**[The Mask – Parshat Tzav](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/parshat-tzav%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)**

How do you come up with the complete works of Shakespeare?

 Just take a bunch of hydrogen, and leave it alone for about fourteen billion years!

 There seems to be a miraculous potential within the very fabric of reality itself to evolve – to develop into higher and more complex structures, to go from inanimate matter to the conscious beings. You start off with hydrogen atoms, and over time, you end up with us. In Judaism, that potential is called *Hashem.*

That Divine potential to create and to become is inherent within us; just as sure as we exist, so the power of *Hashem* is within us, calling us to evolve, to be willing partners in the process of Creation. It is not something we have to acquire; it is essentially who we are, behind the mask of our individuality. Our task is only to remember it, to awaken it, and to express it.

וּמַה נָּעִים גּוֹרָלֵנוּ, וּמַה יָּפָה יְרֻשָּׁתֵנוּ אַשְׁרֵינוּ מַה טּוֹב חֶלְקֵנוּ,
*Ashreinu mah tov helkeinu, umah na’im goraleinu, umah yafa yerushateinu!*
*We are fortunate – how good is our portion, how pleasant our lot, how beautiful our heritage!*

Our Divine nature is our heritage, our destiny, our task – and when we’re ready, it becomes our *commitment:*

צַ֤ו אֶֽת־אַהֲרֹן֙ וְאֶת־בָּנָ֣יו לֵאמֹ֔ר זֹ֥את תּוֹרַ֖ת הָעֹלָ֑ה הִ֣וא הָעֹלָ֡ה עַל֩ מוֹקְדָ֨ה עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּ֤חַ כָּל־הַלַּ֙יְלָה֙ עַד־הַבֹּ֔קֶר וְאֵ֥שׁ הַמִּזְבֵּ֖חַ תּ֥וּקַד בּֽוֹ׃
*Command Aaron and his sons, saying: This is the teaching of the Elevation Offering. It is the Elevation Offering that is on the flame on the altar all night long until the morning; the fire on the altar should be kept burning on it.*

“All night long” – in this dark time of such tremendous suffering and violence on our planet, we are “commanded” – if we can “hear” it – to “keep our fire burning” – to stay present, to *be*Presence, to elevate by burning up whatever destructive and unconscious patterns we find within ourselves. And as we transform ourselves, so do we transform the world. Because the more conscious we become, the more others will be able to feel that Presence in our presence, and that consciousness will catch on – just as one flame ignites another without diminishing itself.

In this way, our Divine potential that is ordinarily hidden becomes more and more revealed.

There’s a story that before Reb Simcha Bunam was a rebbe, he traded in lumber. Once when he was in Dansig on business, the other merchants asked him why he bothered visiting his *rebbe.* “How can your *rebbe*can teach anything to someone as learned you?” They said.

That night, a number of them went to the theater. They invited Reb Simcha Bunam along, but he declined. Later, when they returned, they lamented he had missed such an amazing performance.

“What do I need to see the performance for? I already know all about that show!” said Reb Simcha Bunam.

“What do you mean? How could you know all about it – you haven’t seen it!”

“Yes, but I read the program!”

“You can’t really know a show just by reading the program, you have to experience it for yourself!” they retorted.

“And so it is with my rebbe.” The merchants were silenced.

On this week of Shabbat Tzav and Purim, may we keep the flames of Presence burning on the altar of this moment and reveal the Divine potential behind all of our masks. *Hag Samayakh,* *Good Shabbos!*

**More on Parshat Tzav…**

**This is it! Parshat Tzav**

 Once, Rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev was gathered with his *hasidim* after Yom Kippur. Setting his eyes on one disciple, he turned to him. “I will tell you what you prayed for and what Hashem’s response is," he told him*.*

“You prayed that you should receive your livelihood for the whole year all at once, so that you would be free to spend the rest of the year praying and and studying,” he explained.

“But then, you realized that if you had all the money at once, you’d probably not be able to resist starting a new business venture with all that capital, and you’d be in the same situation as before. So, you asked that you’d be given half now, and half in six months." The *hasid*was wide-eyed with amazement as his master miraculously reported his whole thought process.

“But then you realized that still wouldn’t work," Rabbi Levi Yitzhak continued, "so you asked that it be given to you in monthly installments. The truth is, however, Hashem doesn’t want your prayers and Torah study; Hashem wants you to labor in your business!”

The central and universal message of Hasidism is to connect with the Divine in every moment, in every action. Without diminishing the importance of the particular spiritual practices, the aim of those practices is to awaken the constant awareness of the Divine Presence by becoming totally present in all of life. In this way, presence realizes The Presence.

But to do that, it is important to make sure you have the two main dimensions of Presence operating. There's a hint of these two dimensions at the beginning of our weekly reading (Leviticus Chapter 6):

**א**וַיְדַבֵּ֥ר יְהֹוָ֖ה אֶל־משֶׁ֥ה לֵּאמֹֽר

***1.****And the Divine spoke to Moses, saying,*

**ב**צַ֤ו אֶת־אַֽהֲרֹן֙ וְאֶת־בָּנָ֣יו לֵאמֹ֔ר זֹ֥את תּוֹרַ֖ת הָֽעֹלָ֑ה הִ֣וא הָֽעֹלָ֡ה עַל֩ מוֹקְדָ֨ה עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּ֤חַ כָּל־הַלַּ֨יְלָה֙ עַד־הַבֹּ֔קֶר וְאֵ֥שׁ הַמִּזְבֵּ֖חַ תּ֥וּקַד בּֽוֹ:

***2. "****Command Aaron and his sons, saying, This is the law of the Elevation Offering: it is the  the Elevation Offering which burns on the altar all night until morning, and the fire of the altar shall burn upon it.*

If you wish to *elevate*​every moment and every situation so that everything becomes a realization of the Divine, you have to have let this moment be an *offering,*even in moments of darkness: *"That is the Elevation Offering which burns on the altar all night..."*

And to accomplish that, you have be totally aware: *"...and the fire of the altar shall burn upon it." –*meaning, your awareness should "burn" on the "altar" of your heart, constantly.

These two dimensions, staying aware of the fulness of this moment, on one hand, and offering yourself to this moment as an act of love, on the other, are the two essential dimensions of Presence. They are not separate, and yet we seem to find ways to separate them! One person has good intention, but bumbles about nervously. Another seems to be very aware, yet they are aloof and un-compassionate. Neither of these is very elevating.

But bring the heart and the mind together, and everything becomes holy, no matter how mundane or even disturbing, *barukh Hashem.*

Here's an inquiry to bring these two dimensions from potential into actuality: *"What is the offering right now? Mah HaOlah?"*Try and asking this often to yourself, and see what comes. Sometimes, you might get a great new insight about how to respond to the moment. Other times, there might only be the openness of the question. Either way, the inquiry can help to bring you to the "altar" of your heart and let your awareness burn brightly...

**Burn- Parshat Tzav**

4/6/2017 1 Comment

The Torah reading, *Parshat Tzav,* hints at the Passover theme of liberation- going out from the bondage of ego, represented by slavery in Egypt, and into the spacious freedom of the *midbar-* the wilderness of Reality Itself, beyond the limited maps of Reality generated by the mind. It says the priest should take the *Minkha-* the “meal offering”- *“v’hiktir hamizbeiakh reiakh nikhoakh azkarata Lashem- and burn its remembrance on the altar as a pleasing fragrance to the Divine.”*

Now the image of burning has two main aspects. On one hand, fire creates light and warmth, which are necessary and pleasurable. On the other hand, fire burns and destroys- it can be dangerous and painful. In other words, fire is a metaphor for life itself- beautiful, pleasurable, and also incredibly painful at times. But if you offer your awareness as a gift to this moment as it is- *v’hiktir hamizbeiakh-*your awareness will burn of the altar of the present, *reiakh nikhoakh-* your connection to this moment in the face of both pleasure and pain is like a pleasing aroma, *azkarata Lashem-* bringing the remembrance of the Divine Oneness within which everything appears and disappears.

Of course, this isn’t always easy, because of what I call the “yeah but” principle. One moment you’re relaxed, open and in harmony with Reality, and the next moment something happens that throws you off, and your mind says, “yeah but…” That’s why offering the minkha- the gift of your Presence- *azkarata Lashem-* it must be a remembrance of the Oneness that you recall to yourself every day, as it says in the seder, *Kol y’mei khayiekha- all the days of your life.* And when you remember the Oneness, you actually re-member yourself- meaning, your consciousness that’s become fragmented and contracted can relax back into the open field that is your nature.

So on this Shabbat Tzav, the Sabbath of Command, of Mitzvah, may we receive this mitzvah of re-membering- practicing daily, nightly and constantly the return to Presence and opening to the love that flows from there. Good Shabbos!!!

love,
brian yosef

[**Locke﻿d in the Bathroom- Parshat Tzav**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/locked-in-the-bathroom-parshat-tzav)

Last week, I accidentally locked myself in the bathroom.

The doorknob had broken a few days before. I went in to use the bathroom, and when I was finished, I realized I couldn’t get out.

Dang.

I took the screen out of the window, but soon realized that if I tried to squeeze my body through that tiny opening, I would not only be stuck in the bathroom, but stuck halfway though the window. Not a good plan.

I had no regular tools- only a bunch of  various pieces of doorknob lying around the bathroom. So, I grabbed a piece of metal and started bashing the doorknob as hard as I could.

That didn’t work.

Only one thing left to do-
Stop. Look.

Sitting there and looking carefully, I could see something that looked like a lever inside the door hole in which the knob was recessed. I found a metal thing which fit right inside and carefully pushed the lever thing. The doorknob released and it came right open.

It was a good test, and a perfect reminder of the importance of Presencein the midst of the absurdities and challenges of life.

There are three phases for dealing with absurdities and challenges.

This week’s reading, *Parshat Tzav,*begins with a description of the *Olah-*the “elevation” offering that the priests are to perform:

*“… olah al mokdah… kol halailah ad haboker-*
*“…the elevation offering should stay on the flame all night until morning.”*

If you want to live an “elevated” life, let the "night" of challenges be reminders to remain alert. Keep the "flame burning all night long." This is the first stage.

Then it says the *Kohen*- the priest- must take the ashes of the offering and remove them to a place outside the camp.

In other words, after you’ve burned through the negativity and come out the other end, completely let go of it. Don’t keep it around by creating mental stories about it; let it out of your space. This is the second stage.

Then it says that the *Kohen* should kindle wood on the altar in the morning as well. The fire is called:

*“… aish tamid- a continual flame- lo tikhbeh- it should never be extinguished.”*

In other words, after the challenge is over and you’ve let go of it, you’ve got to still practice being conscious. It doesn’t work very well to get conscious only when things are challenging!

And fortunately, it’s actually pretty easy to stay present in the many uneventful moments that comprise much of our lives- don’t take them for granted! That’s the blessing of the many prayers, sacred phrases and Divine Names you can use to come deeply into Oneness of the present moment, all day long.

In the days of the Baal Shem Tov, it once happened at the conclusion of Yom Kippur that the sky was particularly cloudy. The moon was completely obscured, preventing the Baal Shem from making the blessing on the new moon that's traditionally chanted after Yom Kippur.

The Baal Shem sensed that the welfare of his people somehow depended on his making the *Kiddush Levana-*the Sanctification of the Moon- that night. Determined, he stood beneath the night sky, concentrating his mind to cause the clouds to disperse, but with no success. He eventually accepted his failure as what needed to be, and retired to his room.

His disciples, however, knew nothing of the Baal Shem’s sadness and had begun to dance around the house in ecstatic celebration. Eventually their revelry burst through the door into the Baal Shem’s room. In their mad ecstasy they took him by the hand and drew him into the dance.

Later the Baal Shem noticed- the sky had cleared and the waxing moon beamed brightly. The Baal Shem made the *brakha-*the blessing- and averted the danger.

On this *Shabbat Tzav,* the Sabbath of Connection, may we connect the three phases as the Baal Shem tov did- accepting challenge and even failure when it happens, letting go of negativity and opening to the joy of the Dance, and blessing the holiness of each moment, regardless of whether our fortune is "waxing" or "waning".

*Good Shabbos, Hag Purim Samayakh!*

[**Keep Burning! Parshat Tzav**](https://www.torahofawakening.com/weekly-torah/keep-burning-parshat-tzav)

In the days of the Baal Shem Tov, it once happened at the conclusion of Yom Kippur that the sky was particularly cloudy. The moon was completely obscured, preventing the Baal Shem from making the blessing on the new moon as is traditionally chanted after Yom Kippur. The Baal Shem sensed that the welfare of his people somehow depended on his making the *Kiddush Levana-*the sanctification of the moon, that night. Anxiously he stood beneath the night sky, concentrating his mind to cause the clouds to disperse, but with no success. Sunk in gloom, he eventually gave up and retired to his room.

His disciples, however, knew nothing of the Baal Shem’s sadness and had begun to dance around the house in ecstatic celebration. Eventually their revelry burst through the door into the Baal Shem’s room. In their mad ecstasy they took him by the hand and drew him into the dance. Later the Baal Shem noticed- the sky had cleared and the crescent moon beamed brightly. The Baal Shem made the blessing and averted the danger.

At first glance, you might think that this story is about the power of joy and community- about how the master needed the innocent enthusiasm of his disciples to cheer him up, which then miraculously cleared the clouds from the sky.

A fine and valid interpretation!

But another way of seeing the story reveals a unity between all the different elements- the Baal Shem’s experience of the darkness, the joy of the disciples and the revelation of the moon are all parts of one happening. The point is not the disciples cheering him up; the point is the way in which he relates to the darkness.

If you want true freedom, if you want to leave Egypt for good, you need to have a constant and unconditional commitment to being conscious. Meditation and prayer are only one part of the practice- the rest happens in the flow of life, in real time. Every part of life must be brought into the arena of practicing awareness.

In order to understand how to do this, it can be useful to divide your life experience into three categories.

The first involves moments when challenges come into your life from things you are committed to. For example, you might have challenges with work or children or relationships. In those moments, you must remain conscious that this is the arena of practice. Be committed to not letting the negativity take over your mind, creating pessimistic, complaining or blaming stories. Know that you have the power to completely *be*with the unpleasantness and that ultimately it can’t hurt you. It will certainly pass. Then, deal with the situation from that place.

The second involves negativity that comes into your life from things you are *not*committed to. For example, someone cuts you off on the road or someone insults you at work. Or, it could be negativity from your own mind. Regardless of the source, if you are not committed to the relationship, eject it from your mind completely. Don’t waste a second struggling against the annoying co-worker or the bad driver. Be with whatever feelings arise, but let go of any thoughts that keep those feelings alive. Even better- make a blessing for those who bother you. If possible and appropriate, take action. Even a smile can transform some situations.

The third involves the “empty” or “neutral” moments. When you are walking from one place to another, eating, driving and so on, there is no inherent content and the mind often wanders. Those times are such precious gifts because it’s not so difficult to be awake in those moments. Identify those moments- be aware of how they come in your day. When you brush your teeth, make your tea, whatever; use your mind on purpose. And that means either one of two things: either focus your thinking in an intentional way, or let go of your thinking and simply be present with whatever is happening.

Focused thinking can be contemplation on either spiritual or practical things. It can be solving a problem or thinking a prayer of gratitude. Presence means knowing you are *not* your thinking. It means putting aside your thinking and simply being.

Finally, take some time every day to step out of the flow of life. In order to practice in the three types of life experience, it is vital to separate from them to do your daily *avodah-*spiritual work. The vital elements of *avodah*are also three- meditation (quiet presence, just being with Being), prayer (expression of your heart toward Being) and contemplation or learning (like what you are doing right now as you read this).

There is a hint of these three life situations in the *avodah*that is described in this week’s reading. *Parshat Tzav*begins with a description of the *Olah-*the “elevation” offering that the priests are to perform. It says that the *“olah al mokdah… kol halailah ad haboker-*the elevation offering should stay on the flame all night until morning.” In order to be “elevated”, you must remain alert the whole time you are experiencing something challenging or negative. Don’t become unconscious! Keep the flame burning all night long. This corresponds to being awake as you deal with challenges in things you are committed to, such as relationships and work.

In our opening story, this is when the Baal Shem tries his best to disperse the clouds, and then eventually retires to his room to fully be with his sadness.

Then it says the *Kohen*- the priest- must take the ashes of the offering and remove them to a place outside the camp. In other words, after you have burned through the negativity, completely let go of it. Don’t keep it alive by creating mental stories about it! Get it out of your space. This corresponds to negativity from things you are not committed to. Don’t waste your energy on things that don’t matter!

This is when the Baal Shem lets go of the sadness and joins in the dance.

Then it says that the *Kohen* should kindle wood on the altar in the morning as well. The fire is an *“aish tamid-*a continual flame- *lo tikhbeh-*it should never be extinguished.” In other words, after the challenge is over and life has become neutral again, you should still remain conscious. Don’t just try to get conscious when things are challenging! This corresponds to the many neutral moments that comprise much of our lives. It’s easy to be awake in those moments- don’t take them for granted!

This is when the Baal Shem makes his blessing on the moon. The moon, waxing and waning, sometimes visible and sometimes not, represents the up and down flow of the every day. Sanctify the ordinary- as it says, “when you lie down and when you get up”.

On this *Shabbat HaGadol-*the Great Sabbath preceding our festival of liberation, may we all grow in our constant practice of being conscious and sanctifying every moment of this precious existence. Good Shabbos!

**The Power of Preparation –Passover and Parshat Tzav**

There are moments when our situation dictates our next move, and there is no ambiguity about what we must do. If there were a baby in the middle of the road, for example, it is clear we should rescue the baby. In such a moment, there is no leeway for weighing options, for considering which path to take. The path is clear, and the mind is wholly present in the task at hand. We might call this *active presence-*being totally present and committed in one’s action.

There is also a situation we might call *passive presence,*or *receiving presence.*This could be when you receive something or behold something so satisfying that there is no part of you that is left out of the experience; there is a sense of arrival. The present is not experienced as a stepping-stone to some other moment, but the present is IT. An example of this might be beholding something awesome in nature, or even drinking a glass of water when you are parched.

Ordinarily, these moments tend to be few. The aim of spiritual work, however, is to totally reorient yourself to become fully present in every moment, to connect deeply with reality as it presents itself now, always now, in *this*moment. To do this, we have to shift our perspective from mind and thought to the awareness behind mind and thought. Just as both the baby in the road and the satisfying experience automatically bring one to the fullness of the present beyond thought, so we must learn to bring ourselves fully to the present, even and especially in ordinary and mundane moments.

This is the hidden message in this week’s parsha, *Tzav.*Throughout the Torah, when G-d tells Moses to communicate something to the Israelites, it usually says, “G-d spoke to Moses saying, ‘speak to the Israelites…’”. In this case, rather than saying, “speak to the Israelites”, it says “*command* the Israelites”. That’s the meaning of the word *Tzav-*it is the command form of the word “command”. By saying, “command” rather than “speak”, it implies a sense of intensity, and calls the one commanded to a state of presence. To receive a “commandment” is different from receiving a “suggestion” or a “possibility”; the baby is in the road, and you must act.

However, the Torah then goes on to enumerate tedious details about certain ritual sacrifices. The subject matter is not even new; it is merely a continuation of last week’s parsha, which introduced the subject [(see last week’s blog entry).](http://www.torahofawakening.com/1/post/2013/03/five-windows-to-this-parshat-vayikra.html) Why is the special word *tzav*used in this context?

But this is the whole point. Much of our lives are spent with ordinary, repetitive things- the daily grind of keeping things moving. The ritual sacrifices are a metaphor for how to frame the ordinary: By bringing our awareness fully into each moment, the “ordinary” is transformed into something sacred. The word for sacrifice, *korban,*actually doesn’t mean sacrifice at all; it means “drawing near”. The “daily grind” becomes a way of drawing near to the Ultimate, for everything is part of the Ultimate. Once the mind ceases pulling us away from this moment, we can see this moment as an opportunity to awaken, to be a vessel for consciousness.

This is also the meaning of the instructions to “keep the fire on the altar burning all night” (Lev. 6:2). The “day” represents those special experiences and deeds that bring us to the sacred and the fullness of presence. The “night” represents the ordinary and mundane, when we tend to fall asleep in the spiritual sense. To “keep the fire burning” in the “night” means to transform the ordinary into a *korban-*into a sacred moment through the power of awareness.

This lesson is a powerful reminder as we move into the preparation time for *Pesakh*(Passover). Preparing for *Pesakh*has a very mundane, detail-oriented aspect to it, involving going through your fridge and cabinets to find all the *hameitz*(foods made with wheat, oats, barley or spelt, except of course *matzah*) to either eliminate it or sell it. [(Click here for info on traditional Pesakh preparations- and don't let it freak you out! Even a little effort at whatever level you are comfortable can be very powerful)](http://www.chabad.org/holidays/passover/default_cdo/jewish/Passover.htm). Often, this will reveal hidden dirtiness and inspire a deep cleaning of the house. The *hameitz*is a symbol for ego and separation from the present. The *matzah,* in its flatness and simplicity, represents full intimacy with the present and freedom from ego.

So what is the lesson? The ego craves something special. It wants to be impressed, and to impress. But preparing for *Pesakh*is an opportunity to embrace the mundane, to discover the sacred in the cleaning of kitchen muck. In surrendering to these mundane tasks and doing them not as drudgery but as “commandment”, as *mitzvah,*we open ourselves to receive the true and liberating power of *Pesakh.*

When you eat the *matzah* this *Pesakh,* may you taste the joy, sweetness and purity of real liberation, and may your liberation bring this world a step closer to a global awakening and healing.

*Hag Samayakh! Good Shaabbiiiisss!*