

Shavua Tov

Weekly Parsha

A Rood Awakening! Torah Commentary
By Glenn McWilliams

Torah Portion: *Tzav* **צו** “Command”

As he hath done this day, so YHWH hath commanded to do [all seven days], to make an atonement for you.

Ka'asher asah bayom hazeh **tzivah YHWH la'asot lechaper aleychem.**

Scripture for Study: *Vayikra (Leviticus) 6:1 – 8:36*

In Vayikra, our last Torah portion, we discussed the erroneous nature of the Church’s teaching that our need for the Torah has been done away with due to the advent of Messiah and the consequential destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. The testimony of the Brit Chadasha clearly contradicts this false teaching and reveals that there is still a need for believers to understand the Temple, the priesthood, and the sacrifices. We need only look at the testimony of the apostles to confirm the truth of this matter.

“Know ye not that ye are the temple of Elohim, and that the Spirit of Elohim dwelleth in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16)

“Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to Elohim by Yeshua Messiah.” (1 Peter 2:5)

“But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light.” (1 Peter 2:9)

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of Elohim, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto Elohim, which is your reasonable service.” (Romans 12:1)

From the very beginning of the Sinai Covenant, the expressed purpose of the calling of the children of Israel was the priesthood of all Israel.

“Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine: and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.”
(Exodus 19:5-6)

Clearly the calling to the priesthood is the calling of all Israel. As priests, the children of Israel would become the intermediaries, intercessors, and Torah teachers for the rest of the world. By keeping the Torah, Israel would embody the image of YHWH in the world. To this end, Israel is chosen not for privilege, but for responsibility. As a kingdom of *cohanim*, Israel would be the inspiration, example, and living Torah to the nations of the world; therefore, it is of the utmost importance that we, as the children of Israel, understand what is contained in the book of the *cohanim*. We should understand that as the children of Israel are the embodiment of YHWH to the world; the *cohanim*, Aaron and his sons, are the personification of YHWH for the children of Israel. As Aaron (the *Cohen Gadol*), his sons (the *cohanim*), and the Levites carry out their unique calling within the community of Israel, they represent a microcosm of what we are to become. The revelations given to them are also for us; consequentially, they should be studied carefully. Notice the contrast between the opening sentences of Vayikra and Tzav:

And YHWH called unto Moses, and spake unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them...”
(Leviticus 1:1)

And YHWH spake unto Moses, saying, Command Aaron and his sons, saying...”
(Leviticus 6:8-9)

While the words of our Torah portion are specifically addressed to Aaron and his sons, we must remember that what they are commanded to do serves as our example. By understanding the instructions to Aaron and his sons, we too learn how to fulfill our calling to be a kingdom of priests unto the world. Let us therefore turn our attention to the teachings of YHWH as given to our mentors.

Given that our Torah portion is specifically addressed to the *cohanim*, it should not surprise us that it begins with a teaching about the burnt offering, the altar, and its fire. Here we take note of another contrast between this week’s opening verse and that of Vayikra. When YHWH instructed Moses to address the children of Israel, He told Moses to simply “speak” to the children of Israel. This week, however, when addressing Aaron and his sons, the *Cohen Gadol* and the *cohanim*, YHWH instructs Moses to “command” them. Some might think that since the *Cohen Gadol* and the *cohanim* are to be the spiritual beacons for the children of Israel, it would not be necessary to address them with the more forceful act of commanding them. On the other hand, one might assume that since the children of Israel are not held to the same spiritual standards, they would need the stricter language of a “command” to bolster their obedience. Instead, we see the opposite. The Talmud explains this peculiar use of language in direct connection with the teaching of the whole burnt offering. The Talmud teaches that because the *cohanim* receive no portion or benefit from this particular offering, for it all ascends in smoke, future generations may become less enthusiastic about this offering in favor of those offerings

which designate a portion for the *cohanim* and their households. It is therefore taught that YHWH added the weight of commandment to the burnt offering to keep it from falling to neglect.¹

We may also be somewhat surprised that while the position of *cohen* is one of the highest in all of Israel, the portion begins not with the lofty services of the *Cohen Gadol* in all of his pomp, but instead with the mundane task of removing the ashes from the altar. Within this simple action there is a great teaching about how we are to carry out this special calling. Humility is always the proper attitude of service. Yeshua, our *Cohen Gadol*, has invited us to learn this necessary attitude from him.

“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you; and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart.”
(Matthew 11:28-29)

We see this message of humility further emphasized in the changing of garments required in the process of fulfilling this function.

“And the priest shall put on his linen garment, and his linen breeches shall he put upon his flesh, and take up the ashes which the fire hath 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 forth the ashes without the camp unto a clean place.” (Leviticus 6:10-11)

It may seem peculiar to many believers that doing such a mundane task would require us to put on our good, priestly garments, yet doing so will reveal our great respect for YHWH and His altar. It is our way of showing YHWH that even this mundane service is a great honor for us. As the psalmist wrote,

“For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my Elohim, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.” (Psalm 84:10)

Indeed, no matter how mundane the task, to be chosen by YHWH for such a service is a great honor. Again the psalmist wrote,

“Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth, and causeth to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy Temple.” (Psalm 65:4)

We should also realize, however, that this honor of being chosen for responsibility is a gift of grace and not a cause for arrogance. It is for this reason that the Torah demands that we put on our good, priestly garments when we approach YHWH and His altar, but that we put on other, humbler garments when we go out among the people with the ashes. By keeping our priestly garments for YHWH, we are assured that we are indeed seeking to honor the Holy One by our

actions and not rob Elohim by stealing His glory for ourselves. It was in this same spirit that Yeshua taught, saying,

“Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward. But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: than thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret Himself shall reward thee openly.” (Matthew 6:1-4).

The teaching of the ashes reveals to us another important lesson. The ashes are the residue of the evening *tamid* offering that burned on the altar all night. These ashes belong to yesterday's offering; thus before bringing our new offering, we must first remove the residue of yesterday's labors. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch eloquently teaches:

“While the ‘taking up’ of the ashes is meant to introduce the new day’s service in terms of what was accomplished on the preceding day, as a permanent reminder of these past accomplishments the removal of the ashes from the camp conveys the thought that, at the same time, the Jewish nation must begin its task anew each day. The start of every new day summons us to set out upon our task with full, renewed devotion, as if we had never accomplished anything before. The memory of yesterday’s accomplishments must not detract from the energy with which we must do our duty today. Thoughts of what has already been accomplished can spell death to what has yet to be done. Woe to him who rests upon his laurels in smug complacency; who does not begin the work of each new day with new, complete devotion as if it were the very first day of his life’s work.”²

The prophet Ezekiel likewise reminds us not to rest our hope upon yesterday's righteousness.

“But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all My statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgression that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. But when the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked man doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.” (Ezekiel 18:21-22,24)

We should realize that our relationship with YHWH is eternally in the present. We cannot rely upon yesterday's efforts; we must live and walk before YHWH today.

Along with the command to remove the smothering ashes of yesterday's offerings are two other commands; one positive and one negative. After removing the ashes from the altar, the *cohanim* are commanded to keep the fire burning. This is the positive commandment to tend and feed the fire that it may continue upon the altar of YHWH. The counterpart of this commandment, stated in the negative, is to not put the fire out. This is a prohibition against doing anything that

should cause the fire to cease or be extinguished. It is apparent that hidden within these commandments is much more than just a simple, literal meaning.

YHWH declared through the prophet Jeremiah, "Is not My word like as a fire?"³ The Holy One also spoke to Jeremiah, "Behold, I will make My words in thy mouth fire..."⁴ When Jeremiah refused to speak the word, he finally conceded, "But His word was in mine heart as a burning fire..."⁵ Moses also compared the Torah to a fiery law when he said, "From His right hand went a fiery law for them."⁶ The psalmist likewise wrote, "There went up a smoke out of His nostrils and fire out of His mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it."⁷ We should recall that when the Holy Spirit fell upon the *talmidim* of Yeshua on the day of Pentecost, it was described as "tongues of fire."⁸ John the Baptizer declared of the Messiah,

"But he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire." (Matthew 3:11)

Of himself, Yeshua declared,

"I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled?" (Luke 12:49)

Clearly in all of these passages the fire is a symbol of the living Torah. So, in our Torah portion today the *cohanim* are commanded to keep the fire, i.e. the Torah, burning. This is the source of our life and our light. John wrote of this living Torah in the prologue to his gospel:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with Elohim, and the Word was Elohim. The same was in the beginning with Elohim. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth." (John 1:1-5, 14)

The psalmist likewise wrote,

"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Psalm 119:105)

This light, lamp, and fire are the living Word being written on the hearts of the children of Israel by the Holy Spirit that they may fulfill their calling to be the embodiment of YHWH upon the earth, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. The Eternal One declared through the prophets:

"But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith YHWH, I will put my Torah in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts." (Jeremiah 31:33)

"And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them." (Ezekiel 36:27)

Thus we witness that when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon Yeshua's *talmidim*, they immediately began to teach the Word. To this end the apostle Shaul warns us not to quench the Holy Spirit.⁹ As a kingdom of *cohanim*, it is our responsibility to fan the flames of faith and not to quench them. This is true not just in our own hearts but also in the hearts of those whom we teach. We must be careful that we do not allow our zeal to blow so much hot air on the spark of faith in the heart of another that we would extinguish the flame altogether. We have instead been instructed by the Torah to place the wood in an orderly fashion;¹⁰ in other words, we must feed the fire and not smother it. This means we must be conscious of how much our brother or sister can consume, and not overwhelm them with more than they can handle. Again, our goal is not to impress them with our wisdom, knowledge, or understanding, but to bring them to the altar of YHWH where they too may draw near to the Creator and Holy One with a willing offering (*korban*) from their heart.

It is here at the altar with the heart of another in hand being raised in love to the Holy One that we fulfill our calling to be a valuable part of the kingdom of *cohanim*.

The rest of our Torah portion is largely dedicated to the inauguration of Aaron and his sons into the office of *cohen*. This process is described in great detail, and takes place over a seven-day period of time. This seven-day period of dedication should recall for us the story of creation. It was in seven days that YHWH ELOHIM created the heavens and the earth.¹¹ So it is in our portion that we see that the purpose of the *cohen* is to restore the brokenness of creation. It is during these seven days that the *cohanim* prepare for the service which will take place on the eighth day. When the Temple, the altar, and the priesthood are all functioning, it will be the eighth day, the new day, the eighth millennium, and we will then realize the revelation of the new heaven and new earth. Like Shaul, we should realize that we have been given a ministry of reconciliation.¹² We are to dedicate ourselves to this ministry of reconciliation and strive to restore the image of YHWH ELOHIM in this world. It is His light that will draw the seventy nations to Himself. It is our duty to keep the fire of the living Torah burning so that the world may see His light and return to the One who has created them. This is the calling not just for Aaron and his sons, but for all the children of Israel as a kingdom of priests.

SHAVUA TOV!

¹ Kiddushin 29a : The Chumash, Stone Edition, Artscroll Series Pg.568

² The Pentateuch, Samson Raphael Hirsch, Judaica Press Inc. New York 1997 Pp. 393-394

³ Jeremiah 23:29

⁴ Jeremiah 5:14

⁵ Jeremiah 20:9

⁶ Deuteronomy 33:2

⁷ Psalm 18:8

⁸ Acts 2:3

⁹ 1 Thessalonians 5:19

¹⁰ Leviticus 1:7

¹¹ Genesis 1:1ff

¹² 2 Corinthians 5:18