

And he shall take up the ashes to which the fire has consumed the elevation/burnt offering on the Altar, and lay them down at the side of the Altar. (6:3)

Prior to arranging the pyre and the kindling of the Altar fire, the *Kohen* was enjoined to perform the *mitzvah* of *Terumas HaDeshen*. The purpose of *Terumas HaDeshen* is not to prepare the Altar for the coming day's sacrifices, since this is the focus of the *Hotzoas HaDeshen*, the removal of the ashes; rather, *Terumas HaDeshen* is in and of itself an *avodah*, priestly service. Thus, it may be carried out only by a *Kohen kasher*, dressed in his priestly vestments. The *Haromas HaDeshen* is the final conclusion to the service of the preceding day. Just as with the *Korban Minchah*, the *Kohen* lifts out *kometz*, measure, so, too, does he leave out a *kometz* of ashes. He then deliberately places it *eitzel ha'Mizbayach*, next to the Altar on the east side. Just as the *Kometz ha'Minchah* serves as an *azkarah*, remembrance, for the whole *Minchah* that it (the *Minchah*) be remembered before Hashem, so, too, is the *kometz* of the *Deshen* laid out as an *azkarah*, remembrance, of the devotion represented by the sacrifices of the previous day to Hashem and His Torah.

Horav S. R. Hirsch, *zl*, explains the *mitzvah* of *Terumas HaDeshen* with his classic focus on the past as the foundation of the present and the guide for the future. It is a continuation of yesterday's mission, picking up where yesterday left off. It is to carry out the mission that yesterday was to accomplish, with renewed freshness. The very last Jewish grandchild stands before G-d, with the very same mission of life that his first ancestors confronted. Every day he adds his contribution to the solution of the task given to all of the generations of *Bais Yisrael* to that of his predecessors in the whole historical continuum of our nation. The Jewish "today" must take its mission from the hand of "yesterday."

Rav Hirsch applies this thought in his interpretation of the *pasuk* in *Sefer Tehillim* 20:4, *Yizkor kol Minchosecha v'Oloscha yidashne selah*, "May He take the *azkarah*, remembrance, of all your *Menachos*, Meal Offerings, and the *Terumas HaDeshen* of your *Korbanos Olah*, Burnt Offerings." May the remembrance of your acts of allegiance to Him and your efforts to elevate yourselves up to Him be constantly with G-d.

We now understand why, although the *mitzvah* has been executed, *naasis mitzvaso*, such that the *Terumas HaDeshen* nonetheless retains its *kedushah*, sanctity, so that if one uses it improperly, there is *meilah*, trespass. This is despite the rule that once an object has fulfilled its purpose, the prohibition of using it for profane purposes ceases. The *kedushah* of the *Terumas HaDeshen* does not cease, because the purpose of the lifting out of the ashes is not completed by just depositing it. If its meaning is specifically the remembrance of the past as a foundation for all the future – its *kedushah* is never-ending.

Perhaps we might use the *mitzvah* of *Terumas HaDeshen* – and its significance in retaining our

focus on the past while confronting the present and building for the future – as a springboard for developing a deeper understanding of the value of Jewish history as expounded by our sages throughout the generations.

First of all, what is the definition of Jewish history, and how does the Torah's outlook differ from the perspective of the secular historian? The Torah (*Sefer Bamidbar* 32:2) writes: *Va'yichtov Moshe es motzaeihem l'maseihem al pi Hashem*. "Moshe wrote their goings forth according to their journey at the bidding of Hashem." The Torah is the Divine narrative, authored by G-d and transcribed by Moshe. The Torah especially emphasizes Moshe's role in transcribing the experience of the Jewish People in the *masaos*, forty-two encampments, in the desert.

In this *pasuk*, the Torah seeks to underscore G-d's role in history. Thus, as Moshe *Rabbeinu* writes the story, he is recording that everything taking place was dictated by G-d. Every occurrence, every event, every episode, is a direct product of the Almighty's design.

The destruction of the *Bais Hamikdash* is recorded in history. Through Divine Inspiration, *Chazal* were able to deduce that the catalyst for this destruction was a dispute between two men: Kamtza and Bar Kamtza. It may seem like an isolated event, but our Sages teach us that it was not. It was part of the Divine Plan. So, too, when Moshe recorded the series of the Jewish People's encampments in the desert, he was also alluding to their catalyst, thereby indicating G-d's Hand in history.

Regrettably, the study of history plays a small role, if any, in Jewish life. At best, we focus on the events, rather than on the lessons they impart. It is specifically this narrow sweep of events that gives rise to the revisionist approach to history picking apart events, thereby transforming the lessons to suit one's fancy and distorted spiritual perspective. The secular historian, whose bias against traditional and spiritual leadership is evident, has, over time, spawned a school of history that totally ignores G-d's "involvement." We study "events," "people," "issues," but never the guiding Hand of the Creator in catalyzing these events. We refuse to "connect the dots," for fear of having to acknowledge the clear fact that it did not all "just happen." There is purpose, mission and destiny in everything and everyone. To ignore this is to undermine history selfishly and to fool oneself.

Many lessons can be gleaned from the study of history. First, we develop a sense of pride in our heritage. The ability to connect to the glorious culture that preceded us is invaluable. Conversely, our inability to relate to history – to look back with pride; to place people in their correct timeframe and perspective – engenders within us a certain naivete and outlook that are counterproductive to living a full life according to the Torah. The Torah gives us a total blueprint with confidence. Thus, the false accusation leveled at us by our enemies will not sway us, nor will we be compelled to live a life of apologetic acquiescence. This is exactly what happened concerning our secular co-religionists. Their break with the past created a distortion in their self-esteem and severed their identification with the historical continuum of our nation.

We can learn from history how we must deal with the outside world: which strategies to implement; which policies have proven effective over time; and which have not proven effective. Jewish history demonstrates the strength of the creative spirit, the drive for renewal and rejuvenation within the Jewish psyche. If we peruse the last century, we note how *Chassidus* revitalized and quite possibly saved Jewish life in Eastern Europe. We observe how the *Yeshivah* Movement developed and joined with the *Mussar* Movement, saving the traditional method of Torah-learning. Moreover, it infused the European-Jewish community with the study of ethics and character refinement.

Jewish history teaches us that the traditional way of life had its opponents and its antagonists. The latter were relentless in their battle to undermine, reject and ultimately destroy the Torah way of life that has been transmitted throughout the millennia from generation to generation, harking back to Sinai. Yet, Torah has always prevailed. New ideas and modern approaches that emanate from a holy source – if introduced sincerely, *l'shem Shomayim* – can and have preserved the sanctity of tradition as it faces the challenges of modernity.

We face the future standing determined and proud upon the foundations of the past: our glorious and holy history of triumphing over challenge, adversity, apathy and indifference. As we continue to rebuild, we are sparked with a sense of purpose, spurred on by a commitment to the past, a promise to those who laid the foundation for contemporary Jewish life. Tragedy and revival have always been a part of our historical continuum. We look forward to that glorious day when we will no longer suffer tragedy, when challenges and adversity will be a thing of the past, when revival will be our constant motif and everlasting companion.

Jewish history is very much a self-contained drama, with the world as a bystander. World history is a backdrop for Jewish history, since everything that takes place in the world is somehow tied to the Jewish People and their ability to study and keep the Torah. Jewish history views world events and their ramifications as direct links to Jewish destiny. Thus, what takes place “out there” is viewed through the context of the drama taking place “in here.” Jewish history, therefore, has a powerful and intrinsic religious aspect to it. One cannot study it in a vacuum. One must be able to discern and reflect upon the guiding Hand of G-d; otherwise, what is the purpose of rehashing the past? Obviously, it is so that we can better define and understand the present, thereby allowing us to build the foundation for the future.