture of the wood, vertical altar in the shape of a "T" which Yeshua would later become the final sacrifice for sin, so that whosoever believes in Him would not perish, but have eternal life. The cross was an instrument of death, but because of the One who was sacrificed on it, the result is not death, but eternal life.

So where is the altar today?

I exhort you, therefore, brothers, in view of God's mercies, to offer yourselves as a sacrifice, living and set apart for God. This will please him; it is the logical "temple worship" for you. In other words, do not let yourselves be conformed to the standards of the 'olam hazeh'. Instead, keep letting yourselves be transformed by the renewing of your minds; so that you will know what God wants and will agree that what he wants is good, satisfying and able to succeed. (Romans 12:1-2)

The altar was not a place where a person bought their atonement, or a good standing with God. It would do no good for a person to go to the altar and make sacrifices to God, if there was no change in the heart and mind of the offerer. It was the genuine repentance from sin that God was concerned about. The mind is the altar of the

person today. The Hebrew is *nephesh*, which is used to refer to the center of intellect, the mind, the center of emotions, the heart, and the spiritual essence of the person. These are the places where sin lives and thus where sin must be destroyed. Sin cannot be rid from a person's *nephesh* without sacrifice. Hatred for another cannot be forgiven without sacrificing the bitterness that lives in the heart of the person. The compulsion to steal cannot be gotten rid of without the death of greed. The darkness of sin cannot be conquered until the light of God's truth fills our hearts and minds.

Spiritual wars were fought on the tabernacle altar in the same way that spiritual wars are fought every day in the *nephesh* of each of God's people. *Nephesh* is not the center of our being, for that is a different part of the tabernacle, but it is the center of our behavior and how we think about the world around us. Fire burned on the altar continuously in the same way that the fire of the Holy Spirit ought to burn continuously in our hearts.

"...only flesh with its life, which is its blood, you are not to eat." [B' resheet/Genesis 9:4-5]

One of the translations of *nephesh* is life. Life is in the blood. It is the blood shed on the altar, which provides atonement for the sins of man, allowing communion to take place between the offerer and God. Life ultimately comes only from God, so it is only in union with Him that anyone finds true life. By becoming a child of God through faith in His Son Yeshua, who provided the final sacrifice for sin on His own altar, we find eternal life.

The altar of our body is where choices are made. Much of life is about the choices we make. God does not force us to worship Him. Serving Him and obeying Him is our choice.

If it seems bad to you to serve ADONAI, then choose today whom you are going to serve! Will it be the gods your ancestors served beyond the River? or the gods of the Emori, in whose land you are living? As for me and my household, we will serve ADONAI!" [Y'hoshua/Joshua 24:15]

The results of our choices are in the hands of God, but God tells us how we ought to live. Serving God as one of His servants requires obeying Him, trusting Him for the outcome, and continuing to serve Him regardless of what that outcome is.

"Sh'ma, Yisra'el! ADONAI Eloheinu, ADONAI echad [Hear, Isra'el! ADONAI our God, ADONAI is one]; and you are to love ADONAI your God with all your heart, all your being and all your resources. These words, which I am ordering you today, are to be on your heart; and you are to teach them carefully to your children. You are to talk about them when you sit at home, when you are traveling on the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them on your hand as a sign, put them at the front of a headband around your forehead, and write them on the door-frames of your house and on your gates. [D'varim/Deuteronomy 6:4-9]

It is the commands of God and the principles they are based on which are to guide our thinking and our decision making. This is how our will becomes bent toward the will of God. In this way we are able to commune with God and draw closer to Him. This was the goal of the sacrifices made at the altar. One would go to the altar, not to kill animals and shed innocent blood, for that would be cruelty unworthy of being called worship of a holy God. The altar was where wills were bent, minds were changed, hearts were softened and molded into the very heart of God.

This is how we become living sacrifices. Shaul tells us that to live is Christ but to die is gain. When we put our faith in Messiah, in a sense, we die with Him. From that point on, we live, not for the world or our own ambitions, but for God and His will. To truly live for Him, we must continually seek out where sin is and make the difficult choices we need to make to sacrifice those sins on the altar of our mind.

The mistake is when we accept ourselves for who and what we are and are unwilling to allow the Truth of God to change our thinking. If you are a pig that enjoys wallowing in its own mud, God will not force you to change. However, there is a way which seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death. The riches of the Kingdom last forever, and are eternal life. The blessings He has for us will be inaccessible to us as unless we allow ourselves to be conformed by the renewing of our minds. As we do, we find that we can change and the rewards for doing so are greater than we ever thought.

The altar was out in the open, where all could see it. They could see the smoke of the burning sacrifices throughout the whole camp. In the same way, how we think and feel about the world around us, though originating from within us, affects our speech and behavior toward other people on the outside. The condition of our heart is more visible to the outside world than we may realize. How we think, which is philosophy, affects everything we do. The true believer in God will have his or her mind guided by the truth of God's Word. Only through diligent study and prayer on the Word of God, can any person see the world the way God intends them to see it. Only with the wisdom God gave him could Shlomo/Solomon see that compared to the vastness and glory of God, all the world is just a vanity of vanities.

The altar was also a battleground. Blood was shed there every day to enable God's people to conquer sin and draw closer to Him. Our mind is a constant battlefield, and one that we have to engage in spiritual warfare in at all times if Truth will overcome darkness and bring God's light into our life. The more we seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, the more we will find that doing so is truly a mind altar-ing experience.