

"The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it, it shall not be extinguished." (6:5)

In *Pirkei Avos (5:5)*, *Chazal* teach us that miraculously the rains never put out the fire of the wood-pile on the altar. The *Mizbayach* was situated in an open space, exposed to the elements. Yet, the fire continued to burn even during the heaviest rains. It seems strange that such a miracle would be choreographed. Why did Hashem simply not have it rain upon the *Mizbayach* so that such a miracle would not be necessary? **Horav Chaim M'Volozhin, zl**, infers a valuable lesson from this miracle regarding our commitment to serve Hashem under all circumstances.

Hashem could certainly have prevented the rains from falling upon the *Mizbayach*. That would not have taught us, however, that the fire of the *Mizbayach* burns despite the rains. We now see that nothing stands in the way of the flame of the altar. It miraculously withstands the rains and any other material/physical barriers. The Hebrew word for rains is *geshamim*, the plural of *geshem*. *Geshem* also happens to be the root of *gashmius*, a term which denotes everything material and physical in this world. Fire is often used as a metaphor for Divine spirituality.

Thus, the miracle that the fire was not extinguished by the rains allegorically teaches us that we may not permit our material desires to quench our spiritual fire. The flame of the love for *Torah* must dominate our quest for materialism. It must burn constantly despite the material attractions of the world. The excuse, "I have to make a living," should not stand in the way of our spiritual growth.

Reb Yitzchak Bunim, zl, takes a pragmatic approach to the words of *Chazal*. By nature of their chemical composite, water and fire are antagonistic to one another. Water poured upon a fire quenches the blaze. If the amount of water is insufficient, the flames quickly dry up the liquid. Yet, for the lofty purpose of the *Mizbayach*, these two "opponents" cooperate, so that a constant flame glows upon the *Mizbayach*.

The lesson to be gleaned is obvious. Human elements must strive to achieve the same level of success in cooperating with each other as these natural elements demonstrated. Personalities may clash, interests may not necessarily coincide, but in the realm of communal "*Klal Yisrael*" there is no room for *machlo'kes*, conflict. Everyone must defer to a Higher Authority - Hashem. The politics that destroy communities, the petty -- and at times childish -- bickering among groups and organizations, the battle of wills to see who can

demonstrate greater obstinacy, are all examples of the "*geshamim*," rains, that can douse the fires of spirituality -and stunt communal growth. Let us take a lesson from the fires of the *Mizbayach* by rallying together for the sake of Hashem -- in accordance with the will of Hashem.