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*With
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ב"ה

Parshas Tzav

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The Bell In Our Hearts

There was once a simpleton who lived in a small village. He always dreamed of visiting the big city but never had the money to get there. One day, he found a gold coin lying in the street. He picked it up, ran straight to the train station and bought himself a ticket on the next train to the big city. The first night in the city, he was awoken by the sound of a loud bell ringing. Curious, he climbed out of bed and followed the sound until it led him to a tall bell tower. Intrigued, he climbed the tower and found the bell ringer. The simpleton turned to the man and asked him, "What's the point of this bell?"

"We ring this bell," the man responded, "whenever there is a fire. It saves our town from burning to the ground."

"Wow," the simpleton thought to himself, "that's exactly what my village needs."

He ran back home and excitedly told his neighbors and friends about the cutting-edge firefighting device that he had discovered in the big city. He turned to them and said, "You know how every time there is a fire it burns down the entire village? Well, fear no more, for I have discovered the solution. Simply build a tower, install a bell and every time a fire breaks out, just ring the bell. No fire will burn this town down again."

A few days later, a fire broke out, and the simpleton climbed up the tower with glee. He enthusiastically rang the bell, yet the fire raged on. He rang it and rang it, yet the fire kept on burning. He kept on ringing, until the village went up in smoke and the fire had nothing left to burn.

Shocked and confused, he raced back to the big city, went back to the bell ringer and demanded an explanation.

"The difference between the two of us," the bell ringer told him, "is that when *we* ring the bell, we use it as a battle cry to awaken the town, and everyone goes running to the river to fetch water to put out the fire. When *you* ring the bell, you merely ring it, hoping the bell itself will magically put the fire out. We put our faith in teamwork, while you put your faith in that shiny, little, loud bell."

The Externals

We, says the Dubno Maggid, often make the same mistake. We put our trust in the external tools of Judaism, hoping that they will magically win our battles for us, while we neglect the internal work those tools require in order to function. You can klop Al Chet, says the Dubno Maggid, from today until tomorrow, but thinking that striking one's chest is in and of itself the cause of Hashem's forgiveness is foolish. We speed through selichos, thinking that merely uttering the words will appease Hashem. We light the menorah and jump into the mikvah and kiss the mezuzah and wave our kapparos and run off to the rest of our day, naively satisfied that "we rang the bell."

When the Torah discusses korbanos, it's easy to look at it the same way: one miracle bell ringing. We bring an animal, slaughter it, wave some of the body parts, burn it ... and voila, we achieve atonement. We put a quarter into the gumball machine and out comes a kapparoh.

This, says the Chinuch, could not be farther from the truth. A korban, much like most mitzvos, is an external motion that Hashem instructed us to go through in order to arouse our pnimius – our inner soul. We take an animal, and right before we slaughter it, we must pause and think to ourselves: this animal should be me. As we pick up its parts that are oozing blood and fat, we are to vividly imagine it is our flesh and our blood. The korban is there to inspire change, to ignite a renewed passion and reverence. It is not a miraculous bell.

The purpose of saying selichos and klopping Al Chet and waving kapparos isn't to complete a checklist of Elul requirements. It is to arouse our sleeping soul to teshuva. It is to jolt us into action. We kiss a sefer that fell on the floor not because the sefer needs love; it is an action that arouses heightened affection for the Torah that moments ago lay degradedly on the floor. When we kiss the mezuzah or a sefer Torah or light the menorah or daven maariv or do practically any of the 613 mitzvos, we are not merely pushing buttons that ensure that God doesn't get upset at us. We are going through the actions that bring our soul ever closer to its Creator in Heaven.

Why Do Jews Shuckle?

Ever wonder why Jews shuckle? Is it a way of combating ADHD during a long session of prayer or study? Is it because the majority of us have way too much caffeine flowing through our bodies? The answer is that Mishlei (2:27) describes the neshamah as a "*Ner Hashem.*" Our souls are Hashem's candles. Hence, just as candles flicker and dance, so do we. When we learn and daven, we shuckle. It is our bodies aligning with our soul; it is the flame inside of us dancing ever higher.

This parshah mentions that in the Bais Hamikdash there was always a fire burning. In fact, it was one of the miracles that took place in the Bais Hamikdash. The fire remained aflame even amidst a downpour of rain. Some ask why Hashem chose to create a miracle that the rain would not put out the fire, and did not simply create a miracle that the rain would avoid the Bais Hamikdash altogether? Reb Simcha Zissel Ziv, the Alter from Kelm, answers that rain represents bounty and beracha. It is telling us that even when life is great and one is firing on all cylinders, what Hashem craves the most is one's neshamah. He wants that fire. One could be at every minyan saying all the words. One could be doing every mitzvah with precision. Hashem wants the fire, the spirit behind the law. He wants the fire in the rain.

The Chassidic masters sum up this idea best. Much like each and every Jew has a body and a soul, so too every mitzvah has a body and soul. To take care of the body is something. But to take care of the soul is a completely different level. It is the real level. Will we live our lives endlessly ringing bells, or will we allow the ring to awaken our neshamos, and serve Hashem with a flickering, dancing soul on fire?