

Daily Service in Herod's Temple (Temple Institute)

See here for illustrations and text: http://www.templeinstitute.org/day_in_life/24_shifts.htm

The Division of Priestly Labor: 24 Shifts

The cohanim who were responsible for the daily service in the Holy Temple were divided into 24 separate shifts. These groups were made up of men who hailed from all parts of the land; the duration of each shift's duties was for 1 week. During that week, each respective shift would be entirely responsible to carry out all of the daily functions in the Temple. Thus, the priests took turns throughout the year in a manner that can be compared to military reserve duty - one would come to Jerusalem for his obligatory period of service in the Temple.

Divisions of Family Groups

Each of these 24 groups was further divided into 6 clans, or family branches. Every day of the week was presided over by one family group, and on the Sabbath the week's entire priestly shift worked together.

Those who were entrusted with the service in the Holy Temple attended to their duties with great joy and enthusiasm. Being a descendant of Aaron was indeed a great merit and honor, and they understood full well the importance of their work for all of Israel.

The priests were exceedingly zealous in their missions, and all wanted the opportunity to conduct the Divine services. There were only a specific number of daily tasks, however, and it was impossible for everyone to attend to these at once. In order to give each priest of the shift an equal opportunity to officiate in these holy vocations, a system was devised whereby all those who desired to serve would receive a fair chance to qualify.

The Daily Lotteries

The assignment of which priests may have the privilege and honor of carrying out the important Temple services was designated by special lotteries which was held each day in the Temple. All the priests of the family clan whose were serving that day would participate in this drawing, which was conducted by an official who was entrusted with this role.

Lotteries Were Conducted Four Times Daily

Each day, four separate drawings were held. Responsibility for the most important Temple services was designated at these gatherings, and while all the tasks could have been determined at one drawing, it was preferred to reassemble all the priests four times for separate drawings. Thus the courtyard was filled with the priests a number of times throughout the day, and this is considered a greater honor for the Master who dwells in that house... in keeping with the verse (Psalms 55:15), "... and we walked to the House of G-d in company."

We will illustrate the manner in which this was done, as we describe the first lottery of the day.

Beginning the Day with Ritual Purification

All of the priests who were eligible and desirous of performing the first service would rise up early and purify themselves by immersing in the water of a mikvah, a special pool of naturally-collected water (such as natural spring water, or rainwater) containing the amount of 40 se'ah (app. 340 liters). This immersion was necessary for everyone, even for a priest who was certain that he had not become defiled. On account of the great sanctity of the Temple, "no man may enter into the Temple court to serve there (or for any other purpose) - even if he is already pure - until he purifies himself again by immersing" (Yoma 3,3)

"All Arise!"

After having purified themselves in this manner, the priests would return to their quarters and await the arrival of the lottery supervisor. The exact time he would come to the Temple varied; thus those who wanted to participate in the first lottery had to make sure and rise early to purify themselves so they would be ready. He generally came before dawn, when an announcement rang out through the Holy Temple each morning: "Priests, arise and begin your duties! Levites, to your platform! Israelites, man your stations!"

This announcement was the job of one named G'vinay, who faithfully cried out the arrival of each new morning during the era of the Second Temple. Hearing his voice, all would rise and begin their sacred tasks. The Jerusalem Talmud comments that "King Agrippa could hear his voice even up to 8 parasangs away, and he rewarded him with many gifts,"(JT Shekalim 5,1).

The Overseer's Greeting

The lottery overseer arrives and announces himself by knocking on the door of the priests' chamber, the Place of the Fire, and when they open the door to greet him he bids them: "Whoever has immersed himself, let him come to draw lots!" to determine who will merit the first service of the day.

The priests make their way to the Chamber of Hewn Stone, where the lotteries took place. This was the same compartment which housed the Great Sanhedrin. Part of this chamber extended into the holy area, and part remained without. The law required that the lottery be held within the holy area, and it was in this part that it took place.

The First Lottery is Conducted

There, they stand in a wide circle, while the overseer stands in the middle. The drawing only took place in a circle, as opposed to the participants standing in straight lines or in some other fashion, lest one suspect that perhaps the official who chose the number should try in advance to quickly decide who the number should end with, so that he could favor a relative or loved one. The hat of one of those in the ranks is removed, in order to mark the starting point of the lottery. (This is another reason why the lottery was held indoors, in the chamber - since it was considered a mark of disrespect to stand in the Temple court without a hat).

A number would be picked and agreed upon, substantially higher than the number of men present. The overseer would then declare that each man present raise a finger. Then, they would count each extended finger (since the Bible forbids the counting of actual people... see Ex. 30:12; for this reason the census was conducted by the half-shekel donation), beginning with he who stands hatless and moving throughout the circle over and over again until reaching the number that had been pre-selected. The priest whom the chosen number falls upon, is he who has won the right to perform the task (some commentators even maintain that the official who chose the number and the one who removed the hat were two separate people, so that there could be absolutely no room for conniving or favoritism; i.e., no foreknowledge of where the number would land).

The Dawn Patrol

After the first lottery was concluded and a winner had been determined, the overseer unlocked the gate to the Temple court with the key he had been given by the priestly family elders. Within the gate of the Chamber of Fire, there was a smaller gate that opened into the court. He opened this smaller entrance, and went through it, out from the Place of the Fire and into the court, with all the priests following him.

The entire party enters into the court. All around the periphery of the court, there is a covered hall of columns. The priests, having exited their own chamber situated on the north side, now split into two separate columns of men. This is the dawn patrol, whose purpose is to check and see that everything in the Temple is in order; that nothing was disturbed during the night and all of the 93 sacred vessels which will be needed to perform the Divine service are accessible and in their proper place.

Torch-lit Sentries

Each column of the priestly patrol is led by a torchbearer (for the sun has not yet risen and it is still difficult to see. On Sabbath nights, they did not carry torches; candles were burning there from before the onset of the Sabbath, to illuminate the path for them - Maimonides). One group went east, and transversed the north and east sections of the balustrade; the second group walked westward, crossing a small portion of the northern side, plus the entire western and southern sides, and a little of the east.

The two rows of priests continued their patrol until they met up with each other at the Chamber of the Meal-Offering Preparation, where the High Priest's daily meal offerings were kneaded and baked. This chamber was in the eastern sector of the court, south of the Nikanor Gates. That group which walked eastward arrived at this chamber first, and they waited there for the arrival of the second patrol (arriving from the west) whose path was longer.

"Peace! All is Peaceful!"

Reunited at this chamber, the two columns greeted each other with the words "Peace! All is peaceful!" This was the signal that all is well and nothing had been found amiss.

Before exiting the Chamber of the Meal-Offering Preparation, the priests left several of their number there to begin readying the High Priest's meal offering.

The First Lottery - Removing the Ashes at Dawn

The first lottery each day determined which priest will carry out the very first daily task in the Holy Temple service - the removal of ashes from upon the altar.

About the Altar

The altar is the very heart of the Holy Temple, for all of the Divine service is centered around it: all of the daily and additional offerings, as well as the individual and congregational sacrifices. All of the major ceremonies in the Temple also take place in the vicinity of the altar: the Passover sacrifice, the bringing of the firstfruits on Shavuot, and even the rejoicing with the lulav branches on Sukkot all take place around the altar.

A Precise Location, From the Beginning of Time

The exact location of the altar is extremely precise, and has been established since time immemorial. The altar built by King David and King Solomon in the days of the First Temple, as well as the one built later in the era of the Second Temple, were both erected on the very same place: for this was the very place from which Adam, the first man, was created. The sages stated: "Man was created from the very spot which atones for him" (B'reishith Rabbah 14:6). Later, it was at this spot on Mount Moriah that Abraham bound Isaac upon the altar that he had built. Through that action, Abraham declared that this would be the place of G-d's Temple for all time.

About the Altar: The Horns and the Ramp

The altar was built as a perfect square and was quite large: it reached a height of 10 amot (app. 5 meters) and its width was 32 amot (app. 16 meters). It was constructed of two main parts: the altar itself, and the ascent ramp. Both were constructed of stones and earth. On top of the altar at its four corners, there were hollow boxes which made small protrusions or "horns." These horns measured one amah square and 5 handbreadths high, each (or, app. 18" x 18" x 15"). The Bible states that the altar may not be approached by way of steps, since this would be considered unseemly and immodest behavior for this holy place: "Do not climb up to My altar with steps, so that your nakedness not be revealed on it" (Ex. 20:23).

Three Fires Atop the Altar

Three separate piles of wood burned atop the altar. The largest of these arrangements was designated to receive all the sacrifices; the second provided the coals for the incense altar within the sanctuary, and the third was the "perpetual fire" which constantly burned on the altar, as the verse states (Lev. 6:5) "And a fire shall burn there on the altar constantly; it shall not be extinguished." A large pile of ashes formed in the center of the altar from the remnants of these fires. G-d commanded that the coals be removed from here, and brought to another location outside of the Holy Temple which was known as the "place of ashes."

The Service of Removing the Ashes

The service of removing the ashes is one of the positive commandments which relates to the outer altar. The Bible states:

"And the L-rd spoke to Moses, saying, command Aaron and his sons, saying: This is the law of the burnt offering: It is the burnt offering, which shall be burning upon the altar all night until the morning, and the fire of the altar shall be kept burning in it. And the priest shall put on his linen garment, and he shall put linen pants upon his flesh, and take up the ashes which the fire has consumed with the burnt offering on the altar, and he shall put them beside the altar. And he shall put off his garments, and put on other garments, and carry the ashes outside the camp to a clean place..." (Lev. 6:3-4)

Following the dawn patrol, the officiating priest who merited the task of removing the ashes now readies himself to fulfill this commandment. His fellow-priests warn him: "Be careful! Do not touch the vessel until after you have sanctified your hands and feet from the water of the laver!"

An Exhortation to Sanctity

They refer to the silver shovel which he will use especially for the purpose of removing the ashes. The actual intention of these words is that the priest should remember that he must not begin his task until he has washed at the copper laver. In spite of the fact that he is already pure, and has even purified himself through immersion, one is still forbidden to begin any sacred Temple service (or even to draw near to the altar) until he "sanctified" his hands and feet at the laver. Thus the verses state (Ex. 30:20-21): "From there, Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and feet; when they go into the Tent of Meeting, they shall wash with water so that they do not die; or when they come near to the altar to serve, to burn an offering made by fire to the Lord, so they shall wash their hands and their feet, so that they will not die. And it shall be a statute for ever to them, to him and to his seed throughout their generations."

Even though the priest is certainly diligent and God-fearing, and well aware of the necessity for this sanctification without being told, it is still incumbent upon his brothers to warn him... for he goes to the altar alone, and as he is only human, he may forget this aspect of his duty. Once they have cautioned him, he stands forewarned.

At this time the other priests also remind him that the special shovel he will use for the ashes (one of the 93 vessels whose position was checked during the dawn patrol) is kept in the corner between the western side of ramp and the southern side of the altar. It will be there waiting for him.

Entering the Hall Alone

Thus heeded, the priest is alone as he enters into the hall that leads into the Holy Temple's interior. No other man could accompany him, for entrance to the area between the hall and the altar or its ramp was forbidden to all but one who was engaged in performing the service. Since this particular aspect of the service was accomplished by only one priest, he entered alone.

He carried no light, but made his way solely by the light of the fire which burned atop the altar. Thus he could not be seen by his colleagues once he entered the hall... for the other priests stood on the eastern side of the court, and this priest now approached the laver which stood on the western side of the altar, to sanctify his hands and feet. Since the altar and ramp were quite high (10 amot - about 5 meters), it blocked all view of him.

This blackout in communications continued, between the priest of the first lottery and his fellows, until he reached the laver - and then, the others finally knew his position; not by sight, but by sound...

The "Muchni" of Ben Katin

What was it that the other priests heard? It was the "muchni of Ben Katin," the sound of a wooden wheel especially devised by one of the High Priests of the Second Temple by the name of Ben Katin. This mechanism was a large pulley shaped like a wheel by which the entire laver was lowered into a well at night, and pulled up in the morning filled with water.

About the Laver

"And you shall make a laver of copper, and its pedestal of copper..." (Ex. 30:18)

The laver, a large vessel which appears like a kettle, is actually the first vessel which the priests have contact with every day, for they must sanctify their hands and feet from its waters before commencing any sacred task in the Holy Temple.

The original laver which was constructed for the desert tabernacle in Moses' time included 2 spigots for releasing the water. In the era of the Second Temple, the High Priest Ben Katin, who fashioned the muchni, also fashioned 12 faucets for the laver, so that the entire shift who participate in the offering of the daily sacrifice may sanctify themselves at once.

The Laver Must Be Constructed of Copper

According to the verse above wherein God commanded Moses to make the laver, it must be constructed of copper. Although many other Temple vessels were constructed of costlier metals such as gold or silver, thus giving greater honor to the will of God - the laver was to be made exclusively from copper. Even later,

throughout all the subsequent generations of the Holy Temple, and even when the nation knew times of great prosperity and decorated the entire Second Temple in gold, the laver still remained of copper.

The Midrash (Bamidbar Rabbah 9:14) relates that the original laver was made from the contributions of the righteous women of Israel, who donated their shiny mirrors towards this cause. These mirrors, made of highly polished copper, were melted down and it was from these that the laver was created. This act of sacrifice was precious in the eyes of the Holy One - the fact that the women cared more about fulfilling the word of G-d than about their own appearance. He declared that the laver must be of copper throughout the ages, to invoke the merit of these righteous women, so the memory of their action will always be before Him.

The Reason for the "Muchni"

There is a specific concern of the laws of Biblical purity with regard to the copper laver, although the same problem can effect certain other vessels as well: anything left overnight in a sacred vessel becomes unfit for use in the morning. If water was left in the laver overnight, the priests would not be able to sanctify themselves with this water. Thus, the laver had to be emptied of its contents at the end of the day. But how could it be refilled quickly with enough water? In addition to this priest who officiates at the removal of the ashes, all 12 priests who will soon be offering the daily morning sacrifice must also wash their hands and feet at the laver!

Ben Katin, one of the High Priests who served during the era of the Second Temple, devised a system whereby this problem of ritual impurity can be circumvented: the mechanism of the muchni, meaning "machinery," or possibly derived from the word for "prepared." By emptying the laver of its contents from the previous day and then submerging in into a specially-made pool under the court, fresh water was obtained for the new day when the laver was hoisted up by the first priest in the morning - he who goes to remove the altar ashes. It was this sound of the laver being raised up with the muchni that could be heard by the other priests in the court, on the other side of the altar.

"The Time Has Arrived!"

When the other priests heard the sound of the muchni raising the laver, they exclaimed "The time has arrived!" Meaning, the time of sanctification has come, for our colleague has now reached the laver. This was the signal for them to prepare themselves to begin their tasks, as well.

Removing Ashes with the Silver Shovel

Once the officiating priest has sanctified himself, he takes the silver shovel from its spot and walks up the ramp, ascending to the top of the altar. There, he uses the shovel to stir the coals, and into it he collects a small amount from the ashes of the inner coals that have been thoroughly consumed by the fire. Most of the ashes remain atop the altar - the amount he is required to remove is minimum. But this action symbolically prepares the altar for a new day of Temple service.

Descending to the floor once again by way of the ramp, the priest turns towards the north and walks towards the east side of the ramp for a distance of "about 10 amot." At that exact location he places the coals from his shovel in a small pile on the floor, as the verse states (Lev. 6:3): "And he shall place them near the altar." This spot is known as the Place of Ashes, on the eastern side of the ramp, about 3 handbreadths from the ramp itself, and at a distance of 10 amot from the southern wall of the altar. The crops from burnt offerings of birds (see Lev. 1:16), the ashes from the inner (incense) altar, and the ashes from the menorah were also placed in this spot.

With that, the priest has concluded the first sacred task of the day in the Holy Temple, the service of the removal of the ashes.

Other Priests Continue to Prepare the Altar

Once the first priest has removed the small amount of ashes, the other priests can now attend to the more general preparation of the altar:

"When they see that their colleague has descended, they run to the laver and sanctify their hands and feet. Then they take the rakes and forks, and ascend to the top of the altar" (Tamid 2, 1).

These priests must now gather together any parts of the sacrifices which were not burned into ashes during the night; with the large forks (see I Sam. 2:14), they move these portions to the sides of the altar (since it is forbidden to remove any part of a sacrifice from atop the altar).

The "Apple"

After this has been done, the priests rake all of the ashes into the very center of the altar. There, a large mound of ashes called the "apple" stood, called so because of its round, domed shape. This was a very large accumulation of ashes made by the various offerings which were burned on the altar. Whenever it grew too large, these ashes were removed and taken to a location outside the city where they were buried. Some say this was done every day. However, on the festivals, when an abundance of sacrifices were burned on the altar, this mound was not cleared away but was allowed to grow exceedingly large - because it was considered "becoming for the altar" that so many sacrifices were burned on it.

Additional Duties Awarded By the First Lottery: Adding Wood for the Fire

In discussing the altar, we learned that three arrangements of wood burn atop it. Following the raking of the ashes into the "apple," the next task is to bring new wood up to the altar for the large fire. The sages have established that the same priest who figured in this first drawing and thus attended to the altar's ashes also received responsibility for several other tasks: He would fix the arrangement of wood on the altar, and bring up two smaller pieces of wood which were added to the first arrangement atop the altar. For it is a positive commandment to add two additional pieces of wood to the fire every morning, at the time the daily sacrifice is offered - as it is written (Lev. 6:5), "The priest shall kindle wood on them each morning."

What Type of Wood was Used for the Altar Fires?

With the exception of olive trees and grape vines, all species of wood is deemed by the sages as kosher, fitting to be used for the altar fires (Midot 2,3). These two were disallowed for two reasons: because they do not burn well, and emit large amounts of smoke; and also, because they are both important for the habitation of the Land of Israel - a primary concern for the sages. Since these two trees both give forth fruit that is essential to sustenance of the nation, they are given special status.

While it is permitted to use any other wood for the altar, it was customary to stock the arrangements with the branches of three particular types of wood: fig, walnut, and pine. These woods all burn well, and were therefore preferable for the altar.

The Second Arrangement: Fire for the Incense Altar

The Rectification of Adam's Sin

The choicest branches of fig were singled out and used for the second arrangement on the altar, the one from which fire is taken off and brought to the golden altar, within the sanctuary. Upon this altar the incense will be burnt, and it is the incense service which was the most beloved part of the Temple service to G-d (Zohar I 130:A). Some have written (see Rashi's comments on BT Zevachim 58:A) that it was for this reason the fig branches were specifically chosen for the incense fire - for it was through the fig tree that Adam, the first man, began to make a rectification for his sin, as the Bible states (Gen. 3:7), "... and they sewed fig leaves, and made for themselves loincloths." Everything in the Holy Temple functioned on many levels; one level is the symbolic. As the incense offering was so special to the Holy One, and helped effect a righting of His relationship with man, it is fitting that such an act comes about through the very element which began that process.

After both the large arrangement and the smaller one for the incense have been lit, the priests descend from the altar and return to the Chamber of Hewn Stone for the second lottery. (Maimonides also maintains that this same priest would bring a shovelful of burning coals from the outer altar to the golden altar located within the sanctuary, upon which the incense will be burned).

Background: The First Lottery Was Introduced Later As A Safety Precaution

The holy duty of removing ashes from the altar was not always determined by lottery. The Mishna records an incident which illustrates the great exuberance and enthusiasm with which the priests carried out the various

aspects of the Temple service. But we shall see that as the sages of the Mishna record, their zeal and desire to perform the commandments was so great, that it could have even become a liability!

Originally, this first daily task was entrusted to a particular priest. Rather, any priest from the particular family clan responsible for that day's service had the right to tend the service, if he so desired.

Why was this sacred role not designated by a lottery at first, as were all the other priestly assignments? The Talmud explains that it was not deemed necessary to conduct a lottery for this part of the service, since it is executed at dawn and those who wish to be eligible would have to rise especially early. Since the early hour meant that the priests would have to make due with far less sleep just in order to be present to participate at the drawing - which they may lose, in any event - instead, it was established that whoever wishes to officiate at this service may simply do so, with no prior arrangements. Thus the most zealous amongst them would make it their business to arrive.

Even so, at times more than one priest arrived to take up the position for removing the ashes, so that several contenders would have to vie for the privilege of fulfilling the commandment. And since there was as yet no lottery, how was the winner determined?

They would engage in a sort of contest to run up the altar's ascent ramp. The length of this ramp was 32 amot; (an a'mah is app. 1/2 a meter) whoever was first to reach the top 4 amot of the ramp closest to the altar itself was deemed to be the winner. In the event that two priests tied and came into this area at the same time, neither was the winner; rather, a lottery of the same type we have already described was then conducted amongst all the priests who were present.

Thus the service of removing the ashes continued for some time, until an incident occurred which illustrated the great love which the priests have for fulfilling this commandment - but also, the potential danger of the present system, which may inadvertently lead to bodily harm:

"Once it happened (Yoma 2,2) that two priests were eagerly running up the altar to tend the ashes, ascending at exactly the same pace. One pushed the other, and the latter fell and broke his leg. When the court saw that the situation was becoming dangerous, they established that the removal of the ashes, too, must be determined only by a drawing."

The Second Lottery

Upon returning to the Chamber of Hewn Stone after the wood piles have been arranged atop the altar, the priests once again gather before the overseer for the second daily lottery. This drawing would determine the distribution of a number of various assignments pertaining to the sacrifice and offering of the tamid, the daily sacrifice.

The overseer called out to the priests to draw for the following tasks:

- Which priest would slaughter the sacrifice;
- Who would receive its blood and dash it upon the altar;
- Who would remove excess ashes from the inner (golden) incense altar within the sanctuary;
- Who would attend to the wicks of the menorah, cleansing the cups of used oil and ash;
- Which priests (this involved 6 priests) would bring the parts of the sacrifice to the altar's ramp;
- Who would bring the fine flour for the accompanying meal-offering up to the altar;
- Who would bring up the High Priest's meal offering;
- And who would pour the wine libation.

13 Individual Priests Received Tasks in this Lottery

All told, 13 different priests received appointments in this lottery, for it was conducted in this way:

The priest upon whom the pre-determined number fell was the original, primary winner of the lottery... he receives the first duty, which is the actual slaughtering of the sacrifice.

Following his appointment, the distribution of each of the subsequent tasks are then determined according to the participants' proximity to the winner in the circle, in a fashion that could be compared to the concept of first, second, third prizes, etc.

Thus, the primary winner of the lottery will slaughter the sacrifice, and the priest in the circle standing immediately on his right will receive the blood in the sacrificial vessel, and dash it against the altar; and so on. The third in line receives the next assignment, that of removing the ashes from the incense altar; the fourth merits the privilege of cleansing the menorah.

The details of each of these duties will be discussed in due course. Let us examine each aspect of the service, step by step:

Initial Preparations

Immediately following the lottery, the last two priests mentioned above - those of the incense altar and the menorah - hurry to prepare themselves and the vessels they will require to carry out their respective services. These vessels are a golden basket which holds 2 1/2 kavim, (about 5 1/2 liters); an oil container, shaped like a large wine goblet and also fashioned of gold; and two keys. They give these keys to the Levite gatekeeper on duty; the Levites are the ones who are entrusted with guarding all of the Temple gates. They are appointed by a supervisor called "Ben Gever," who is in charge of opening the gates in the morning and closing them at night (Sheqalim 5,1).

Unlocking The Sanctuary Gates

Background: The Southern Opening

"This gate shall be shut"

These are the two keys to the great gate of the Sanctuary. However, they do not open the Sanctuary gates themselves. On either side of these doors, there were two small openings, similar to the openings which led from the Place of the Fire into the Court (see "The Dawn Patrol," page 7); one from the north (on the right-hand side of the gates) and one from the south (on the left). The southern opening was never opened, and no man ever passed through it. It was concerning this entrance that Ezekiel prophesied (Ez. 44:2), "And the L-rd said to me, this gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened and no man shall enter in by it, because the L-rd, the G-d of Israel, has entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut." This gate was to remain closed in order to show that not every doorway is needed solely for the purpose of the entrance and exit of men; the Holy One needs no gate to be opened for Him. This one remained closed, but yet the Shechina, the Divine Presence rested within.

These were the keys to the entrance on the north side of the gate. The Sanctuary gates were locked from the inside, and therefore it was necessary to go through these smaller doors and around to the gates from within. The Levite who has been appointed to open the Sanctuary takes these keys from the priests and, opening the small door to the right, enters first into an antechamber and then into the area of the Sanctuary itself. Reaching the great gates, he removes the door-bolt and the locks and opens wide the gates.

The Daily Sacrifice Cannot Begin Until the Gates are Open

The act of opening the Sanctuary gates has great significance, for the morning tamid sacrifice cannot be slaughtered and prepared for offering upon the altar until the gates have been opened. In fact, the priest who has been assigned to this task will not commence until he actually hears the sound of the great gates opening. For with regard to the peace offerings, the verse indicates (Lev. 3:2) "... and he shall slaughter it opposite the door of the Tent of Meeting," and the sages have derived that the same applies to every sacrifice: it must take place while the door are open, and not while they are closed, in order to fulfill the requirement of "opposite the door."

Jerusalem and Jericho: A Unique Spiritual Connection

The Mishna (Tamid 3,8) relates that the sound of the Sanctuary gates opening could be heard in Jericho - a

distance of about 25 kilometers from Jerusalem! But it is not taught that this is because the sound was particularly clamorous or deafening. On a mystical level, they are connected, for they are the two cities in which the Israelites' conquest of the Land of Israel began and ended. Joshua entered into the Land through Jericho; it was necessary that he conquer Jericho first. David's conquest of the Jebusites who dwelled in Jerusalem was the action which completed the establishment of the Land of Israel as the seat of G-d's glory.

In addition to the sound of these gates opening, the Mishna also lists eight other sounds which were made in the Holy Temple and heard all the way in Jericho - including the muchni of Ben Katin, the sounds made by some of the musical instruments and the Levites' song, and the voice of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement. It is even recorded that the fragrance of the incense offering could be smelled in Jericho... and it caused goats in that locality to sneeze! (ibid.)

Although we are provided here with but an illusion, these passages have great depth of meaning. What occurred in the Holy Temple reverberated in Jericho, for on a spiritual plane, Jericho is the mirror image of Jerusalem and thus they are related in many ways. More importantly, Jericho is called "the lock of the Land of Israel" (Bamidbar Rabbah 15:15) and thus it was imperative for Joshua to enter through her and conquer her first. When one is strong, the other is weak, and when Israel's enemies are in possession of Jericho, it is impossible for Israel to be in full possession of her land (R. Zadok HaCohen of Lublin, Dover Tzedek 73:A).

Determining the Exact Time for the Daily Sacrifice to Begin

The overseer now declares to the priests: "Let one go up to a high place in the Temple, to see whether the time has arrived to offer the morning sacrifice!" For Scripture specifies (Lev. 19:6) "In the day that you offer it..." - and the sages' tradition interprets this to mean that the butchering of the offerings may not be done at night. Therefore it was important to ascertain that the time of night was officially over, and that the day had begun according to the definition of Biblical law; namely, at dawn (since the commandment of offering the daily sacrifice becomes practical as soon as day begins, the diligent and zealous priests of the Temple did not want to be hasty and prepare the sacrifice too soon, while it is yet night; but neither did they want to tarry even momentarily once the proper time had arrived).

"The Day Has Dawned!"

If night has indeed begun to wane, the watchman cries out "Barkai! The day has dawned!" But it is still too early to commence with the daily sacrifice. After the initial declaration of barkai, signaling the first moments of day, the priests must wait for the second announcement: he in the high place will call out "the entire eastern horizon is illuminated."

Invoking the Merit of the Patriarchs

Like some consecrated and rarified code whose inner meaning is known to but a chosen few, the exchange continues between the watchman, at his elevated station, and those below in the courtyard. The feelings of anticipation swell within the priestly circle, as these men whose lives are sanctified to G-d wait for the first possible moment for the honor of fulfilling His will.

Once the eastern sky begins to shimmer, one of those down below will call up to his colleague: "Does the glow extend all the way to Hebron?" "Yes," the watchman replies.

The sages of the Jerusalem Talmud stated that the true design behind this part of the exchange was simply to mention Hebron, the city of the patriarchs of the Jewish people - Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For the very name "Hebron" is in itself synonymous with these righteous spiritual giants who are buried there in Ma'arat HaMachpela, the famed double cave which Abraham purchased from Ephron the Hivite (see Gen. 23). The name Hebron is derived from the Hebrew chaver, "friend," for Abraham was the beloved of G-d, the first true believer, who blazed a trail for every spiritual seeker who would follow in his footsteps and likewise embark upon a quest for a relationship with the one true G-d... as Ezekiel testifies, "Abraham was one" (Ez.33:24).

The lives led by these great men were so virtuous that their merit lives on forever, as echoed by the sages of the Talmud (BT Berakhot 18:A) who enigmatically stated that "even in death, the righteous are called alive." To invoke their name, to allude to their identity - even to mention the name of the city in which they lie - is to

recall their merit before the Holy One. "Does the glow extend all the way to Hebron?" That merit is strong enough to provide protection and grace for their children forever. "Yes," replies the watchman.

An Abundance of Caution

On a simple level of interpretation, there was another cause for waiting until the entire eastern sky was lit, until Hebron. It once transpired that the priests in the Holy Temple actually did make a mistake in determining the day's commencement - and the daily sacrifice was offered too early, unintentionally violating the Biblical requirement.

The Mishna in Yoma 2:2 relates that upon that occasion, it was a cloudy day, towards the end of the month (in the Hebrew calendar, lunar months are observed. At the end of the month, the moon rises in the sky close to dawn). The moon's light, which broke through the clouds and lit up patches of the sky, gave the impression that the dawn was at hand and that the eastern sky was aglow with the sunrise. The daily tamid offering was slaughtered, and afterwards the priests realized that this had been done while it was yet night - and was therefore invalid.

The Chamber of Lambs

Once it has been established that the proper time has come for offering the tamid daily sacrifice, and the gates of the Sanctuary are open, the overseer instructs the priests who will be attending to the service: "Bring a lamb from the Chamber of Lambs!"

The Chamber of Lambs was the Temple's store of lambs; at all times a minimum of 6 animals previously checked and certified as blemish-free were kept here for the daily sacrifices. It was required that each lamb be checked 4 days in advance of being sacrificed.

Although the lamb which had been selected for the tamid sacrifice had already been ascertained as being free of any disqualifying blemish, nonetheless as an added precaution - since the Bible strongly prohibits the offering of blemished animals - it is checked again now by torchlight, after its removal from the chamber. This is to preclude the unlikely event that perhaps something has befallen it since it was last examined, which would render it unfit.

After it has been selected, the lamb is given to drink before it is slaughtered, for this makes its skin easier to remove. It is watered from a golden vessel; everything done in the Temple was always conducted with as much honor as possible.

This chamber was located in the northwest corner of the courtyard, within the larger, dome-covered room known as the Place of the Fire which we have discussed. In each of that room's four corners there was a smaller chamber which opened onto the larger room.

The other three chambers were: The Chamber of Seals

Located in the northeast corner of the Place of the Fire, this was the office of Yochanan ben Pinchas, administrator of the seals. An individual who sought to bring a libation to the Temple would come here and pay for his libation, and receive a "seal" from Yochanan. This seal was a note which constituted proof of purchase; one would bring this note to Achya, administrator of the libations, and receive his needs. The amounts of oil, fine flour and wine which accompanied the various peace offerings and burnt offerings, differed for each sacrifice. This system was devised in order make it easier for those who came to the Temple to offer sacrifices: people could procure pure ingredients within the Temple, rather than bringing their own wine, etc., from home and taking the risk of it becoming defiled along the way.

The Chamber of the Fire

In the northwest corner. Here, the fire where the priests sat to warm themselves was constantly burning.

The Chamber of the Showbread

This is where those who made the showbread kneaded and baked the dough. It was located in the southeast corner of the Place of the Fire.

The Chamber of Vessels

After selecting a lamb from the Chamber of Lambs, the cohanim entered into the Chamber of Vessels, where the all Temple vessels were stored (a doubt exists among the sages as to this exact location of this chamber). There, they remove all the 93 sacred vessels of silver and gold which they will require to conduct all aspects of the Divine service during the course of the day.

The Lamb is Led to Slaughter

Now, the priest who received first place in the lottery and thus, the right to slaughter the tamid, leads the lamb to the area of the court north of the altar. He is followed by the 6 priests who will actually bring the parts of the sacrifice up to the altar's ramp.

This slaughtering area was especially equipped: it featured metal rings in the floor the court for holding the animals; 8 small stone columns, topped with wooden blocks and fitted with metal rings, for removing the skin, and marble tables for preparing the sacrifices to be brought to the altar.

Removing the Ashes from the Inner Altar

We have focused on the tamid sacrifice itself; while these aspects of the Divine service are transpiring, other activities which had been awarded by the second lottery begin as well. Once the gates to the Sanctuary have been opened, the other priests on the staff, who are involved in separate aspects of the morning service, may commence with their tasks.

Entering into the Sanctuary

The priest who is to attend the incense altar's ashes now enters into the Sanctuary, straight through the open gates. He carries the golden basket which we have mentioned above (p. 14) and makes his way into the holy place. Standing before the golden incense altar, he first places the basket down, on the Sanctuary floor. Then he removes excess ashes from the incense altar into his two palms, and transfers these ashes into the basket before him. When only a small amount of ashes were left over and the contents could not be gathered up into his palms in this manner, he used a small brush to sweep them straight into the basket. Concluding, he left the basket on the floor before him and exited - the basket would not be removed until later on in the service.

Removing the Ashes from the Menorah

At the same time, the colleague who has been assigned the next task enters into the Sanctuary in the same manner and approaches the menorah, which stands in the south side.

Background: About the Menorah

Biblical Verses - Ex. Chapter 25

"And you shall make a menorah of pure gold; it shall be made of beaten work: Its base, stem, and cups, spheres and flowers must all be hammered out of a single piece of gold. And six branches shall extend from its sides, three branches of the menorah out of one side, and three branches out of the other side (i.e., of its central branch). There shall be three cups made like almonds, as well as a sphere and a flower, on each and every one of the branches. All six branches extending from the menorah's stem must be this way. And in the menorah shall be four cups made like almonds, with their bulbs and flowers. And there shall be a bulb under

two branches of the same piece... their bulbs and their branches shall be made of the same piece... all shall be one beaten work of pure gold. And you shall make its seven lamps: and they shall light its lamps, that they may give light over against it...

"

About the Menorah: Details of Construction

Biblical Verses - Ex. Chapter 25

With these words, the Holy One instructed Moses with the construction of the Temple Menorah, the golden seven-branched lamp. This is a highly detailed, involved and intricate undertaking; yet these passages provide only a general description of the plan for executing the project. The Talmud goes into considerable explanation of its details, and every aspect of the lamp's creation and appearance is discussed. Some of these details include, for example: the menorah's height, measured at 18 handbreadths, and considered to be the height of an average man. Some questions exist with regard to the base, which was either triangular or hemispherical, and may have featured three small legs (Menachot 3, 7; Maimonides Laws of the Temple 3:2).

The Talmud (BT Menachot 28:B) compares the cups which were fashioned on the branches to "Alexandrian goblets," which are wide with a narrow bottom, like wine glasses. As to the menorah's branches, some opinions hold that they were hollow (Ibn Ezra), but the majority maintain that they were solid. The greatest controversy regarding the menorah concerns its basic structure, i.e., the shape and direction of its branches. Some ancient diagrams, as well as historical evidence, depict the menorah as having rounded branches; other opinions maintain that the branches rise diagonally, straight out from the middle.

Because the Bible requires that the menorah be constructed from one segment of metal, it was made from one "talent," or kikar of gold - one piece of pure beaten gold, as opposed to several pieces being joined together. Within the Holy Temple, the menorah stood inside the Sanctuary on the southern side, and its seven lamps were to be lit in such a manner, that they would all shine towards the center. Each day a priest would tend to its the lamps' flames, fixing and preparing the wicks and kindling them anew.

About the Menorah: A Spiritual Illumination

The menorah can be seen as occupying the most central role of all the sacred vessels, for it is the symbol of light - and the sages refer to Jerusalem as "the light of the world" (B'reishith Rabbah 59). One reason for this is the light of the Menorah, bursting forth from within the sanctuary. For the menorah's light was a spiritual, as well as physical, illumination. Thus the sages teach that the windows in the walls of the sanctuary were constructed differently than any other windows in the world. These were just the opposite of ordinary windows, for what is the normally considered the function of windows? To let the light in. But these windows were in order to let the light the out - to disseminate the spiritual light emanating from the Temple menorah out into the world. The Sanctuary's windows allowed the special ethereal light coming forth from the menorah to burst out to the world from within the hallowed hall.

The Service of the Menorah - "Improving" Each Flame

This priest now attends to the service of the menorah, which consists of removing used residue of spent wicks and oil from the individual lamps, and preparing new wicks to be kindled. He must also replenish the full measure of oil for each light, which is 1/2 of a lug.

Ascending to the Menorah

In order to accomplish his task, the officiating priest must stand at eye level so that he may work effectively, cleansing the lamps, placing new wicks and lighting them. But at 18 handbreadths, the menorah stands quite high. The priest ascended by way of three marble stairs which stood in front of the menorah, and lead up to where he could be level with the lamps, standing on the highest of these steps.

Three Steps - For Three "Ascensions"

These three steps correspond to three Biblical verses which mention "going up" in relation to the Menorah:

"And the L-rd spoke to Moses, saying, Speak to Aaron and say to him, when you raise up the lamps, the seven lamps shall illuminate the menorah" (Numbers 8:1)

"And you shall make its seven lamps, and you shall cause its lamps to rise so that they shall shine towards its center" (Ex. 25:37)

"And you shall command the Children of Israel to bring you clear illuminating oil made from hand-crushed olives, to raise up a constantly-burning lamp" (Ex. 27:20).

"Five and Two"

From Biblical exegesis, the sages derive that when attending to the improvement of the seven flames, the priest does not adjust all seven lamps at once. Rather, he must divide this task into five and two: upon entering the Sanctuary, if he finds that the two "eastern lamps," that is, the two flames on the eastern side, are still burning - in that case, he attends to the other five, cleaning out the ashes and filling them with new oil and wicks. He places the refuse into the golden basket.

Even if he enters to find that the other five flames are still burning from the previous day, he extinguishes them and replaces their oil and wicks, and then rekindles them. This is the service known as "Improving the Five Flames." He leaves off the other two lamps for now, allowing them to burn as they were. After the blood of the daily sacrifice has been tossed on the altar (and according to other opinions, after the incense service has been offered) he will return to the Sanctuary to likewise attend to these two lamps in the same fashion.

"The Western Candle"

One flame of the Menorah, the "western" lamp, burned perpetually. This candle was never extinguished, for the other flames were kindled from its fire. Concerning this flame the verse states, "raise up a constantly-burning lamp" (Lev. 24:2-3). This is the second flame from the end on the eastern side. It is related that until the death of the High Priest Simeon the Just, this flame burned constantly in miraculous fashion, which demonstrated to the world that the Divine Presence dwelled amongst Israel (Baraita, BT Shabbat 22,2): "Rava said, what is meant by the words (Lev. *ibid.*) outside the curtain of testimony?' The western candle is the testimony, for it was filled with the same amount of oil as the others, but is not extinguished."

If the priest finds that the two eastern lamps have gone out, he prepares them for rekindling and lights them from the other flames. And if he should ever find that all the flames have been extinguished, he re-lights these two from the fire atop the altar, and then kindles the remaining five. Before leaving the Sanctuary, he leaves the basket on the second step before the menorah, and then departs.

The Daily Sacrifice is Slaughtered

At this point, the tamid daily sacrifice is slaughtered, and the next six priests then merit to bring various parts of the sacrifice up to the altar ramp. The seventh priest brings the fine flour for the meal offering which accompanies the daily sacrifice.

The High Priest's Meal-Offering

The eighth priest, who is the twelfth in the lottery, merits to bring the High Priest's personal meal-offering up to the altar. This meal-offering consisted of 1/10 of an efah (app. 2 quarts) of flour mingled with oil in a pan and baked into 12 loaves. Although this was the High Priest's own, it is considered in many ways like a congregational offering. It was brought to the altar every day - half in the morning, and the remaining half in the evening. Some say that this means 6 loaves were offered in morning, and 6 in the evening; other scholars opine that the loaves were broken in half, with the first half being offered in the morning and the remaining half in the evening. Incidentally, this offering is also brought by every priest who begins to officiate in the Temple, on the first day of his service, as part of his inauguration ceremony. The ordinary, or lay priests, only brought it on the day they took office, but the High Priest would bring this offering every day. It is described in Lev. Chapter 6, where we read:

"And the L-rd spoke to Moses, saying: This is the offering that Aaron and his descendants must bring on the day that any one of them is anointed... it shall consist of 1/10 an ephah of wheat meal, and it shall be a daily meal-offering, with one half in the morning, and one half in the evening... "

Like every meal-offering brought by a priest, this was required to be completely burned on the altar, and not eaten (ibid. v. 15-16).

Once all the parts of the sacrifice, and the meal-offering, have been placed on the altar, they are salted... as G-d commanded, "You shall offer salt on all of your sacrifices" (Lev. 2:13).

The Wine Libation

Finally, the last priest in this lottery receives the task of bringing the 1/4 hin (app. 1 quart) measurement of wine which is poured out on the altar for the morning wine libation that accompanies the daily sacrifice.

Thus, a total of 13 priests receive appointments of Divine service in the second daily lottery. The entire staff needed to offer the daily sacrifice is now in place, and after these priests conclude their tasks, they return to the Chamber of Hewn Stone for the recitation of their morning prayers.

"May the Daily Sacrifice Be Found Acceptable Before You"

Upon returning to the Chamber of Hewn Stone, the lottery overseer instructed the priests that it was time to recite the "Hear O Israel" prayer, together with its corresponding blessing. They also recited the Ten Commandments, since these embody the main principles of the Torah (Maimonides).

After both the daily sacrifice and the incense offering are concluded, the priests will raise aloft their hands and deliver the "priestly blessing" upon the congregation of Israel assembled in the Holy Temple. In the meantime, they now recite these abbreviated prayers, as it was most fitting for those who have engaged in offering the daily sacrifice to now beseech G-d that the sacrifice should be pleasing before Him, accepted, and looked upon with favor.

An Extra Blessing for the Sabbath

On the Sabbath, an extra blessing was added, with which the outgoing shift of priests greeted the incoming one: "May He who causes His Name to dwell in this House, cause love, brotherhood, peace and friendship to dwell between you."

The Third Daily Lottery: The Incense Service

The third lottery was unique. This was held to determine who would have a chance to officiate at the incense offering, which according to Jewish tradition (see Zohar I 130:A, for example) was the most beloved part of the Temple service in G-d's eyes; it was influential in subduing evil, and its characteristic quality aided in amplifying the aspect of Divine mercy and benevolence in the world.

Background: About the Incense

The Bible states (Ex. 30:34), "G-d said to Moses: Take fragrances such as balsam, onycha, galbanum, and pure frankincense, all of the same weight, as well as other specified fragrances."

The incense which was offered in the Holy Temple was made from eleven different ingredients, only four of which are mentioned by name in the verse above. The identity of the other seven spices has been passed down in the Oral Tradition. As is the case with regard to many other areas of Temple study, the exact classification of these ingredients is the subject of serious research and scholarship. Many of these are rare, and some can be obtained only in exotic and distant lands.

The method, or recipe, for preparing the special incense offering from these ingredients was a closely-guarded secret, passed down from generation to generation within the ranks of one particular family known as Avtinas. In addition to the identity of the spices and the exact amounts and manner in which they are prepared, the

clan protected another important secret of their trade: The identity of an herb known in Hebrew as ma'aleh ashan, literally "that which causes smoke to rise." This herb has a quality which enabled the smoke from the incense to rise up to heaven in a straight column. In our own time, some have speculated that this may be the plant *Leptadenia pyrotechnica*, which contains nitric acid.

Background: About the Avtinas Family

The Avtinas family was appointed by the Sanhedrin to provide the incense, and they were exclusively responsible for its production, which was done in the chamber named for them, the Chamber of Avtinas. We have learned that this chamber was located in the south side of the court, over the "water gate."

The Midrash (Shir HaShirim Rabbah, 3:4) provides several poignant glimpses of the Avtinas family, which tell us something of the great dedication that burned in their hearts for their holy occupation:

"The Avtinas family were expert in the preparation of the incense spices, and knew how to use the herb ma'aleh ashan, which caused the smoke to rise. But the rabbis were critical that they refused to teach these things to others, and suspended them from office. The sages sent to Alexandria for skilled craftsmen, and engaged these others to try and duplicate the Avtinas' incense. These craftsmen were expert in the spices, but they could not make the smoke rise up in a straight column like the Avtinas family... the smoke from their incense immediately diffused and scattered.

When the sages saw this, they remarked that everything which the Holy One created, He created only for the sake of His own honor, as the verse states (Isaiah 43): 'Every one that is called by My name, for I have created him for my glory; I have formed him, yes, I have made him.' They returned the Avtinas family to their task, and doubled their wages."

"But the wise men asked them: 'What is the reason that you do not share the secret of your profession; why do you not want to teach others?'

They responded: 'Our fathers passed on a tradition to us, that one day the Holy Temple will be destroyed. We did not want to teach our secret, so that it does not fall into the wrong hands, the hands of idolators; and one day, the holy incense offering which we presented before the Holy One would then be used for idolatry.' When the rabbis understood that this was the reason for their silence, the Avtinas family was greatly praised."

"It was also told that no member of their family ever put on perfume. And when one of them would marry outside the family, they would make an agreement that the girl should never wear perfume. And all this was so that no man should ever suspect that they used the secrets of the holy incense for their own personal use, as the verse states (Numbers 32), And you shall be clean before G-d and Israel'."

"Rabbi Akiva related: Shimon ben Luga told me that once (after the destruction of the Holy Temple), he and a young lad - a descendant of the Avtinas family - were gathering herbs in the fields. 'I noticed that suddenly the boy wept, and then laughed. I asked him, my boy, why do you cry?' And he told me, 'For my family's honor, which has been diminished.' And why did you laugh?', I asked him. 'Because the greatest honor is reserved and established for the righteous in the future world. And in the end result, the Holy One will gladden his descendants, may it be speedily.'"

"I asked the boy, what did you see that reminded you of all this?' And he told me 'As we were gathering, I saw the plant ma'aleh ashan before me in the field.'

'Show it to me!' I exclaimed. But he told me, We have a tradition never to show it to any man.' Only a few days passed, and that child died. Thus he did not reveal it to anyone."

Background: About the Incense Altar

The Biblical Commands (Ex. Ch. 30)

"And you shall make an altar to burn incense; out of acacia wood you shall make it. It shall be square, one cubit long and one cubit wide, and two cubits high, including its horns. You shall cover it with pure gold, its top, its walls all around, and its horns; and you shall make a gold rim all around it."

"And you shall make two gold rings under the altar's rim on its two opposite side; they shall facilitate holding the poles with which it is carried. You shall make the carrying poles out of acacia wood, and cover them with a layer of gold."

"Place this in front of the curtain concealing the ark of the testimony - before the curtain concealing the testimony area where I commune with you.. Aaron shall burn incense on this altar each morning when he cleans out the lamps. He shall also burn incense before evening when he lights the lamps. For all generations, there will be incense before the L-rd at all times."

"Do not burn any unauthorized incense on it, and do not offer any animal sacrifice, meal offering or libation on it. Once each year, Aaron shall make atonement on the horns of this altar. For all generations, he shall make atonement with the blood of the atonement sacrifice once each year. This altar shall be a holy of holies to G-d."

Heavenly Reward

An extraordinary tradition relates that because it was so beloved to the Creator, He sought to reward those who attended to it in an unusual fashion, whose effects were manifest immediately: whoever officiated in the incense offering became wealthy, and enjoyed the blessing of Heaven-sent bounty and prosperity from then on. This concept is also reflected by the verse (Deut. 33: 10-11), "... they shall put incense before You... bless, L-rd, his substance, and accept the work of his hands... "

The Incense Service is Once in a Lifetime

Thus, in order to give all the priests an opportunity to avail themselves of this Divine blessing, and so that no one man should "monopolize" such favor by receiving it more than once, it was established that unlike the other aspects of the Temple service, each priest may officiate at the incense offering only once... and afterwards, he may not apply again. The priests who arrived at this third gathering knew that if they merit to perform this service, it will be an opportunity they shall have just once in a lifetime - for the winner will not even be allowed to participate in the drawing again.

"Newcomers Only!"

To paraphrase the language of the Mishna, the overseer of the lotteries would cry out: "Newcomers only! Whoever has never once offered the incense, let him come and draw lots!"

The Talmud expounds on this and states emphatically that in all the hundreds of years that the Holy Temple stood, no man ever repeated the incense service. This fact in itself translates into an amazing detail: there were so many priests in each family clan that a lottery gathering never once took place (and this scene was replayed every day over many hundreds of years) wherein everyone present had already performed this service!

The Fourth Lottery

The fourth daily lottery was once again opened for the participation of all priests. In fact, states the Mishna, since it follows the incense drawing which was only eligible to newcomers, by contrast the overseer of this lottery would now cry out "Both newcomers and veterans alike! Let all come to draw lots!"

This gathering now ascertained who merited to bring the parts of the sacrifice from the altar's ramp up to the top, where the sacrifices were consumed in the altar's fire. We will recall that as part of the second lottery, six priests merited to bring the parts of the daily sacrifice from the place where the sacrifices are slaughtered and prepared, and over to the ramp. However, the portions are left there on the ramp, on the eastern side of the lower half. The priest who now wins the fourth lottery is he who will actually bring these segments up to the altar (some claim that the same number of priests who brought the portions over to the ramp - six - now bring them up as well). He who merits to perform this task places the portions on the altar's fire, and pours out the

accompanying libations as well.

Storing the Priestly Garments at the Conclusion of the Four Lotteries

When the priests all arrived in the early morning to participate in the lotteries, they were all attired in the priestly vestments; in the event of meriting in the lottery, each would be able to commence with the sacred tasks immediately. But when the last lottery had been concluded, all those priests who did not receive any tasks in any of the lotteries, now remove their priestly garments and present them to the official in charge of the uniforms, to be put away.

The priests do this in the most modest fashion: they remove their sanctified garments without removing the pants, and put their own ordinary clothes on over the holy pants. Then, they remove the priestly pants from underneath, and replace them with ordinary pants. This way their immodesty was never exposed.

The priestly clothes are then placed into "windows," special cubbyhole lockers which were reserved for the effects of the members of each shift. Each window was labeled "pants," "turbans," etc. so that the items would be stored separately and not in a jumble.

The Service Continues: Taking the Incense Vessel

The priest who has received the task of offering the incense, now takes up the special vessels of the incense service: a large golden spoon which holds the amount of 3 kavim, and a smaller vessel, filled to the brim with the incense, and placed inside the larger vessel. This prevented any of the incense from spilling.

The Shovel

It is also the turn of he who received the task of "the shovel" to now bring the shovel of coals to the inner altar within the Sanctuary for the burning of the incense. First he must take up a silver shovel and ascend to the top of the outer altar, where he will stir the coals to and fro, and take some of the burning coals into the shovel.

Which Priest Merits the Shovel of Coals?

There is some question amongst the sages and commentators as to which priest merits the task of gathering coals for the inner altar. According to one opinion in the Talmud, this duty was not included in any lottery. Rather, says Rabbi Yehuda (BT Yoma 25:B), "the priest who has merited the incense service exclaims to the one who stands to his right at the time of the lottery: You have merited along with me, the service of the shovel!"

Maimonides, however, maintains that whoever won the privilege of the removing the ashes from the altar at dawn, also merited this service of the shovel as well (T'midim, 4:5).

In any event, this priest now takes the silver shovel up to the outer altar, as described above. When he descends with the coals, he transfers them into a golden shovel, and it is this one that he will take into the Sanctuary for the incense service.

Throwing the Magrepha

The two priests, he who will offer the incense and he who bears the shovel, now make their way together towards the Sanctuary. But before arriving there, in between the Hall and the altar, one of them takes a vessel called magrepha (either a rake-like vessel used for brushing away the ashes from the altar, or a type of musical instrument), and throws it down to the floor!

In the language of the Mishna (Tamid 5, 6) "the sound made by the magrepha falling was so deafening at that moment that in the entire city of Jerusalem, no one could hear his friend speaking!"

Throwing down the magrepha was a signal which served three purposes:

- 1). When the priests who were outside the court heard the sound, they knew that their colleagues within were about to prostrate themselves before the Divine Presence... and they ran to bow down with them.

2). When the Levites heard it, they knew that the Levite choir was about to enter the court and stand upon the platform, to begin their service of the daily song. They too, ran to join their brothers...

3). And when the Assembly Head (the official in charge of the Israelites who stand in the Temple to accompany the sacrificial service, as representatives of the entire nation) heard, he separated the priests who had become defiled, and stood them all together in the Eastern Gate. This way, everyone could see that they were impure and therefore could not serve in the Holy Temple, and no one would suspect that they had any other reason for not participating in the service.

At this point, these two priests now continue up the twelve steps that lead to the Sanctuary building. They are preceded by two other priests - those who received the tasks of removing the residue ashes from both the inner (incense) altar, and the menorah. He whose job was the altar's ashes enters first. Using the edges of the shovel, he arranges the coals upon the altar evenly, so that the incense will burn well. He then takes up the basket which he left there earlier, prostrates himself and exits, having concluded his task.

He is followed by his colleague, the priest who improves the menorah's wicks. He now enters, and if he finds the two easterly-most candles still burning, he extinguishes the outside flame so that he may replenish its oil and replace its wick, and then relight it. But he does not extinguish the "western candle," the second flame from the end - this flame he allows to burn continuously, the "perpetual flame," and from this he will rekindle the menorah in the evening.

If he should find that the "western candle" had gone out, he then cleanses its lamp as well, replenishing its oil and wick, and rekindles its light from the fire atop the outer altar. Afterwards, he takes up the vessel containing the menorah's refuse which he had left earlier on the second step; he prostrates himself once, and departs the Sanctuary.

The Incense is Placed Upon the Altar

The priest who attends to the incense service now enters into the Sanctuary, together with one colleague who will assist him. He removes the smaller vessel filled with incense, and hands it to his companion. The latter deposits some of the incense into the palms of the priest.

As mentioned above, the incense service only came about once in each priest's life - therefore, the priest who will now officiate has no prior experience. Before he entered, he was warned that he must be very cautious when placing the incense upon the burning coals. If he sprinkles it on the coals too close to the side where he is standing, he will be burned. He is instructed that he must sprinkle it with a motion moving away from himself.

When he receives word from the overseer that he may now begin, the priest begins to let the grains fall from his palms across the top of the altar, slowly, like one who sifts flour (Maimonides). When the entire chamber fills with the cloud of smoke, he prostrates himself and exits the Sanctuary.

The Conclusion of the Daily Service

After the priests have concluded their sacred duties within the Sanctuary, bowed down and departed, they exit the Sanctuary and stand upon the twelve steps which lead down to the area before the altar.

The priests who attended to the inner altar's ashes, the menorah's wicks, the shovel, and the incense, all stand to the right of their colleagues (who brought the parts of the sacrifice up to the altar). They hold all the vessels they have been using in their service: the golden baskets which hold the ashes and wicks, the shovel and the incense utensils; now they place these vessels down and face the congregation. Turning towards all the people who have gathered in the Court, they extend their hands and recite the Priestly Blessing:

- "May the L-rd bless you and keep watch over you;
- May the L-rd make His Presence enlighten you, and grant you grace.
- May the L-rd direct His providence towards you, and grant you peace."

"The priests will place My name on the Children of Israel, and I will bless them" (Numbers 6:38-42).

The Priestly and Levitical Watches

Maimonides states: "The tribe of Levi is completely separated, designated for the service of the Holy Temple; as the verses testify (Deut. 10:8), At that time, G-d designated the tribe of Levi to carry the ark of G-d's covenant, to stand before God and serve Him, and to offer blessing in His name. It is for this reason that Levi was not given any portion or inheritance along with his brethren. G-d is his heritage, as God promised him.'

It is a positive commandment for the Levites to be available and prepared to carry out the service of the Temple, unoccupied with other pursuits... their tasks are divided; some guard over the Temple, some are the gatekeepers, opening the Temple's doors at the start of the daily service, and locking them at the close of the day."

The Bible states, "... and they (the Levites) shall be your associates, and they shall be entrusted with responsibility for the Communion Tent" (Numbers 18:4).

With these words, G-d instructed Aaron in the commandment of establishing watches in the holy place. Unlike ordinary guard stations or "checkpoints," these watches were not for the purpose of guarding against intruders such as enemies or robbers, but rather to glorify the honor and dignity of the House of G-d. If one would not expect to find the palace of an ordinary king or nobleman to be left without an honor guard, how much moreso would such a practice be fitting and proper in the House of the Creator himself, the living G-d of Israel.

Some authorities maintain that these watch stations were manned round the clock, but most others opine that the Temple watches only applied to the night.

Altogether, watches were kept in 24 locations throughout the Holy Temple. The majority of these - 21 - were manned by the Levites, and 3 by priests. Tractates Tamid and Midot enumerate the locations of these various watches throughout the Temple, and most of the information in this chapter is based on information contained therein, and expounded upon by various commentators of the Oral Tradition. It may also be of interest to the reader to note that the scholars of the Temple Institute of Jerusalem have researched and documented the precise location of these stations, using a computerized blueprint of the Temple complex itself.

Location of the Priestly Watches

The three locations where the priests stood watch were the Chamber of Avtinas, the Chamber of the Spark, and the Place of the Fire.

The first two locations were structures built into the side of the court like upper lofts:

In The Chamber of Avtinas the incense which was offered up on the golden incense altar in the sanctuary was prepared, and it was called after the priestly Avtinas family, who were entrusted with the sacred task of compounding the ingredients and creating the incense for the service. According to descriptions in the Jerusalem Talmud, this chamber was located on the south side of the court, directly over the "Water Gate" (called so because it was through this gate that the golden flask of water was brought up to the Temple from the Shiloach on Sukkot, during the Festival of the Water Libation).

The Chamber of the Spark was located in the north of the court. Here, a small fire was kept burning to provide the fire which burned perpetually atop the altar.

The watches in both the Chamber of Avtinas and the Chamber of the Spark were manned by young priests who had not yet reached the age of their official Temple duties.

The Place of the Fire was likewise situated on the northern side, east of the Chamber of the Spark. This was not an upper loft, but a very large room covered with a domed roof. A great fire was kept burning here all the time, and some say that the officiating shifts of priests would warm themselves around it. As they performed their tasks barefoot on the bare marble floors of the Temple, they were subject to cold. But most opinions hold that the priests who returned from immersing themselves for purification would afterwards warm themselves in this chamber.

Night in the Holy Temple: Sleeping Arrangements

The Place of the Fire also housed the sleeping facilities for those on duty in the Temple, like the priestly dormitory. Whichever family division would be responsible for the next day's service come morning's light would sleep in this room the night before. Some would sleep on the floor, and some on specially-constructed "bunk beds:" wide slabs of cut stone were built into the walls of this rooms, extending out in alternating, overlapping fashion like steps, one on top of another, so that none extended over the other.

The elders, being more sensitive, would sleep on these stones slabs; the younger priests slept on the floor.

The Keys to the Gates of the Temple Court

Since each family clan held exclusive authority for the Temple itself on its day of service, these elders also kept the keys to the Temple court gates with them, in this chamber.

"Within the Place of the Fire, there was an opening in the floor that measured one square amah (about a half-meter square). This opening was covered over by a marble slab which could be removed. A metal ring was fixed into the slab, and it could be removed by pulling on the ring. On the inside of this marble tablet, a chain was attached. This chain held the keys to the gates of the court."

"When the time came to lock the gates of the court (at the close of the day), the priest who guarded the chamber raised up the marble slab, took out the keys, and locked the gates of the court from the inside - from where he stood at his watch, within the Place of the Fire. Outside, a Levite stood guard, for at the Place of the Fire, the priests watched from within and the Levites from without. After he finished locking the gates, he returns the keys to their place, covers up the stone with his cloak, and sleeps on top of the spot" (based on Midot 1:9).

Location of the Levitical Watches

The levites guarded the additional 21 stations, in the following locations:

To begin with, five groups of levites stood guard at the five gates leading into the Temple Mount.

Background: The Temple Mount Gates

A brief description of each of these five gates:

The double "Hulda Gates" on the southern side of the Temple Mount. These two gates were called after Hulda the prophetess (see II Kings 22:14), who sat between them during the days of the First Temple, and told her prophecies to the people entering and exiting the Temple. These two gates served as the main entrance and exit for the Temple Mount. Since the majority of the buildings and activities were on the southern side of the complex, most of the traffic was through this side, and therefore two gates were necessary to accommodate the flow of people.

The "Kiponos" Gate on the western side. This gate was probably named after the benefactor who contributed the funds for its construction, although some authorities maintain that the word is derived from the Greek for "garden work," and that a rose garden was located in the proximity of this gate. This gate also facilitated entrance and exit.

The "Tadi" Gate on the north. Unlike the others, this gate was not used for gaining access to and from the Temple; in fact, in the language of the Mishna, "it served no purpose at all." According to some opinions, it was built exclusively for decorative purposes, and added in beautifying the edifice of the Temple. But other scholars maintain that a priest who inadvertently became defiled (and thus, would have to cease his service, and exit the holy areas of the Temple in order to purify himself by immersion) would exit the Temple unobtrusively through the Tadi gate (as indicated by the Aramaic translation of the word, which carries a connotation of "modesty" or "secret"). There are other possible explanations for this name as well.

The "Eastern" Gate, located on the east side of the Temple Mount. This gate featured a massive illustration of Shushan, capital of ancient Persia, which was created in honor of the Persian kingdom that ruled in the Land of Israel during the first days of the Second Temple (having granted permission for the rebuilding of the Temple).

It was through this gate that the High Priest would escort the red heifer and the entire entourage of priests and assistants to the "Mount of Anointment" (the Mount of Olives) to the place where it was burned for the process of ritual purification.

Other Levitical Watch Stations

In addition to the five gates, four shifts of levites also stood guard duty at the four corners of the Temple Mount, on the inside corners (along the mount's wall). Another five shifts watched at the five gates to the court, and four, at the four outside corners of the Temple Mount.

The remaining 3 watch stations consisted of one shift in the Chamber of Sacrifices; one shift in the Chamber of the Curtain, and one behind the Holy of Holies.

The Chamber of Lambs was one of 4 small chambers located within the 4 corners of the larger Place of the Fire, mentioned above. It was situated in the southwest corner, and in it were lambs which had been checked and determined to be free from blemishes, designated for the daily sacrifices.

The Chamber of the Curtain was used by those who weaved the curtains in the Temple. Its exact location is unknown.

A Description of the Nightly Routine for the Levitical Watches

The sages of the Mishna (Midot 1:2) provide a vivid description of the nightly routine in the Holy Temple with regard to these watches, and the manner in which they were rendered.

"Each night, the supervisor of all the watches patrols the Temple Mount, inspecting each and every watch. Burning torches are borne before him (in order for the guards to recognize that it is he), and if perchance he encounters a watchman who does not rise up before him, the supervisor cries out to him: "Peace be unto you!" But if the supervisor receives no reply, it is obvious that the guard has been caught asleep. He would then rap the sleeping levite with his stick; the supervisor was even empowered to set his covering on fire (as a punishment for not carrying out his duty properly).

Everyone within earshot who heard the cries of the unfortunate sleeper would say what is that noise in the court? Oh, it is the sound of a levite who has been rapped, and his covering set alight, for he has fallen asleep on his watch.'

Rabbi Eliezer ben Yaakov, a contemporary of that era (and the author of Tractate Midot), related that once, my mother's brother was found sleeping, and his covering was singed'."

The Daily Song of the Levitical Choir

Although the Levites sang upon many occasions in the Holy Temple, one of their most important and basic musical tasks was the daily song. Each day, the Levite choir stood atop the platform located in the Court of Israel facing the outer altar, just inside the Nikanor Gates, and sung a special song for that particular day. On the Festivals and New Moon, different songs were sung. All of these songs, with their instrumental arrangements, were performed while the morning and evening wine libations were poured out on the altar by the officiating priests. Thus the Levites accompanied the Divine service of the priests with a service of their own. They complimented each other; in many ways, the Levitical songs were as important a Temple function as the priestly service of the sacrifices itself, for the one could not function without the other. Each day, during the wine libation, the overseer of the choir stood atop one of the horns of the altar and signaled to the Levites "with a kerchief in his hand" to begin their song. At three points in their song, they would pause, when the priests would sound the silver trumpets and all the people in the court prostrated themselves before the Presence of G-d.

The order of the daily songs have a deep significance, and there is a mystical connection which each song had for the particular day it was sung. The Oral Tradition has preserved the listing of the Levitical songs that were sung each day in the Holy Temple, and various commentators and sages have explained some of the connections which can be seen between these songs and the days of the week.. (Based on Tamid 7:4)

The Daily Song of the Levitical Choir

On Sunday, the first day of the week, they sang Psalm 24, which begins with "The earth is the L-rd's, and the fullness thereof." For Sunday is the first day of creation; on this day G-d acquired heaven and earth for Himself, and established sovereignty over His world.

On Monday, the second day of the week, they sang Psalm 48, which begins with "Great is the L-rd, and highly to be praised in the city of our G-d, in the mountain of His holiness." It was on this day that the waters were divided, and a firmament was put in place between the upper and lower waters (Gen. 1:6-7). The rabbis explain that this psalm was chosen for this day because G-d departmentalized His creation and reigned over it (see the psalm in its entirety).

On Tuesday, the third day of the week, the Levites sang Psalm 82, beginning with the words "G-d stands in the congregation of G-d; He judges among the judges." For on this day of creation the dry land became visible. Upon this land, the judges stand to render their decisions. As the sages put it, "G-d caused the land to be revealed through His wisdom, thus preparing the world for His congregation."

On Wednesday, the fourth day of the week, they sang Psalm 94, which begins with "O L-rd G-d, to whom vengeance belongs; O G-d, to whom vengeance belongs, shine forth!" This was the day wherein the sun, moon and stars were created... and in the future, He will exercise judgement and exact vengeance from those idolators who worship these heavenly bodies, as if they were gods themselves.

On Thursday, the fifth day of the week, they sang Psalm 81, beginning with "Sing aloud to G-d our strength: make a joyful noise to the G-d of Jacob." The living creatures were created on this day, and one who sees these creatures give praise to their Creator. For truly, when a person perceives the myriad variations and diversity of G-d's handiwork, he is filled with awe and wonder at His great wisdom.

On Friday, the sixth day of the week, the Levites sang Psalm 93, which begins with "The L-rd reigns, He is clothed in majesty." Creation was crowned and completed on this day, the last of the original six days of creation. Today man was created, and only he can recognize G-d's true greatness. Of all the vastness of creation, man alone has the capacity to understand the Creator's rulership, and accept it upon himself to be the king's subject.

On the holy Sabbath, the Levites sang "A psalm, a song for the Sabbath day" - Psalm 92. The sages of Israel taught that this psalm is a song for the future, rectified world... "the day which is complete Sabbath tranquility, for everlasting life."

The Talmud explains this according to a deeper understanding: the world was only created with the intention that it was to last for only 6,000 years, and in the 7,000th year it would be destroyed - at which time, only G-d Himself would remain. This mystery is alluded to by Isaiah the prophet (Is. 2:12) as "the L-rd alone shall be exalted on that day." This song was sung with reference to that Sabbath day, the 7th one thousand-year period... for one day of the Holy One is like a thousand years (Psalms 90:4).

The Six Daily Songs Correspond to Six Thousand Years

The Zohar teaches that every day, the Levites' song corresponded to that thousand-year period: On Sunday, it stood for the first; on Monday, the second, etc. Thus:

Six Thousand Years of Creation

The first day corresponds to the earth's first thousand years, when the earth was complete in its "fullness;" this was the time until the flood, when humanity enjoyed the full benefit and pleasure of the earth's bounty. Therefore the Levites sang "The earth is the L-rd's, and the fullness thereof."

On the second day of the week, the Levites sang "Great is the L-rd, and highly to be praised in the city of our G-d, in the mountain of His holiness." For it was during this historical period that Mount Moriah was chosen by G-d to rest His holy presence amongst mankind forever.

The third day's song was "G-d stands in the congregation of G-d; He judges among the judges." For it was in the world's third thousand-year period that G-d presented the Torah to Israel, and rested the Divine Presence in their midst.

On the fourth day the Levites sang "O L-rd G-d, to whom vengeance belongs; O G-d, to whom vengeance belongs, shine forth!" For this day corresponds to the epoch when the Temple was destroyed, and the Holy One has vowed to bring His vengeance against those who were responsible.

The fifth day's song was "Sing aloud to G-d our strength: make a joyful noise to the God of Jacob." For during this entire thousand years, Israel was without the Holy Temple; no means of serving G-d remains for her save singing.

On the sixth day, G-d alone will reign, and the kingdom will be His. And the holy Sabbath which is sanctified by G-d and sacred to Israel is an allusion to the 7,000th year - the future rectified world.

These songs, and the lore surrounding them, deserve to be examined in greater detail, for they constitute an entire treatise for study in their own right. While this is not the place for such a treatment, we can already sense that they are replete with meaning and significance, and that each song is inexorably connected to its corresponding day by an intricate web of thought and symbolism.

In Conclusion

On this note, it is fitting that we conclude our study with one particular Midrashic teaching that deserves our particular attention.

According to tradition, the Second Holy Temple, like the first, was destroyed at the conclusion of the Shabbat - on Saturday night. Both Josephus and the Midrashic writings describe how even though the flames of destruction raged all around, and the blood of the slain flowed through the Temple, the priests nevertheless continued to serve atop the altar, and the levites did not cease to sing, right up until the very end.

Yet despite the fact that the actual destruction of the Holy Temple took place on a Saturday night, the Midrash records that at those moments the Levites sang the song for Wednesday - "O L-rd G-d, to whom vengeance belongs; O G-d, to whom vengeance belongs, shine forth!" Why did they not sing the song for that day of the week, which was Saturday?

Now according to the insight from the Zohar which we have quoted above, we can understand that the levites were addressing their song to the destruction itself, and consoling Israel by reminding her that God has sworn vengeance against His enemies. In this context perhaps their song was even meant to "remind" G-d to keep His word, and to "shine forth" at the proper time, to manifest Himself in the garb of Divine vengeance.

But now that we have examined the close relationship between each day of the week and its respective song, and seen something of the great insight and understanding which the sages of Israel possess, perhaps we can shed new light on this perplexing question... based on our own contemporary knowledge, and the wisdom and experience that we have acquired from hindsight in our own times. For although the sages of yore were great and inspired, we in our own generation, are privy to new understanding to which those great men had no access; in short, we have new evidence.

For on that fateful evening of destruction, it is true that the priests and levites consoled each other and all of Israel with the knowledge that G-d will avenge His honor; perhaps their song summarized the entire epoch. It is certainly possible that they chose to remind the Holy One of his own vow, as well.

But while all of these explanations are acceptable, it is also quite possible that as the Levites stood atop the platform in that place of sublime inspiration and holiness for the last time, all of a moment they received the most profound flash of prophetic revelation...

And they prophesied, they saw with perfect clarity of vision, that although the terrible destruction now loomed all around them on this Saturday evening, the continuation of their service would most certainly come about as well. The day would come when the Holy Temple would be rebuilt. Though it may be far off in the distance, it would certainly transpire, for it is a Divine promise...

At that moment they could see that it would truly come to be. The rebuilding would happen, even if it happens very slowly, and in stages, one step at a time. For like the morning dawn, "such is the way of Israel's redemption. In the beginning, it progresses very slowly... but as it continues, it grows brighter and brighter" (JT Berakhot 1:1).

So too, the Levites perceived that the long process of Israel's redemption, hinging on the rebuilding of the Holy Temple, would begin again on a Wednesday... thus they sang the song of Wednesday, for they sang not of destruction, or revenge, but of promise continuation, renewal and rebirth:

The Levites saw that Jerusalem and the Temple Mount would stand desolate for nearly two millennia... but they would be regathered by Israel once again on a Wednesday: Wednesday, June 7th, 1967 was the day they saw, and perhaps this day could be considered the first step towards the rebuilding of the Holy Temple. For this day marked a turning point in Jewish history, and began a new era, which progresses in our own time, and moves towards the great destiny of the Jewish people, to be a light to the nations and a people who walk with G-d in their midst.