

DARCHAI NOAM - דרכי נועם

“Its ways are ways of pleasantness”

(Mishlei 3:17)

Parashat Tetzaveh
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darchai.noam@gmail.com
www.darchai-noam.com

How can the Parasha help us grow this week?

Tetzaveh – Serving Hashem with all of our faculties

In this week's Parasha of Tetzaveh we learn about the special items of clothing that were made for the Kohanim and the Kohen Gadol. The Parasha then describes the inauguration ritual whereby Aaron and his sons were consecrated into Divine service as Kohanim. This consecration process was known as מילויים (miluim), a seven day ritual that culminated on the 1st of Nisan. From that point on, Aaron and his sons and their descendants would forever be Kohanim to Hashem.

Let us focus on one aspect of the miluim – the placing of the blood:

*You shall take the second ram and Aaron and his sons shall lean their hands upon the ram's head. You shall slaughter the ram, take some of its blood and put it upon the cartilage of Aaron's ear and upon the cartilage of the ears of his sons, and upon the **thumb of their right hands** and the **big toe of their right feet**, and you shall sprinkle blood on the altar all around. (Shmot 29:19-20)*

We see that the animal's blood was placed on the Kohanim's ear, hand, and foot. This raises two questions. Why was blood used? And what is the significance of these body parts? In his commentary to this pasuk, Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch answers both of these questions. First, he explains that these body parts represent the three main faculties that a human uses to interact in the world. One uses the ear to hear and understand. The hands are used to perform creative activity. And one uses the feet to move about in the world and strive to advance. Rav Hirsch explains that all three faculties are 'consecrated' to demonstrate that the Kohen is dedicating all his faculties to the service of Hashem.

Furthermore, Rav Hirsch explains that the blood represents the unholy animal. However, the blood is elevated when it is sprinkled on the altar and thereby offered up to Hashem in holiness. The slaughtering of the ram represents the cessation of utilising one's faculties for their own egotistical purposes, that is, in serving their animal soul. The placing of the blood on the body parts, the same blood which is to be sprinkled on the altar, represents the rededication of one's faculties to the service of Hashem.

The right ear, thumb and toe were used for the ritual because the right side is usually the stronger side. Thus, we see that the Kohanim are to dedicate all their faculties and the best and strongest aspect of each of those faculties. (Those of us who are left-handed¹ do not have to feel left out. The 'right' side of the body often just refers to the stronger side. Indeed, many of the mitzvot that need to be done with the right hand are actually performed by a lefty with their left hand because that happens to be their 'right' or stronger hand.²)

The entire tribe of Levi were also inaugurated into the service of Hashem through a special ritual. After immersing in a mikveh and being fully shaved, the Leviim were brought to the Ohel Moed. Aharon then

¹ Or left footed for that matter. This week's interesting fact - the two don't always go together. Right handers can be left footers and vice versa.

² Actually, there are two categories of mitzvot that relate to right vs left. The first category is dependent on which side is subjectively stronger or weaker. Thus a lefty would use their left hand because that is their stronger side and this gives more honour to the mitzva (like in the case of tefillin which are placed on the weaker arm and tied with the stronger hand). The second category is dependent on kabbalistic reasons to favour the right side (such as covering one's eyes with one's right hand during kriyat Shema). In such cases a lefty would act in the same manner as a righty. For those who are interested, there is an excellent short book by Rabbi Paysach Krohn called "Yad Eliezer" which explains these issues in more detail.

lifted each Levy up as a wave offering before Hashem and they were thus dedicated to the service of Hashem.³

What about the 'ordinary' Yisrael⁴? In a well-known halacha in the Mishneh Torah, the Rambam explains that anyone can become dedicated to Hashem.⁵

Not only the tribe of Levi, but any one of the inhabitants of the world⁶ whose spirit generously motivates him, and he understands with his wisdom to set himself aside and stand before Hashem to serve Him and minister to Him and to know Hashem, proceeding justly as Hashem made him, removing from his neck the yoke of the many reckonings which people seek, he is sanctified as holy of holies. Hashem will be His portion and heritage forever and will provide what is sufficient for him in this world like He provides for the Kohanim and the Leviim.

Thus, anyone can become dedicated to the service of Hashem, and the Rambam compares such a person to the holy of holies. This expression is used by to refer to the holiness of Aaron, the Kohen Gadol⁷. The Rambam is thus implying that every individual can reach a similar level of kedusha.

This concept that anyone can reach the highest levels of kedusha can be seen most remarkably in the purification process of the metzora who was struck with tzora'at. The metzora had been guilty of antisocial behaviour such as speaking lashon hara. He was banished from the camp and placed into quarantine and prohibited from interacting with society. After doing teshuva and healing, he still needed to undergo a purification ritual before he could return to his normal life.⁸ This ritual had many parallels with the inauguration rituals of the Kohanim and the Leviim, including the placing of the blood on the ear, the thumb of the right hand and the big toe of the right foot. In this sense, the Metzora, who had made serious mistakes in his life, was now being compared to Aaron the Kohen Gadol! One message learned from this is that the reformed metzora could become as holy as the Leviim, the Kohanim and even the Kohen Gadol, if only he too dedicates his faculties to the service of Hashem.

If this concept applies to the Metzora, then how much more so does it apply to each and every one of us. We can all dedicate all of our faculties to Hashem and thereby reach the spiritual heights of the Kohen Gadol. What does it mean to dedicate all of your faculties to Hashem? If you have money, you can give tzedakah. If you have intelligence, you can learn Torah. If you have the ability to speak, you can recite brachot, daven and share words of kindness and encouragement to others. Whatever skills and resources you have can be dedicated to serving Hashem, each one at their own level. And then all of our faculties can be elevated and holy.

Let's try something this week:

1. Take some time to do a cheshbon hanefesh and figure out your resources and your skills. What do you have available to you?
2. Ask yourself the following question and try to answer it honestly. How much of your resources and skills do you devote to your own interests, and how much can and should be devoted to Hashem instead? Then make a gradual change towards redirecting your resources towards holiness.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Ledder

* To subscribe please email darchai.noam@gmail.com

³ Bamidbar 8:6-11.

⁴ Of course, no Jew is 'ordinary'. You are all special!

⁵ Hilchot Shemittah, Chapter 13, Halacha 13. I have paraphrased the translation from here: https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1007178/jewish/Shemita-Chapter-13.htm. The Rambam brings this halacha at the very end of Hilchot Shemittah, which deals with the Shemittah year when everyone would lay down their tools of agriculture and spend the year learning Torah. The end of such an amazing year of being immersed in Torah is an appropriate time for this halacha to apply.

⁶ Apparently this could apply to non-Jews as well.

⁷ See Chronicles I 23:13.

⁸ See Vayikra 14:2-20.