



D'var Torah Parashat Tzav / Shabbat HaGadol – April 1, 2023

By Arnie Zar-Kessler

- I. Shabbat HaGadol
 - a. Timing vis Pesach
 - b. Tradition of the Rabbi's talk
- II. Aligns this year – as it often does – with Parashat Tzav
 - a. Second portion in sefer Va-Yikra
- i. And even though, these portions take up almost one-third of the Chumash
- ii. The time frame is less than one year
- III. Pointing to its crucial importance in shaping the identity of B'nei Israel
 - a. Continues the detailing of the laws of sacrifices
 - b. With guidance for the entire community
 - c. And – in this portion – greater focus on Aaron and his sons
 - d. And thus, represents something of a challenge to link its contents to the upcoming Hag
- IV. Of all the verses that detail the instructions, one verse in particular caught my attention – 6:11
 - a. In the listing of the various sacrifices,
 - b. In describing the of the meal-offering, the text states,
 - i. 'Every male of the children of Aaron shall eat it
 - ii. An eternal portion for your generations
 - iii. From the fire-offerings to HaShem
 - iv. Whatever touches them (these) shall be holy'
 - c. This is a very compelling idea sort of embedded in text related to qualities of grain, carrying out of ashes, uniforms for the priests and

the various types of offerings for the various reasons – sin, gratitude, etc.

d. Perhaps this verse gives us a path to see not only sacrifices but even much of the aspiration and mechanics of holiness differently

e. Perhaps this – in the words of the poet – ‘there is a crack in everything. That’s where the light comes in’

f. *Maybe there is a place for transmission of holiness – even possibly a contagion of holiness – ‘all who touch it shall be made holy’*

V. We don’t need reminders that ours is a tradition replete with transmissions – almost entirely about impurity

a. A short list of what transmits tameh – (impurity) includes

i. Metzora – the leprosy like disease that requires all levels of prettification in order to rid one’s self and one’s house of it

ii. A man’s ‘nocturnal emissions’

iii. Women’s menstruation –

iv. Giving birth

v. The one-sixtieth amount of dairy to render a meat broth traif

vi. One could argue that hametz

vii. And most of all death

1. The prohibition of eating from a carcass not ritually slaughtered

2. The rituals of purifying a dead body

3. Kohanim prohibited from entering a cemetery

4. All about the contaminating capacity of death in our lives

b. It’s no surprise then that many Jewish congregations have been the most fastidious about mask wearing and other precautions in a very contagion

c. *Thus, even as helpful as it we might wish it to be, there is no such parallel list of contaminates of tehora – of purity and purification*

VI. And, oh my, how we need a contagion of holiness

a. That would spread uplift / transformation / hope / happiness

b. You’ve read as much – and likely more than I have

i. On the rise of mental health issues

ii. On the rise in suicides

iii. Drugs as a leading cause of death as life expectancy shortens

c. And a very recent one from the U of C that asked people about how happy they were

- i. Given the three choices, (sort of happy, pretty happy, not so happy)
- ii. Abrupt shift in the pretty happy and the not so happy
- iii. In the last fifteen years or so
 - d. Perhaps with all the recent real contagion all around us, it sometimes feels like we're living in a contagion of despair
 - e. Even Karl Jung wrote extensively on the impact of affect, later employed in developing the idea of '**the contagion effect**' in social psychology

i. 'nothing is so infectious as affect'

ii. and..

VII. But, alas the Rabbis did not confronted this possibility and did not see such an avenue form this verse, or the few others that offer a similar message and potential meaning.

a. Based on *Ha'amek Davar* and Harchev Davar,

i. The derashah of Chazal finds yet another meaning. When non-kodesh matter is brought into contact with kodesh to the extent that the former absorbs some of the latter, the non-kodesh must now be governed by the same halachos as the latter. If substance of a valid korban is absorbed, the non-kodesh material becomes subject to the same limitations as the korban. In other words, if the korban can only be eaten for a limited amount of time in a certain place, the non-kodesh that has absorbed the ta'am of kodesh is now subject to the same limitations and restrictions.

ii. In other words, the mundane can take on some of the trappings of holiness without becoming elevated itself.

- iii. Chaggai the prophet is instructed by Divine command to pose a question to the kohanim of his generation, whose conduct left much to be desired: "If a person carries meat that is tameh in the corner of his garment, and then he touches bread with that corner, and the bread touches the stew, and [the stew touches] the wine or oil or any other food – does that food become sanctified? The kohanim answered and said, "no."
- iv. Chaggai continues, "If one who touched a dead person would touch all of these, would they become tameh?" The kohanim answered, "They would become tameh."
- v. ... Apparently, kedushah and tumah do not behave entirely symmetrically. Tumah is contagious; kedushah, not necessarily so.

- b. The Rabbis looked at the word, 'yikdash'
- i. Which most of us still working with elementary Hebrew would understand as 'will be made holy (or 'holy-fied')
- ii. The Rabbis understood as The sons of Aaron must make themselves holy (in order to merit the partaking of the offering)
- iii. It may be something of a stretch of a word play, but it serves to deny the possibility of holiness becoming contagious
- iv. **And, alas, there is no meaningful line of commentary that supports the idea of such a contagious property of holiness linked to this verse, or to the sacrifices themselves.**

- c. The Rabbis were thus in alignment with the governing authorities of that time
- i. Think of it – if someone could claim immunity by simply grabbing the altar, say
- ii. And thus have impunity for any of their misdeed, then the system of accountability would be compromised
- iii. -any scoundrel (pick your own) could exploit the quasi-legal system; unimaginable!

VIII. Stuck as I was – and as we might be – I am grateful to my friend and colleague, R. Dov Bard, who reminded me

- a. Of the opening pages of Heschel's between God and Man, in which Heschel states the reminder anyone who attempts a drash – Shabbat HaGadol or otherwise to recall, paraphrasing here
- i. **In order for the Torah to be a living Torah, it must address basic human questions and needs**
- ii. Or as my teachers' teacher, Joseph Schwab wrote of curriculum – one must seek the substantive structures of any discipline in order to discover, 'what are the basic questions' the endeavor hope to address?
- b. And thus, we can ask, once we strip away our aversion to animals being slaughtered
- i. To the burning and smoke
- ii. And all the other outward manifestations of the sacrificial cult,
- iii. *What was the human need that the sacrifices addressed?*
- iv. And, by extension, *The human need we still carry with us*

IX. The world the of the people – not only b'nei Yisroel – lived in was one of true chaos

- iii. Our cooking
- iv. Our study
- v. Our purchase of afikomen gifts
- vi. In whatever ways we bring ourselves fully to this holiday
- vii. ...bring ourselves fully to the sacred task at hand.
 - b. As Rabbi Ellie Monk teaches
 - i. *...unlike evil, which is easily spread,*
 - ii. ***By contrast holiness with goodness, require real penetration to be transmitted to others.***
 - c. May we – and even though it stretches the traditional understanding of the text -
 - i. May we be instruments
 - ii. No, **may we be vehicles for transmission of**
 - iii. A form of a contagion of holiness, of uplift, of transformation
 - d. And may all we touch, and those who are touched by us
 - i. Be made just a bit more renewed.
 - ii. A bit more happy
 - iii. A bit more holy
 - iv. Kein y’hi ratzon –
 - v. So may it be
- vi. Shabbat Shalom and Hag Kasher v’sameakh.

(Baruch Levine)

Lord spoke to Moses saying or Eliezer center there and the priests remove the fire pads they become sacred fire opinions and rosewood lives. Lee made hammer sheets as plating for the altar. Once they've been used for offering to the Lord that becomes sacred that can serve as a warning to the people of Israel that he has a priest took the copper fire pencils for use for walking by those who died in the fire or hammering and deflating for the

introduction to Leviticus Leviticus as part of a long narrative extending from Exodus chapter 25 to Numbers chapter two, what might be called when the tabernacle stood assignment begins with God's instructions to Moses to provide a portable residence in Michigan or Mikdash to Oliver holy place for the Divine Presence and place for God to meet

regolith moslem passes laws. tabernacle narrative stands at the center of the Torah and although it takes up almost a third of the Torah it covers the time span of less than a year. This indicates its crucial importance all the institutions that ultimately shape Israel's national religious existence, the law, the priesthood, the forms of temporary worship and the tribal foundation of society. I said to have been ordained status during this brief period in Israel's history. The tabernacles narrative as a stage in Israel soldier at Sinai

kisses direct continuation of what preceded it the end of Exodus, and the narrative at the end of the Vegas continues directly into numbers. Chapter one takes up the story. From the time of the Divine Presence entering the tabernacle on the first of May son in the following Exodus. The first group of laws on sacrifice chapters one through seven are given on the first day of the month. The day the Presidents entered the Tabernacle.

The complex interaction of narrative and law displayed in Leviticus is defining literary feature of the Torah and the priestly document in particular.

Finally, nowhere outside of Leviticus, is there a clear articulation of the reason for the Jewish people's existence? God is entered into a relationship with the Israelites so that they may perpetually sanctify his name. The role of the world and in history is to attest to his existence to publicize his oneness and to advertise his greatness. This their command to do by worshipping and keeping his laws when they failed to do so. His name was profane. That is his famous diminishing his reputation targets. When they get when they live up to this charge and duty he and his name are sanctified. The statement explicit in chapter 22, verses 31 through 33. And implicit throughout the book is really fundamental Jewish belief and customs through all generations.