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The Fire of *Gehenom* Has No Power

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¹ And a *siyum* of tractate *Chagigah*.

1.

ARK AND MISHKAN

On the verse,² “Betzael made the Ark,” the *Midrash* comments:³

When Hashem told Moshe to build the *Mishkan*,⁴ Moshe went and told Betzael. Betzael asked, “What is the purpose of this *Mishkan*?” Moshe said, “So that the Holy One will cause his *Shechinah*⁵ to rest in it, and teach Torah to Israel.” Betzael asked, “But where will the Torah be placed?” Moshe answered, “After we have made the *Mishkan*, we will make the Ark.” Betzael responded, “Our teacher, Moshe, this is not fitting for the honor of the Torah. Let us make the Ark first, and then we will build the *Mishkan*.” Therefore, Betzael merited to have the Ark ascribed to him, as the verse says, “Betzael made the Ark.”

The *Midrash* implies that the purpose of the Ark was for something other than enabling the indwelling of the *Shechinah* in the *Mishkan*. This is seemingly implied also by a different *Midrash*,⁶ which states that following the building of the *Mishkan*, Hashem said, “You have established an abode for Me; now establish an abode for the Torah, so that it will dwell with Me.”

This is difficult to understand:

True, the **Torah** was placed in the Ark. But the primary resting and indwelling of the *Shechinah* was also in and through the Ark. As *Ramban* explains:⁷ “The main purpose of the *Mishkan*” was to serve as “a place where the *Shechinah* would rest, which is the Ark.” How then can we differentiate between them, asserting that the *Mishkan* and the *Mikdash*⁸ were overall for the sake of “the indwelling of the *Shechinah*,” whereas the Ark served as “an abode for the Torah”?

² *Shemos* 37:1.

³ *Shemos Rabbah*, “*Vayakhel*,” ch. 50, sec. 2; *Midrash Tanchuma*, “*Vayakhel*,” sec. 6 (*Buber* ed., sec. 8).

⁴ {The portable Temple constructed in the desert.}

⁵ {Divine presence.}

⁶ *Midrash Avkir*, quoted in *Yalkut Shimoni*, “*Terumah*,” *remez* 368.

⁷ *Ramban*, beg. of *parshas Terumah*.

⁸ {I.e., the *Beis Hamikdash*, the Temple in Yerushalayim.}

2.

THE TEACHINGS OF REISH LAKISH AND RABBI ELAZAR

We will clarify this matter prefacing:

The indwelling of the *Shechinah* in the *Mishkan*, which is called a *Mikdash*,⁹ is mentioned in the verse:¹⁰ “They shall make Me a *Mikdash*, {Sanctuary} and I will dwell within them.” From its nuanced wording — “the Torah does not say, ‘in it,’ but rather, ‘within them’” — we learn that the Sanctuary possesses another facet. Namely, “I will dwell within” every single person.¹¹

The explanation regarding the indwelling of *Shechinah* “within” — in the private Sanctuary of — every person, is as follows:

At the end of tractate *Chagigah*,¹² the *Gemara* says:

Rabbi Abbahu said that Rabbi Elazar said: “The flames of *Gehenom*¹³ have no power over Torah scholars. This can be derived by a *kal va’chomer*¹⁴ from a salamander: Salamanders are produced by fire; and so when a person smears himself with its blood, fire has no power over him.¹⁵ How much more so, then, {should fire not have any power over} Torah scholars, whose entire bodies are fire, as it says:¹⁶ “Surely My words are as fire, says Hashem.”

Reish Lakish said: The flames of *Gehenom* have no power over the sinners of Israel. This can be derived by a *kal va’chomer* from the Golden Altar: The Golden Altar, was plated with gold no thicker than a gold dinar {and which had incense burning on it}

⁹ *Eruvin* 2a. {Note that two terms are used here: *Mishkan*, referring to the tabernacle in the desert, and *Mikdash*, referring to the sanctuary in Yerushalayim. The point of this phrase is that both terms are sometimes used interchangeably, and what applies to one, applies to the other. In our context, when discussing the indwelling of the *Shechinah* in the *Mishkan*, the same phenomenon occurred in the *Beis Hamikdash*.}

¹⁰ *Shemos* 25:8.

¹¹ *Reishis Chochmah* (*Shaar Ahavah*, ch. 6, s.v., “*ushnei pesukim*”); et al.

¹² *Chagigah* 27a.

¹³ {Purgatory.}

¹⁴ {Lit., “light and heavy,” *kal va’chomer* is a talmudic logical proof, whereby a strict ruling in a lenient case demands a similarly strict ruling in a more stringent case; alternatively, a lenient ruling in stringent case demands a similarly lenient ruling in a lenient case.}

¹⁵ {Tradition teaches that the salamander was created out of fire and was immune to its effects.}

¹⁶ *Yirmiyahu* 23:29.

for many years. Nevertheless, fire had no power over it. How much more so {should the fire of *Gehenom* have no power over} the sinners of Israel, who are filled with *mitzvos* as a pomegranate is full of seeds, as it says:¹⁷ “*Rakatech* {your temples} are like a slice of pomegranate.” Do not read¹⁸ this word as “*rakatech*,” but as “*reikanin shebach*” {the empty people among you}.

Simply understood, the connection between these two teachings is to be understood as follows: These teachings are a thematic continuation of the previous topic in the *Gemara*, discussing the plating of the Altars – the Gold and Copper Altars. Reish Lakish’s teaching, “The flames of *Gehenom* have no power over the sinners of Israel. This can be derived by a *kal va’chomer* from the Golden Altar,” continues this theme, since Reish Lakish emphasizes how the Altar was **plated** with gold. Similar to this teaching, the *Gemara* first presented a teaching of Rabbi Abahu, that “the flames of *Gehenom*¹⁹ have no power over Torah scholars.”

However, on this basis, we need to clarify:

a) Reish Lakish’s teaching, “This can be derived by a *kal va’chomer* from the Golden Altar,” should have come first. Only after this teaching should the *Gemara* have presented Rabbi Abahu’s teaching about Torah scholars, as Rabbi Abahu’s teaching does not share a common theme with the topic in the *Gemara*.

b) The main discussion about the {lack of} power of *Gehenom* over the sinners of Israel (and about *Gehenom* in general) is found in tractate *Eruvin*.²⁰ There, the *Gemara* (also) quotes the teaching of Reish Lakish, “The flames of *Gehenom* have no power over the sinners of Israel.” As such, the *Gemara* **there** should also have quoted the teaching of Rabbi Abahu, “The flames of *Gehenom* have no power over Torah scholars...,” since: a) the main discussion about this topic is in *Eruvin*, whereas, here in *Chagigah* it is only mentioned parenthetically; and b) *Eruvin* precedes *Chagigah* {in the *Talmud*}.

¹⁷ *Shir Hashirim* 4:3.

¹⁸ {by vowelizing the consonants of this word differently.}

¹⁹ {Purgatory.}

²⁰ 19a.

c) Reish Lakish says: “This can be derived by a *kal va’chomer* from the Golden Altar... which was plated with gold no thicker than a gold dinar... Nevertheless, fire had no power over it.” Seemingly, his point emphasizes the opposite of the point made in the *Gemara’s* earlier conclusion. The Rabbis maintain that the plating of the Altars is “considered subordinate”²¹ to the Altars. Meaning, the plating on the Copper and Golden Altars were **subordinate** to the Altars. (For this reason the Altars were not susceptible to impurity). But Reish Lakish’s teaching emphasizes the robustness of the Golden Altar’s plating (the opposite of subordination). That is, the plating, due to its toughness, could tolerate the heat and protected the utensil — the Altar — to the extent that “fire had no power over it.”

3.

MORE QUESTIONS ON THE TALMUDIC EXPOSITIONS

We need to clarify many further nuances in this teaching of the *Gemara*. Among them:

a) The *kal va’chomer* from the Golden Altar that the *Gemara* applies to the sinners of Israel surely holds true, even in an even greater measure, with respect to Torah scholars. Meaning, just as the gold plating prevented the fire from damaging the Altar, so, too, a Torah scholar’s Torah-learning prevents the flames of *Gehenom* from harming him. This should apply even if the Torah scholar performed unseemly deeds which would make him deserving of punishment by the flames of *Gehenom* (if not for the merit of his Torah-learning).

As such, it is unclear: (a) The entire teaching about Torah scholars is seemingly superfluous! For we could have reached this conclusion on our own: If this concept (and teaching) applies to the sinners of Israel, how much more so should it apply to Torah scholars! And, (b) now that, in fact, the *Gemara* does present the special insight about Torah scholars, why does it need to come up

²¹ {*Chagigah* 27a.}

with a different *kal va'chomer*? The *Gemara* could have used the same *kal va'chomer* from the Altar.

This question is even stronger: The salamander was an impure *sherertz*²² (or, at least, a *chayah*).²³ Why would we derive a lesson about **Torah scholars** from a *sheretz* when we can infer the same lesson from the **Golden Altar** of the *Beis Hamikdash*?

b) True, the flames of *Gehenom* have no power over them (Torah scholars — because they are Torah scholars, and the sinners of Israel — because they are filled with *mitzvos*). But since both “Torah scholars” and “the sinners of Israel” wind up in *Gehenom* as a result of their sins,²⁴ Why, then, do we refer to the first group only with the epithet, “Torah scholars,” and the second, only with the epithet, “sinners of Israel”?²⁵

4.

TORAH VS. MITZVOS

The explanation:

The Jewish people connect to Hashem in two ways: by Torah study and by *mitzvah* observance. However, there is a difference in the connection that each of these methods are achieve:

When a Jew studies Torah and understands Hashem’s wisdom with his intellect, he unites with the Torah, in “a wondrous union. There is no union like

²² {I.e., one of the eight creeping species mentioned in *Vayikra* 11:29-30 whose carcasses are ritually impure.} See *Tosafos, Chagigah*, *ibid*; Rashi, *Chullin*, 127a, s.v., “*salamandra*.”

²³ {A non-domesticated animal species.} See Rashi on *Chagigah*, *ibid*; *Anaf Yosef* commenting on *Ein Yaakov*, *ibid*; *Aruch Hashalem*, entry “*salamandra*.”

²⁴ See *Anaf Yosef* on *Ein Yaakov* (quoting *Rav Moshe DeLeon*).

²⁵ {In the end, both groups have transgressions that need atonement, and both have merits, so the polarizing epithets, in this context, seem misplaced.}

it... where the two become completely one from every conceivable angle.”²⁶
Meaning, a person’s whole being becomes Torah.

This is not the case with *mitzvos*. When a person performs a *mitzvah*, he becomes a “chariot”²⁷ for Hashem’s will. However, he does not become **united** with the *mitzvah* (as is the case with Torah study).²⁸

This, then, is the difference between the two teachings of Rabbi Abahu and Reish Lakish: Rabbi Abahu discusses the greatness of Torah study for the Jewish people — Torah scholars. Through Torah study, the Torah scholars’ “**bodies are fire.**” “Fire” here refers to Torah (as in the verse,²⁹ “My words are like fire”). Through Torah study, Torah scholars fuse completely with Torah and G-dliness, to the extent that the Torah becomes their “whole being,” as mentioned. Reish Lakish discusses the greatness of *mitzvos* (in the context of the sinners of Israel). They are “filled with *mitzvos* as a pomegranate is full of seeds.” Although *mitzvos* do not create a **union** between the *mitzvah* and the Jews who perform them, nonetheless, they become (at least a vessel {for *mitzvos* and the G-dliness contained therein}) “filled with *mitzvos*.” Therefore, “the flames of *Gehenom* have no power over them.”

This explains the nuanced wording, “filled with *mitzvos* as a pomegranate.” Just as in the case of a pomegranate, although it is filled with seeds, the seeds are separate entities unto themselves, so, too, with the sinners of Israel: Although they fulfill *mitzvos*, we do not say “their bodies are *mitzvos*,” but rather, “they are **filled** with *mitzvos* as a pomegranate.”

Nevertheless, although Torah scholars have an advantage in that their bodies are fiery, we cannot infer that the flames of *Gehenom* have no power over **Torah scholars** from the *Gemara*’s teaching regarding the sinners of Israel. The reason: The Torah judges a Torah scholar who transgresses more strictly than a sinner of Israel who transgresses. [This is analogous to the *Gemara*’s

²⁶ *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 5.

²⁷ {The analogy of a chariot: Just as a chariot submits to the will of its driver, a person performing a *mitzvah* submits to Hashem’s will.}

²⁸ *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 5, 23.

²⁹ {*Yirmiyahu* 23:29.}

teaching:³⁰ “The unintentional sins of Torah scholars are considered as if they were intentional.”]

On the other hand, we cannot apply the teaching regarding Torah scholars to the sinners of Israel, for Torah scholars have the unique advantage that “**their bodies are fire**,” unlike the sinners of Israel.

5.

TORAH SCHOLARS, SALAMANDER; SINNERS, GOLDEN ALTAR

On this basis, we can also appreciate why the *Gemara* derives that the flames of *Gehenom* have no power over Torah scholars from salamanders, and regarding sinners of Israel, from the Golden Altar.

Salamanders are “produced by fire,” similar to Torah scholars whose “entire bodies are fire,” i.e., their entire beings are Torah. Through this *kal va’chomer*, Rabbi Abahu also answers the following question: If we are talking about Torah scholars, whose “entire bodies are fire,” how could a Torah scholar possibly sin? On the other hand, if these Torah scholars do sin, and consequently, they descend into *Gehenom*, why do the flames of *Gehenom* possess no power over them (and why do their bodies remain fiery)? To answer, Rabbi Abahu presents a *kal va’chomer* from salamanders, which are produced by fire.

The *Gemara* says:³¹ “The main form of immersion is in fire.” Meaning, the primary purifying element is fire (more so than water). Now, since fire purifies, i.e., removes ritual impurity, surely it cannot generate impurity. However, we find that salamanders — an impure *sherertz* (or at least, an impure *chayah*) — are produced by fire. On the other hand, despite being produced by fire, “when a person smears himself with its blood (of a salamander), fire has no power over him.”

³⁰ *Bava Metzia* 33b; see *Alter Rebbe’s Shulchan Aruch, Hilchos Talmud Torah*, ch. 4, par. 3.

³¹ *Sanhedrin* 39a.

This concept certainly holds true regarding Torah scholars whose entire bodies are fiery. A Torah scholar can possibly succumb to sin, since his soul was enclothed in a body of flesh and blood, and he lives in this physical world, where “the wicked prevail.”³² Nevertheless, their entire bodies remain fiery, and so the flames of *Gehenom* have no power over them.

In contrast, the sinners of Israel are filled with *mitzvos* as a pomegranate. The *Gemara* derives that the flames of *Gehenom* have no power over them by means of a *kal va'chomer* from the Golden Altar which was **plated** by gold. This is because through *mitzvos*, a person becomes only “**plated**,” i.e., he is encased by the *mitzvah*, and the *mitzvah* protects him. But the person does not **unite** with the *mitzvah*, as is the case regarding Torah study.

6.

GETTING THE NAMES RIGHT

Now we can appreciate why the first group of people is called “Torah scholars,” and the second, “sinners of Israel.”

Since the **bodies** of the Torah scholars are **fire**, the *Gemara* cannot {explicitly} call them “sinners of Israel,” or the like. Moreover, it is forbidden to disparage them. For if a person ridicules a Torah scholar, he is essentially ridiculing the **Torah**, for the Torah and a Torah scholar are inseparable. (As the *Gemara* says:³³ “A Torah scholar who sinned is not to be ridiculed in public.”) Therefore, the *Gemara* says, “The flames of *Gehenom* have no power over Torah scholars,” from which we can understand {implicitly} that they are guilty of unbecoming behavior.

In contrast, regular people {i.e., those who are not Torah scholars} are filled with *mitzvos* as a pomegranate. But if a person disparages an ordinary

³² *Etz Chaim*, quoted in *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 6.

³³ *Menachos* 99b.

fellow, he has not by extension disparaged the *mitzvos* that this person had performed, because a regular person and the *mitzvos* are **not** united as one. (The person is merely **filled** with *mitzvos*, as mentioned.)

[On the contrary! The *Gemara* specifically calls the second group of people “sinners of Israel,” and disparages them, since this ridicule serves as part of their atonement. This is similar to the *Gemara*’s teaching about Chizkiyahu:³⁴ “He dragged the bones of his father {King Achaz}³⁵ on a bier of ropes,” {so that this embarrassment would bring some measure of atonement for his sins}.]

7.

TORAH AND MITZVOS IN THE MISHKAN

We mentioned a teaching of our Rabbis earlier: “*They shall make Me a Sanctuary, and I will dwell within them*: the Torah does not say, ‘in it,’ but rather, ‘within them’ — within every single Jew.” This indicates that just as the personal *Mishkan* contained two elements — Torah and *mitzvos* — so, too, did the macro-*Mishkan* and *Mikdash*:

The explanation: Two authorities debate the purpose of the *Mishkan* (*Mikdash*). *Ramban* (mentioned above) maintains, “Thus the main purpose of the *Mishkan* was to provide a place where the *Shechinah* would rest, which is the Ark.” *Rambam* maintains that it was “prepared for sacrifices to be offered within.”³⁶

We can posit that, in essence, “This Sage said one thing, and the other said one thing, but they do not disagree.”³⁷ In referring to the *Mishkan*, the verse, “I will dwell within them,” teaches two things:

³⁴ *Pesachim* 56a, and **Rashi**, ad loc; *Berachos* 10b, and **Rashi**, ad loc.

³⁵ {He was notoriously wicked in matters of religion such as idol worship etc.}

³⁶ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Beis Habechirah*,” ch. 1, par. 1.

³⁷ {*Bava Metzia* 11a; *Chulin* 105a, 114a.}

- a) In the *Mishkan*, G-dliness should reveal itself, and do so inwardly, i.e., in a way that it would **fuse** {with the material}.³⁸
- b) The *Shechinah* should dwell in the lower realms {i.e., in this world} through refining the lowly and physical objects. This is similar to *mitzvos*, which are en clothed in specifically physical objects.

These two objectives correspond with (a) the Ark, and (b) by the sacrifices, and the *Mishkan*, as a whole.

a) In the Ark (which housed the Torah) G-dliness was revealed: “The place of the Ark did not take up space.”³⁹ Meaning, people could see how the physical place where the Ark stood was G-dly, for He alone can integrate opposites.⁴⁰ The Ark measured two and a half cubits...,⁴¹ **specifically and precisely**, but at the same time, it did not take up space. This demonstrates the advantage of the **union** that Torah accomplishes, as discussed above.⁴²

b) The *avodah*⁴³ of sacrifices, and of the *Mishkan*, as a whole, whereby thirteen⁴⁴ (or fifteen)⁴⁵ physical objects were taken and made into a Sanctuary for Hashem, signified a descent of the *Shechinah* into the **lower realms**.⁴⁶ This is similar to the refinement of physical objects by using them to perform *mitzvos*. Although miracles also took place in the *Mishkan*, in general, and in the process of offering sacrifices, in particular, the very body of the physical objects did not become G-dly.

³⁸ {In the original, succinct Yiddish/Hebrew, “*in an ofen fon yichud.*”}

³⁹ *Yoma* 21a; *Megillah* 10b; *Bava Basra* 99a; see *Likkutei Sichos* vol. 11, p. 319, ff.

⁴⁰ *Responsa of Rashba*, “*Choshen Mishpat*,” ch. 418; *Sefer HaChakirah*, by the *Tzemach Tzedek*, p. 68, ff.

⁴¹ {*Shemos* 25:10.}

⁴² {I.e., physical space becoming united with G-dliness parallels Torah becoming one with a person.}

⁴³ {Divine service.}

⁴⁴ *Shir Hashirim Rabbah*, ch. 4, sec. 13; *Zohar*, vol. 2, p. 148a; *Midrash Tanchuma*, *parshas Terumah*, sec. 5; quoted by Rashi in his commentary on Torah at the beginning of *parshas Terumah*.

⁴⁵ *Rabbeinu Bachya*, *parshas Terumah* 25:7; *Kli Yakar*, *ibid.*, 25:3; see *Zohar*, *ibid.*, p. 135a.

⁴⁶ See at length *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 3, “*Terumah*”; *ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 197 ff.; et al.

8.

AN ABODE FOR ME AND AN ABODE FOR THE TORAH

On this basis, we can appreciate why the aforementioned *Midrashim* (quoted at the beginning of this *Sichah*) distinguish between the Ark and the *Mishkan* (as a whole), although, in general, the resting and indwelling of the *Shechinah* in the *Mishkan* occurred in and through the Ark. For when we break it down, there are two elements:

a) “An abode for Me.” This refers to the diffusion of the *Shechinah* into the physical objects of the *Mishkan* (and within the service of the sacrifices, etc.). This “abode” was similar to the way *mitzvos* work. The world connects with G-dliness — an “abode” (home) in this physical world.

b) “An abode for the **Torah.**” This refers to the manner in which the *Shechinah* rested in the **Ark**. This Presence had the advantage of **unity**, i.e., G-dliness coalesced with the Ark — “the place of the Ark...” — as mentioned above. This is representative of the advantage of Torah scholars, whereby through Torah, their “**bodies are fire.**”

9.

BECOMING ONE THROUGH TORAH

We discussed earlier the difference between Torah and *mitzvos* regarding their effect on the “personal Sanctuary,” meaning, their effect on a Jew who studies Torah and performs *mitzvos*, and similarly, also on the “general Sanctuary” {the *Mishkan*}. This difference is a result of the difference between the ways in which the Torah and *mitzvos* are connect and united with G-dliness:

Regarding the Torah, it says,⁴⁷ “The Torah and the Holy One are entirely one,” meaning, Torah and G-dliness are **one**. They are not like two things conjoined to become one, but rather, they are {essentially} “one” — a single entity.

In contrast, *mitzvos*, which are Hashem’s will, are called “limbs of the King,”⁴⁸ analogous to human limbs. Although they **acquiesce**⁴⁹ to the soul, they are not **fused** with it. *Mitzvos* are commands given to people, whereas the Torah existed even before anyone studied it.

Therefore, when a Jew studies Torah, i.e., when he studies Hashem’s wisdom which is one with G-dliness, the person also **cleaves** to, and becomes **fused** with, Torah and G-dliness.

But when a Jew performs a *mitzvah*, and fulfills Hashem’s will and command, since a *mitzvah* is a command and a directive to Jews, this brings a person to a state of **bittul**⁵⁰ (he nullifies himself and fulfills Hashem’s will), but he does not **fused** with the *mitzvah*.

10.

BRINGING DOWN HASHEM’S ESSENCE

On this basis, we will better appreciate why achieving that “I will dwell within them” — (even the aspect of) making Hashem “an abode in the lower realms”⁵¹ — requires both Torah and *mitzvos*.

Hashem desired an abode in the lower realms — He wanted his Essence⁵² to reside here in this lowly physical world, the lowest of all the realms. This

⁴⁷ Cited in *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch 23, with attribution to the *Zohar*; cf. *Zohar*, vol. 1, 24a; *Zohar* vol. 2., 60a; *Tikkunei Zohar*, *Tikkun* 6, at the beginning; *Likkutei Torah*, *parshas Nitzavim*, 46a.

⁴⁸ *Tikkunei Zohar*, (at the end of *Tikkun* 31); quoted in *Tanya*, *ibid*.

⁴⁹ {In the original, “*batul*.”}

⁵⁰ {*Bittul* connotes self-nullification, humility, and the negation of ego.}

⁵¹ *Midrash Tanchuma*, “*Naso*,” sec. 16; see also *Bamidbar Rabbah*, ch. 13, sec. 6; *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 36; *Maamar Yom Tov Shel Rosh HaShanah* 5666.

⁵² See *Hemshech* 5666, p. 3 (end), et al.

requires two elements: a) something to draw down Hashem's **Essence**; and b) something to cause the effusion {of His Essence} to descend into the **lower realms**.

This, then, is the difference between Torah and *mitzvos*. Torah: Since, "Torah and the Holy One are entirely one," Torah **elicits His Essence**.⁵³ However, Torah does not cause Hashem's Essence to descend into the **lower realms**. This is because Torah, even the way it appears down below, is too lofty to be **enclothed** in lowly, physical objects.

In contrast, *mitzvos* are "limbs of the King." *Mitzvos* descend into, and are enclothed in, physical things. Even moreso, this is the whole point of *mitzvos*: Taking lowly, physical objects and refining and elevating them by using them to perform a *mitzvah*. This causes Hashem's Essence to descend and rest in the **lower realms**.

11.

THE ORDER

On this basis, we can also appreciate the flow and continuation between the two statements about the flames of *Gehenom* having no power over the Torah scholars and the sinners of Israel, and the *Gemara's* prior topic. [Additionally, we will also understand why these two statements are recorded specifically in tractate *Chagigah* and not in tractate *Eruvin*.]

The point of both statements is that we need to ponder the particulars of things. When we do, we will see how the sins of all Jewish people — Torah scholars and sinners of Israel alike — are only a "plating" that is subordinate to them, but their core is goodness and holiness.

This idea is a thematic continuation of the earlier topic in the *Gemara* regarding the Altars in the *Mikdash*. The Altars were not susceptible to impurity

⁵³ See *Tanya*, ch. 51-53; ch. 37 (end).

because a detailed examination of them discloses that their metal plating was secondary to their core.

As discussed, the indwelling of the *Shechinah* in the *Mishkan* was composed of two elements: Torah and *mitzvos*. For this reason, the *Gemara* records, immediately following the discussion about the Altars, this same idea as it applies to the personal Sanctuary within every Jew. The “personal Sanctuary” also contains the two elements of Torah and *mitzvos*. And these elements are the essence of every person, the Torah scholars and the sinners of Israel. This essence can never be nullified by sins. For sins are merely “plating” in vis-a-vis their essence.

On this basis, we can also appreciate the **order**. The *Gemara* first mentions the teaching regarding Torah scholars and only afterward, the teaching regarding sinners of Israel (even though the Golden Altar is mentioned only in the second teaching regarding the sinners of Israel). This order reflects the way in which a person conducts himself in general: “Torah study leads to the performance of the *mitzvos*.”⁵⁴ So, too, in our case regarding bringing about the presence of the *Shechinah* in the Sanctuary (both personal and general): First, Hashem’s Essence is elicited through Torah; and afterward, it is diffused into the lower realms through *mitzvos*.

-Based on talks delivered on the 20th of *Av* 5731 (1971) and on the *Maamar Padah BeShalom* 5732 (1971)

⁵⁴ *Bava Kama* 17a.