

"And he shall take up the ashes which the fire consumed the burnt offering on the altar and he shall place them beside the altar." (6:3)

The first task assigned to the *Kohen* every morning in the *Bais Hamikdash* was the removal of the ashes of the previous day's sacrifices from the altar. *Horav M. Shapiro, z.l.*, explains that these ashes were removed, because their cooling effect on the embers prevented the new fire from burning properly. It is prohibited to wield iron on the *Mizbayach*, because iron shortens life, while the *Mizbayach* lengthens it. Likewise, it was necessary to remove anything that smothered the fire which was designated to burn constantly. This also applies to the *Menorah*, whose residue was cleaned out in order to allow a clean bright flame to burn.

Horav Shapiro derives a profound moral lesson from this daily service. A *Kohen*, a descendant of Aharon, was charged with the prime task of reaching out to his Jewish brethren in order to bring them closer to their Father in Heaven. When a person sins, he must bring his sacrifice to the *Bais Hamikdash* where the *Kohen* offers it to Hashem. The sprinkling of the blood, combined with the eating of the *korban's* flesh, helps the person to atone for his sin. Indeed, this is the source of the appellation, "*korban*." It brings a person "closer," "*karov*" to Hashem.

Every Jew has within him a spark of heavenly spirituality. In some individuals this spark is buried beneath many layers of superficial physical domination, repressed by man's base material desires. That small measure of spirituality, the tiny spark of *kedushah*, nonetheless anchors the Jew to Hashem, ultimately enabling him to return from iniquity. Every single Jew harbors that tiny spark of *kedushah*. Everyone has some redeeming quality which constitutes an ember of holiness, waiting to be stoked to eternal brilliance.

The *Kohen* is enjoined to seek out that "*pintele Yid*," to fan the spark to life. His sensitivity avails each individual the opportunity to pursue eternal bliss. This idealistic goal can only be achieved if the *Kohen* is able to remove the cold ashes of apathy in order to stimulate the Jewish heart and soul, so that the flame from within will burn pure with vigor and brilliance.