

Scouring Our Souls (Tzav)

There is a wellspring of life within you where you can go for cleansing and transformation. -Deepak Chopra

In preparation for Passover, there is an inordinate focus on cleaning. We clean the bedrooms, the floors, the windows, the refrigerator, the cabinets, the drawers, the counters, the oven – every nook and cranny that is accessible, and even some that are not so easily reached.

This tradition is often cited as the origin of the popular concept and practice of "spring cleaning" among the general population. Many rabbis, however, have taken the arduous task of cleaning our physical homes and reinterpreted it as an opportunity to get our spiritual homes in order.

This week's Torah reading reflects a similar theme.

The Torah provides a detailed list of various types of sacrifices brought at the Temple. A fairly common offering is the chatat, or sin-offering. This category of sacrifice serves as a tool for repentance across a broad spectrum of transgressions – from seeking forgiveness on behalf of the entire people of Israel to the personal penitence of an individual.

Also included in the list is the olah, or elevation-offering. Unlike the chatat, the olah is less about remorse and more about commemoration. It is meant to "elevate" our connection with God.

In Leviticus 8:2, Rabbi Ovadia Sforno (1475–1549) comments on the fact that the chatat is mentioned first. He emphasizes that this order is significant: the law requires that the chatat be brought before the olah.

Sforno explains that there is little sense in attempting to offer the elevation-offering before the sin-offering. It is difficult to elevate ourselves and come closer to God if our sins remain unacknowledged or unrepented.

In essence, Sforno suggests that we must first clean up our act – or at least take meaningful steps toward redemption – before seeking to ascend spiritually. This idea is reflected in the order of the sacrifices.

May we succeed in cleaning both our homes and our souls, and may the upcoming holiday help elevate us even further.

Shabbat Shalom and Chag Kasher Ve'sameach,

Ben-Tzion

Dedication

To Elli's Kosher Kitchen, Abu Dhabi. For going over and above the call of duty.