

Comments on Tzav: The Small מ-Mem, The Soul, The Grain Offering, Bitya, and Senator Joe Lieberman z'l.
 Rabbi Eliot Malomet March 30, 2024 20 Adar II 5784 Shabbat Parah

Last week at the beginning of Vayikra	ס-Small Aleph	ויקרא	vayikra	And He called
This week at the beginning of Tzav	מ-Small Mem	מוקדה	mokda	on the blazing hearth

Small letters are a bit of a coincidence at the beginning of the first two parashas of Vayikra. The remaining orthographic diversity in Vayikra is comprised of large letters:

large vav	בְּחֹרֶן	Lev. 11:42
large gimmel	וְהִתְגַּלַּח	Lev. 13:33
large peh sofut	אִם only according to some	Lev. 26:24

The small letter at the beginning of our parasha, מ, in מוקדה, once again draws our attention. Here is the verse it is in:

צו את אהרן ואת בניו לאמר זאת תורת העולה הוא העולה על יוקדה על המזבח כל הלילה עד הבקר ואש המזבח תוקד בו. (ויקרא ו:ב)

Command Aaron and his sons, saying: This is the Instruction [for] the offering-up— that is what goes-up on the blazing-hearth on the altar all night, until day-break, while the fire of the altar is kept blazing on it: (Lev. 6:2)

The context: The main categories of sacrifice were listed in last week's parasha; here, we get more specific details: 1. the olah-burnt offering was to remain burning the whole night and 2. the priest had to dispose of the ashes in the morning. To do so, the priest had to change his clothing (he could not wear the priestly garb outside the sanctuary). The fire was never allowed to go out: אש תמיד תוקד על המזבח לא. A regular fire is to be kept-blazing on the altar—it is not to go out! (1:6). As we learned last week, there are numerous imaginative explanations for each orthographic anomaly. To understand the small מ, we have to examine the word יוקדה which means blazing hearth. Fire as a metaphor for the soul is very common in Judaism. The source quoted most often for this is, Proverbs 20:27,

יָקַד	burn
לִיָּקַד	to kindle
תִּוְקַד	to be kept burning

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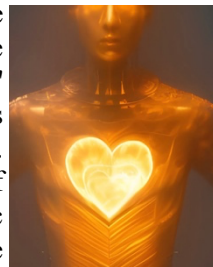
הַתְּלַהֲבוֹתָיו שֶׁל אָדָם מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל בִּשְׁעַת עֲשׂוֹת מִצְוָה צְרִיכָה לֵהוֹיֵת מְרֻגָּשֵׁת רַק עִמָּךְ עִמָּךְ בְּתוֹךְ לְבוֹ, נִפְשׁוֹ תִּוְקַד בְּקִרְבוֹ, וְלֹא שֶׁהִתְלַהֲבוֹתָיו תִּהְיֶה נִרְאִית וְגִלּוּיָהּ לְעֵינֵי כָל, עַד שֶׁנִּכְרְזוּ עָלֶיהָ בְּרַבִּים.

The fervor that a Jew has while doing a mitzvah should be felt only very deeply inside the heart, with the soul on fire inside, and not visible on the outside, lest everyone decries it in public.

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The fire on the altar is a metaphor for the fire in the human heart. Just as the little aleph in ויקרא symbolized Moses' altruism, the little mem in מוקדה stands for modesty in religious fervor. Exuberant and ostentatious displays of religious zeal are frowned upon; ecstatic outbursts are no substitute for the sustained steadiness of the contained, unpretentious glow that ought to burn in the fervent human heart.



Now this is the Instruction [regarding] the grain-gift: Last week when the Torah introduced the minha-cereal offering, we learned that it was a type of offering that was brought by individuals who could not afford the larger more expensive sacrificial animals or birds. The detailed instructions of the minha are found in this week's parasha. וְהָרִים מִמֶּנּוּ בְּקִמְצוֹ—the Kohen would lift from it, his handful of fine flour, together with some oil and frankincense, and burn it on the altar. Just a portion would be burned, the rest would be baked into matzot and eaten by the priests near the altar. The idea that there is a "sliding scale" of possible offerings, sparked this midrash:

רַבִּי יְהוֹשֻׁעַ דְּסַכְנִין בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי לִוִי אָמַר: בּוֹא וְרֵאָה כַּמָּה חֵס הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עַל מְמוֹנָם שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל. אָמַר לְהֵן: מִי שְׁנֹתֵהֶן לְהַבִּיא קֶרְבָּן יָבִיא מִן הַבְּקָר... וְאִם לֹא מִצֵּא מִן הַבְּקָר יָבִיא כֶּבֶשׂ... וְאִם לֹא מִצֵּא מִן הַכֶּבֶשִׂים יָבִיא מִן הָעוֹזִים... וְאִם לֹא מִצֵּא מִן הָעוֹזִים יָבִיא מִן הָעוֹפּוֹת... וְאִם לֹא מִצֵּא מִהֶעוֹף יָבִיא סֵלֶת... וִיקְרָא רַבֵּה חֵד.

Rabbi Yehoshua of Sikhnin said in the name of Rabbi Levi: Come and see the extent to which the Holy One blessed be He is concerned about the financial wellbeing of Israel. He said to them: One who is obligated to bring an offering shall bring it from the cattle...If he was unable to find from the cattle, he shall bring a sheep...If he was unable to find from the sheep, he shall bring from the goats...If he was unable to find from the goats, he shall bring from the birds...If he was unable to find from the birds, he shall bring fine flour...

Paraphrase: God cares about our financial well-being, ie. that we may become impoverished by the cost of sacrifices. For that reason, the Torah provides a menu of options of what to sacrifice based on what we can afford. To some this may seem ridiculous, but to others this is not surprising, after all, God cares about every aspect of our lives. The questions underlying this text are: what are the financial limits when it comes to serving God? What happens if you can't afford to serve God? How do we balance the desire to serve God with the need to stay out of poverty? In contemporary Jewish life, how do we balance living a full Jewish life with the cost of such a life? Synagogues, Jewish Day Schools, Jewish summer camps have different ways of answering this question. Some will rely on objective information, like tax forms and bank statements, and others will rely on discrete conversations and the wisdom of

