

We Control the Destiny of the Temple Mount *By Benzion Twerski*

Several months ago I stood atop a mountain that overlooked the Temple Mount. I expected that as I contrasted the history of this holy mountain with the present excavations and desecration of our most revered place on earth, I would be overcome with sorrow. Despite my expectations, I found myself indifferent to the significance of what had occurred here. Why was I not moved upon gazing at the place where Avraham Avinu eagerly bound his son Yitzchak and placed him upon the altar? How could I remain impassive to the desecration of the site where the Almighty chose to reveal His glory through ten daily miracles? Why did I regard with apathy the place where millions of Jews came to seek atonement, to celebrate the three pilgrimage festivals, and to commune with the Creator through the daily sacrificial service in the Holy Temple?

There are those who contend that the Temple Mount and indeed, the Temple itself, have no inherent significance. Indeed, in October of 1999, the chancellor of a particular seminary was quoted in *The New York Times Magazine*, as saying that the destruction of the Temple was “an advancement for religion.” Furthermore, he

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stated, “When the Temple was destroyed, the Jewish cult of animal sacrifice was destroyed with it. In its place came verbal prayer, which gave birth to the synagogue, which gave birth to the church and to the mosque. Verbal prayer is what made Judaism portable and invulnerable. Now Jews could live anywhere. They didn’t need the Temple.” How have we

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Our sages tell us, “When a person passes before the Heavenly tribunal, he is asked... ‘Did you yearn for the Redemption?’” (*Shabbat* 31a) It seems to me that the Heavenly tribunal is asking the following—to what extent did we reflect on the Redemption? Did we consider the Redemption in a vague, intangible sense, or did we believe in its actuality? Was it a fleeting thought, or something to which we gave sincere deliberation?

The Holy Rebbe of Iyhel, known by

his work, *Yismach Moshe*, kept a packed suitcase at his side at all times in anticipation of *Mashiach’s* arrival. His yearning was evident in his actions.

The phrase “Next year in Jerusalem” is central to Yom Kippur and the Pesach Seder. But longing to return to Jerusalem twice a year is insufficient. True, there are numerous references to the Temple service in the *Shemoneh Esrei*. But these passages are not enough to inspire genuine yearning. Our sages knew this; consequently, they established a special section of prayers detailing the order of the daily sacrifices in the Temple. These prayers, called *Karbanot*, are supposed to be recited at the beginning of our morning and afternoon prayers.

The Talmud relates that Avraham Avinu asked the Almighty how his descendants would acquire forgiveness. The Almighty answered, “Let them bring the daily sacrifices.” Avraham responded that that was possible only as long as the Holy Temple stands. “What will aid them after its destruction?” The Almighty responded, “Let them say the Order of the Sacrifices, and I will consider it as if they had actually brought them before me, and I will forgive all of their sins” (*Taanit* 27b).

In essence, the Talmud is instructing us that by reciting the passages

dealing with the daily sacrifices we have maintained our connection to the Temple Mount and its remarkable powers of forgiveness. It is noteworthy that *Shacharit* begins with the recitation of the story of the *Akeidah*, and follows with *Karbanot*. This sequence is significant: first we must appreciate the exalted qualities of the Temple Mount, and then we can appreciate God's choosing this Mount as the site where sacrifices will be offered. A father was willing to sacrifice his son for Hashem at a particular place; consequently, that place is where Jews go to bond with God and restore their souls.

Human nature is such that when we expend an immense amount of time preoccupied with a particular matter, we become emotionally attached to it. Conversely, when an idea is absent from our daily thoughts, we remain emotionally disconnected from it.

As I agonized about my indifference to the Har HaBayit, I realized that I had done very little to connect with this awesome place. Like many *bnei yeshivot*, I was accustomed to skipping *Karbanot* when it was inconvenient.

Tradition has taught us repeatedly that when we neglect something, it is taken from us. We came to take the Temple itself for granted and it was removed from our midst. Often, we justify omitting *Karbanot*, because of all the parts of *tefillah*, we consider these prayers the most "negotiable." The result of this is that the Temple Mount itself becomes negotiable. When we lack the proper respect for the passages on the sacrifices, well-intentioned but misguided Jewish leaders feel justified in expunging references to the Temple service from their prayers.

If we commit to reinstate *Karbanot* to its former glory, and pay it newfound respect, we hope in turn the Almighty will respond by consecrating this Holy Mountain with the building of the Third Temple, where once again we will merit bringing the daily sacrifices on the Holy Altar. 