

Kol Rina  
*An Independent Minyan*  
Parashat Tzav  
March 19 2022 \*\*\* 16 Adar II, 5782

Kol Rina – An Independent Minyan, is a traditional egalitarian community. We are haimish (homey/folksy), friendly, participatory, warm and welcoming. We hold weekly services in South Orange as well as holiday services and celebrations which are completely lay led. We **welcome all** to our services and programs from non-Hebrew readers to Jewish communal and education professionals.

Tzav in a Nutshell

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/2858/jewish/Tzav-in-a-Nutshell.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2858/jewish/Tzav-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

**G-d** instructs **Moses** to command **Aaron** and his sons regarding their duties and rights as **kohanim** (“priests”) who offer the **korbanot** (**animal** and meal offerings) in the **Sanctuary**.

The fire on the **altar** must be kept burning at all times. In it are **burned** the wholly consumed ascending offering; veins of fat from the peace, sin and guilt offerings; and the “handful” separated from the meal offering.

The **kohanim** eat the meat of the sin and guilt offerings, and the **remainder** of the meal offering. The peace offering is eaten by the one who brought it, except for specified portions given to the **kohen**. The holy meat of the offerings must be eaten by ritually pure persons, in their designated holy place and within their specified time.

Aaron and his sons remain within the Sanctuary compound for seven days, during which Moses initiates them into the priesthood.

Haftarah in a Nutshell: Jeremiah 7:21-28; 9:22-23.

[https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article\\_cdo/aid/651957/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/651957/jewish/Haftarah-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

This week's *haftarah* touches on the subject of sacrifices, the main topic of the week's Torah portion.

G-d tells the prophet Jeremiah to rebuke the Jewish people, saying that His primary intention in taking their forefathers out of Egypt wasn't the sacrificial offerings, rather in order that they observe the commandments. But despite the fact that **G-d** repeatedly dispatched prophets to admonish the people, "They did not obey nor did they incline their ear, but walked according to [their] own counsels and in the view of their evil heart, and they went backwards and not forwards." G-d further informs Jeremiah that the people will also not hearken to these words that he will speak to them now.

The *haftarah* concludes with G-d's admonition: "Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom, nor the strong man boast of his strength, nor the rich man boast of his riches. But let him that boasts exult in this, that he understands and knows me, for

I am G-d Who practices kindness, justice and righteousness on the earth; for in these things I delight, says G-d."

## **FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

[Violence and the Sacred: Tzav from the Jonathan Sacks z'l Legacy Trust](https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/tzav/violence-and-the-sacred/)  
<https://www.rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/tzav/violence-and-the-sacred/>

Why sacrifices? To be sure, they have not been part of the life of Judaism since the destruction of the Second Temple, almost two thousand years ago. But why, if they are a means to an end, did God choose this end? This is, of course, one of the deepest questions in Judaism, and there are many answers. Here I want explore just one, first given by the early fifteenth-century Jewish thinker, Rabbi Joseph Albo, in his *Sefer Halkkarim*.

Albo's theory took as its starting point not sacrifices but two other questions. The first: Why after the Flood did God permit human beings to eat meat? (Gen. 9:3–5). Initially, neither human beings nor animals had been meat eaters (Gen. 1:29–30). What caused God to, as it were, change His mind? The second: What was wrong with the first act of sacrifice, Cain's offering of "some of the fruits of the soil" (Gen. 4:3–5)? God's rejection of that offering led directly to the first murder, when Cain killed Abel. What was at stake in the difference between the offerings Cain and Abel each brought to God?

Albo believed that killing animals for food is inherently wrong. It involves taking the life of a sentient being to satisfy our needs. Cain also knew this to be true. He believed there was a strong kinship between humans and other animals. That is why he offered not an animal sacrifice, but a vegetable one. His error, according to Albo, is that he should have brought fruit, not vegetables – the highest, not the lowest, of non-meat produce. Abel, by contrast, believed that there was a qualitative difference between people and animals. Had God not told the first humans: "Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves in the ground"? That is why Abel brought an animal sacrifice. Once Cain saw that Abel's sacrifice had been accepted while his own was not, he reasoned thus: if God, who forbids us to kill animals for food, permits and even favours killing an animal as a sacrifice, and if, as Cain believed, there is no ultimate difference between human beings and animals, then I shall offer the highest living being as a sacrifice to God, namely my brother Abel. According to this reasoning, says Rabbi Albo, Cain killed Abel as a human sacrifice.

That is why God permitted meat-eating after the Flood. Before the Flood, the world had been "filled with violence." Perhaps violence is an inherent part of human nature. If humanity were to be allowed to exist at all, God would have to lower His demands. Let humans kill animals, He said, rather than killing human beings – the

one form of life that is not only God's creation but also in God's image. Hence the otherwise almost unintelligible sequence of verses after Noah and his family emerge on dry land:

Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings upon it. The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in His heart, "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood..."

Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them...

"Everything that lives and moves will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything..."

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made humanity."

Gen. 8:29–9:6

According to Albo, the logic of the passage is clear. Noah offers an animal sacrifice in thanksgiving for having survived the Flood. God sees that human beings need this way of expressing themselves. They are genetically predisposed to violence ("every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood"). If society are to survive, humans will need to be able to direct their violence towards non-human animals, whether as food or sacrificial offerings. The crucial line to be drawn is between human and non-human. The permission to kill animals is accompanied by an absolute prohibition against killing human beings, "for in the image of God has God made humanity."

It is not that God approves of killing animals, whether for sacrifice or food, but that to forbid this to human beings, given their genetic predisposition to bloodshed, is utopian. It is not for now but for the end of days. Until then, the least bad solution is to let people kill animals rather than murder their fellow humans. Animal sacrifices are a concession to human nature.[1] Sacrifices are a substitute for violence directed against humankind.

The contemporary thinker who has done most to revive this understanding is French-American literary critic and philosophical anthropologist René Girard, in such books as *Violence and the Sacred*, *The Scapegoat*, and *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*. The common denominator in sacrifices, he argues, is:

...internal violence – all the dissensions, rivalries, jealousies, and quarrels within the community that the sacrifices are designed to suppress. The purpose of the sacrifice is to restore harmony to the community, to reinforce the social fabric. Everything else derives from that.[2]

The worst form of violence within and between societies is vengeance, "an interminable, infinitely repetitive process." This is in line with Hillel's saying, on seeing a human skull floating on water:

“Because you drowned others, they drowned you, and those who drowned you will in the end themselves be drowned.”

Mishnah Avot 2:7

There is no natural end to the cycle of retaliation and revenge. The Montagues keep killing and being killed by the Capulets. So do the Tattaglias and the Corleones, and the other feuding groups in fiction and history. It is a destructive cycle that has devastated whole communities. According to Girard this was the problem that religious ritual was developed to resolve. The primary religious act, he says, is the sacrifice, and the primary sacrifice is the scapegoat. If tribes A and B, who have been fighting, can sacrifice a member of tribe C, then both will have sated their desire for bloodshed without inviting revenge, especially if tribe C is in no position to retaliate. Sacrifices divert the destructive energy of violent reciprocity.

Why then, if violence is embedded in human nature, are sacrifices a feature of ancient rather than modern societies? Because, argues Girard, there is another and more effective way of ending vengeance:

Vengeance is a vicious circle whose effect on primitive societies can only be surmised. For us the circle has been broken. We owe our good fortune to one of our social institutions above all: our judicial system, which serves to deflect the menace of vengeance. The system does not suppress vengeance; rather, it effectively limits itself to a single act of reprisal, enacted by a sovereign authority specialising in this particular function. The decisions of the judiciary are invariably presented as the final word on vengeance.[3]

Girard's terminology here is not one to which we can subscribe. Justice is not vengeance. Retribution is not revenge. Revenge is inherently I-Thou, or We-Them. It is personal. Retribution is impersonal. It is no longer the Montagues versus the Capulets, but both under, the impartial judgement of the law. But Girard's substantive point is correct and essential. The only effective antidote to violence is the rule of law.

Girard's theory confirms the view of Albo. Sacrifice (as with meat-eating) entered Judaism as a substitute for violence. It also helps us understand the profound insight of the Prophets that sacrifices are not ends in themselves, but part of the Torah's programme to create a world redeemed from the otherwise interminable cycle of revenge. The other part of that programme, and God's greatest desire, is a world governed by justice. That, we recall, was His first charge to Abraham, to “instruct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just” (Gen. 18:19).

Have we therefore moved beyond that stage in human history in which animal sacrifices have a point? Has justice become a powerful enough reality that we no longer need religious rituals to divert the violence between human beings? Sadly, the answer is no. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and

the end of the Cold War, led some thinkers to argue that we had reached “the end of history.” There would be no more ideologically-driven wars. Instead the world would turn to the market economy and liberal democracy.[4]

The reality was radically different. There were waves of ethnic conflict and violence in Bosnia, Kosovo, Chechnya, and Rwanda, followed by even bloodier conflicts throughout the Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa, and parts of Asia. In his book *The Warrior’s Honour*, Michael Ignatieff offered the following explanation of why this happened:

The chief moral obstacle in the path of reconciliation is the desire for revenge. Now, revenge is commonly regarded as a low and unworthy emotion, and because it is regarded as such, its deep moral hold on people is rarely understood. But revenge – morally considered – is a desire to keep faith with the dead, to honour their memory by taking up their cause where they left off. Revenge keeps faith between generations...

This cycle of intergenerational recrimination has no logical end... But it is the very impossibility of intergenerational vengeance that locks communities into the compulsion to repeat...

Reconciliation has no chance against vengeance unless it respects the emotions that sustain vengeance, unless it can replace the respect entailed in vengeance with rituals in which communities once at war learn to mourn their dead together.

Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior’s Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience* (Toronto: Penguin, 2006), pp. 188–190.

Far from speaking to an age long gone and forgotten, the laws of sacrifice tell us three things as important now as then:

First, violence is still part of human nature, never more dangerous than when combined with an ethic of revenge.

Second, rather than denying its existence, we must find ways of redirecting it so that it does not claim yet more human sacrifices.

Third, the only ultimate alternative to sacrifices, animal or human, is the one first propounded millennia ago by the Prophets of ancient Israel, few more powerfully than Amos:

Even though you bring Me burnt offerings and offerings of grain,  
I will not accept them...

But let justice roll down like a river,  
And righteousness like a never-failing stream.

Amos 5:23–24

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[1] On why God never chooses to change human nature, see Rambam, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, III:32. [2] Rene Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 8. [3] *Ibid.*, p. 15. [4] Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

Always (Sometimes) There: Constancy and Intermittence in Relationship: Tzav  
by Rabbi Aviva Richman

<https://www.hadar.org/torah-collection/aviva-richmans-divrei-torah>

Parashat Tzav opens with an image of constancy, the fire on the altar that always burns, never extinguished (Leviticus 6:2: *אש תמיד תוקד על המזבח לא תכבה*). The unextinguished fire is not just practical, burning sacrifices throughout the day and fats throughout the night; it represents an ongoing and unwavering connection between the people and God.<sup>1</sup> Yet, an honest religious life involves flux, times when we do feel strong connection and times when we don't. The dance between faith and doubt, presence and absence, can also emerge in close relationships with others. How can we savor moments of connection while acknowledging real gaps, even extended gaps? How can we build relationships that integrate these experiences of alienation, rather than shutting down or pretending the gaps don't exist?

Upon closer look, the connotation of the word *tamid* ("always") is not necessarily as constant as the image of the constant fire depicts. In some places, the Torah uses the word *tamid* to refer to something that is ongoing, but in intervals rather than continuous. For example, the Torah uses the word *tamid* to describe the lamps of the *menorah* (*להעלת נר תמיד*), even though they didn't burn constantly, but were only lit at night, to burn while it was dark.<sup>2</sup> In our *parashah*, *eish tamid* obviously means "constant," as it is explicitly paired with the phrase "it shall not be extinguished." Yet, the range of meanings of the word *tamid* exposes a provocative complexity: there can be a *tamid* that is truly constant, and there can be a *tamid* that holds the power of constancy even as it is nonetheless intermittent. We might experience this kind of "intermittent always" in various parts of our lives. Maybe our kids feel we are "always" there for them, even if they only see us at the beginning and end of each day. Or we are strengthened by the existence of a good friend, even if we go months without speaking. Or we continue to feel the abiding presence of someone we love even after they have passed away.

This meaning of *tamid* as intermittent becomes particularly poignant when the fire in the *mikdash* (sanctuary) no longer burns at all.<sup>3</sup> In a liturgical dirge for Tisha B'Av, one medieval poet draws on the imagery of the fire burning constantly on the altar to characterize the inner connection and passion felt during the triumphant moment of the exodus from Egypt (*אש תוקד בקרבי*). He devolves into lament as he shifts to the exile from Jerusalem, climaxing in his articulation that God became distance and then disappeared altogether (*רחק ממנו והנה איננו*). Losing this symbol of constant connection, we might fear total loss or abandonment. What do we do when this fire that "shall never be extinguished" goes out? In our own lives, how do we avoid devolving into a sense of total abandonment when a presence so

anchoring and orienting disappears?

One approach is substitution or adaptation: we try to recreate a constant sense of connection through something else. The first *mishnah* in Berakhot follows this path, relating the *mitzvah* of Shema to the constant fire on the altar. According to the Sages' opinion, the evening Shema can be recited up until dawn, since the fats were burned on the altar all night. In this view, prayer encodes the kind of constant connection the fire on the altar offered, even throughout the darkest parts of night. Yet this is an imperfect approximation. There is no way we will actually be in a state of prayer as constantly as the fire.

Instead of reaching to **substitute** for the ongoing connection that was lost, we can **embrace the intermittent** meaning of *tamid*: a sense of everpresence that endures through breaks and rupture. Yehudah Amichai, in his collection of love poems, brings us to this kind of real and rugged love:

My God, the soul you have given me is smoke  
From the constant burning of memories of love  
We are born and immediately start to burn  
Until the smoke, like smoke, dissipates.

Amichai emphasizes the power of love as an animating force in our existence, but frames this through memory. Our souls are not fueled by present interactions, but by long gone moments of love that leave a formative impression and continue to fuel our existence now. Beyond a reference to romances come and gone, the religious subtexts of his poem invite us to reflect on relationship more broadly, including relationship with God, where we feel ongoing presence within a reality of absence.<sup>4</sup>

In this picture, we can see mitzvot as practices that encode “memories of love” even when our sense of God (and God’s love) does not feel constantly present.<sup>5</sup> When Maimonides categorizes the mitzvot in his comprehensive collection of Jewish law, the Mishneh Torah, he places the Shema and tefillah, among others, in Sefer Ha-Ahavah (Book of Love). This title is his own creative invention; there is no order of the Mishnah called “Love.”<sup>6</sup> Maimonides’ categorization is nothing less than a claim that love is a critical philosophical root in our practice of mitzvot.<sup>7</sup> The rituals from tzitzit to food blessings are framed as an expression of constant awareness and love for God (פְּדֵי לִזְכֹּר אֶת הַבּוֹרָא תָּמִיד).<sup>8</sup> If we apply Amichai to Maimonides, we might say that, if we aren’t “feeling the love” from God in a given moment, these mitzvot cultivate “memories” or residual impressions of God’s love for us. We learn to thrive on these disconnected and fragile impressions of love when we can’t access something more robust.

Personally, I came to tangibly experience this kind of intermittent yet nourishing love in a difficult pregnancy, where a problem in the umbilical cord meant that blood flow was not pulsing as it should, but actually stopped at times. The blood

flow was intermittent, not constant. This kind of pregnancy sometimes terminates—there was a fear that the gaps would lead to total disappearance—but sometimes the fetus is able to hang on and get what they need. I learned from this baby what it means to take a hard look at divine love and know that it might not “show up” in the consistent way we want and think we need. Instead, we accept the imperfect picture of reality, soak up what we can from the fragile yet potent reservoirs we can access, and trust that we have the strength to make our way. The constant orienting fire on the altar yields to a more subtle practice of Torah and mitzvot as “memories of love,” intermittent connection points that fuel a relationship with God, even as God may not necessarily feel present in an ongoing way. Mitzvot bring us back to the experience of Sinai, or perhaps some other formative moment for us, (re)creating a sense of closeness and intimacy that cuts through absence and longing. This is the formative power of tamid that is not the same as continual connection. As we navigate our religious lives and our close relationships with others, we can draw on this model of tamid to sustain us through challenges and loss that might otherwise be overwhelmingly disruptive. Intermittent “memories of love” can fuel the constant fire inside us.

### ***Shabbat Shalom.***

<sup>1</sup> For more on this theme, see the essay on Parashat Tetzaveh by my colleague and teacher Rabbi Shai Held, “Between Ecstasy and Constancy: The Dynamics of Covenantal Commitment,” available here: <https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/between-ecstasy-and-constancy>.

<sup>2</sup> The Torah describes the daily morning and afternoon sacrifices as tamid even though they are brought at discrete times, not continually. The Torah describes the tzitz as bringing atonement tamid (Exodus 28:38), even as the kohen gadol does not wear it constantly (whether the tzitz continues to function while not being worn is the subject of a debate between R. Yehudah and R. Shimon on Talmud Bavli Yoma 7b and Pesaḥim 77a). But tamid can also mean something constant and continual, such as in the description of the shewbread on the table in the mikdash (Exodus 25:30), where our sages go to great lengths to describe that there was never a moment without bread, even in the act of transferring new loaves (Mishnah Menahot 11:7).

<sup>3</sup> There is some doubt whether the author of this alphabetical acrostic is R. Yehudah Ha-Levi, R. Avraham ibn Ezra, or someone else. The full lines of the phrases quoted are: “אֵשׁ תִּיִקַּד בְּקִרְבִּי בְּהַעֲלוֹתִי עַל לִבִּי, בְּצֵאתִי מִמִּצְרַיִם. קִיְנִים אֶעֱרָה, לְמַעַן אֲזְכִּירָהּ, בְּצֵאתִי מִירוּשָׁלַיִם / A flame shall burn within me, when I raise on my heart, my leaving Egypt. And I will awaken lamentations, so that I shall remember, my leaving Jerusalem” “רָחַק מִמֶּנּוּ, וְהִנֵּה אֵינּוּ, בְּצֵאתִי מִירוּשָׁלַיִם / [God] distanced from us, and behold was gone! Upon leaving Jerusalem.” (translation by Rabbi Gabriel Kretzmer-Seed).

<sup>4</sup> The first two words draw on a piece of liturgy from the morning blessings. The phrase שְׂרִיפֵת תָּמִיד evokes the burning of the daily sacrifice. The final phrase adapts a line from high holiday liturgy in the expanded third blessing (Kedushah) in the Musaf Amidah: וְכָל הַרְשָׁעָה כּוֹלָה כְּעֵשׂן תִּכְלָה.

<sup>5</sup> For an analysis of the meaning of “mitzvah” that moves far beyond “commandment” into the realm of love and care, see Rabbi Jason Rubenstein, “What are mitzvot? A perspective from

the ethics of care,” in David Birnbaum and Martin Cohen (editors), *Search for Meaning* (2018), pp. 453-482. An earlier version of this essay can be found in the form of a shiur on the Hadar website, available here: <https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/who-says-i-have>.

<sup>6</sup> To be sure, the title may derive in part from the Veahavta paragraph of Shema, which lists some, but by no means all, of the mitzvot included in Sefer Ha-Ahavah.

<sup>7</sup> Maimonides’ organization of the Mishneh Torah drew in part upon Islamic codes of law at the time that were framed in philosophical notions about the “roots” of law.

<sup>8</sup> See Hilkhot Berakhot 1:3. Perhaps Maimonides is also informed by the practice of dhikr in Islam, recitations meant to bring one’s consciousness and focus towards God.

[Parshat Tzav: When Eating Meat was a Sacrifice by Rabbi H. Schwartz Ph.D](https://www.growtorah.org/vayikra/2022/3/16-parshat-tzav-when-eating-meat-was-a-sacrifice)  
<https://www.growtorah.org/vayikra/2022/3/16-parshat-tzav-when-eating-meat-was-a-sacrifice>

When the Jewish people were in the wilderness before they entered the land of Israel, the consumption of meat was associated with holiness. Every piece of meat that was consumed came from an animal that was sacrificed in the Mishkan. This sacrificial act was one meant to bring the worshiper closer to Hashem. In Parshat Tzav, the Torah states, “And that which is left thereof [from the meal-offering] shall Aharon and his sons eat; it shall be eaten without leaven in a holy place; in the tent of meeting they shall eat it. . . . it is most holy as the sin-offering and the guilt-offering.”[1] Through sacrifice, worshipers both offered a korban to Hashem and ate the remaining meat in an ethical and sustainable manner.

In the times of the Mishkan, the consumption of meat was a conscientious and thoughtful endeavor. Each sacrifice had a definite purpose: to offer thanksgiving, to atone for a sin, to commemorate a holy day (such as the Korban Pesach), or to make one feel closer to Hashem. People owned animals as sources of labor or food, as well as a form of capital; hence slaughtering them in connection with the Temple rites was a sacrifice of a precious source of income and food. Those offering a sacrifice were giving up a needed possession.

The animal was a creature that the owner raised and saw on a daily basis, and whose needs were a matter of personal responsibility and even concern. Since a mother animal and its offspring could not be slaughtered on the same day,[2] those who offered sacrifices needed to be aware of familial relationships among animals. Animal welfare was an ingrained part of the sacrificial procedures.

The relatively small number of sacrifices performed daily meant that attention was given to the death of each animal. Sanctity was related to physical wholeness and perfection. The kohanim had to be free of bodily imperfections, and the animals to be sacrificed had to be free of blemishes.

Those offering a korban were required to be involved in the sacrificial process. For sin offerings, they were required to lean their hands on the animal and make a confession prior to the act of slaughter. Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, Chief Rabbi of Efrat, explains that the emotional result of the one who brought the sacrifice and watched

it being killed was to imagine themselves on the altar. They would experience feelings of teshuvah and become transformed, worthy of a renewed lease on life.

[3]

Different standards surround meat eating in the United States today. Rather than an infrequent act, many people consume meat daily, if not more than once a day. As of 2012, there were slightly shy of a million primarily meat cattle farms in the US. Though this suggests a decline from over a million in the late 2000s, this is primarily because of smaller farms with less than 50 heads of cattle, shutting down. The majority of cattle are not free range, fed a diet of dried grain as opposed to being grass fed. Instead of an individual sacrifice of one person's animal in a special ceremony, animals are currently raised by mass-production procedures in huge numbers. The individualized attention and specialized care given to livestock in sacrificial rituals is absent in massive farms.[4]

Because of these conditions, today's consumption of meat has negative effects that did not occur in the days of the Mishkan. In some cases, these negative effects violate or compromise halakhah,[5] and often go against the ethical sensitivities that the Torah wishes to instill in us.

For example, while the Torah forbids tza'ar ba'alei chayim, inflicting unnecessary pain on animals, most farm animals—including those raised for kosher consumers—are raised on "factory farms" where they live in cramped, confined spaces, are denied fresh air, sunlight, exercise, and any enjoyment of life before they are slaughtered and eaten.[6]

There is a world of difference between the consumption of meat in the time of the Mishkan and today. Holiness has been replaced by speed, special events by routine mass-production, a Sanctuary by many slaughterhouses, and positive residual outcomes by many serious negative consequences. Though the consumption of kosher meat is entirely permissible, perhaps it is time to reconsider the means by which we produce this meat, in an effort to restore holiness and kavannah to the process. (*Richard H. Schwartz is a professor emeritus of mathematics at the College of Staten Island; president emeritus of the Jewish Vegetarians of North America (JVNA); and co-founder and coordinator of the Society of Ethical and Religious Vegetarians (SERV). He is best known as a Jewish vegetarian activist and advocate for animal rights in the United States and Israel.*)

[1] Vayikra 6:9-10 [2] Vayikra 22:26-28 [3] Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, "There, But For the Grace of G-d," Jerusalem Post International edition, March 28, 1998) [4] Learn more [here](#). [5] See, for example, the halakhic discourse of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein on not eating veal, in Igrot Moshe, Even Ha-ezer, Vol. IV, no. 92. [6] Learn more [here](#).

### [Lessons From the Ashes:Tzav by Naomi Kalish](http://www.jtsa.edu/torah/lessons-from-the-ashes/)

<http://www.jtsa.edu/torah/lessons-from-the-ashes/>

Many of us choose our careers and life roles carefully and spend our days engaged in pursuits about which we feel passionate. However, sometimes even a

vocation can feel like drudgery. Whether a profession, family role, or volunteer position, roles that once came with a sense of calling or purpose can become hard to face and starting the day can require exceptional energy. This can happen as part of the ups and downs of ordinary life but is especially true when we experience multiple simultaneous crises.

Burnout often refers to an exhaustion of motivation, interest, or energy for one's work, sometimes prompted by tedium. Compassion fatigue refers to the toll that caregiving can take on a person in work in caring, helping, or service. Both can create a vocational crisis. This week's parashah suggests several strategies for combatting the depletion we all face at some point.

The beginning verses refer to the first action of the day for the kohanim in the Temple: *terumat hadeshen*, the lifting up and removal of ashes from the altar from the previous day. The Torah provides a detailed instruction:

*The priest shall dress in linen raiment, with linen breeches next to his body; and he shall take up the ashes to which the fire has reduced the burnt offering on the altar and place them beside the altar. He shall then take off his vestments and put on other vestments, and carry the ashes outside the camp to a pure place. Lev. 6:3–4*

The first action of the day was not new business, but rather the removal of the ashes of the previous day's offering.

Lessons from this ritual guide us to retain vocational vitality, in at least four ways:

### **Stay connected to yesterday's holiness**

The Hasidic master Simcha Bunim (1765–1827) of Przysucha in South Central Poland found meaning in the timing of *terumat hadeshen* as the first act of the new day. The act of lifting up the ashes symbolized that “what was holy yesterday must be treated with respect today as well” (Etz Hayyim Commentary).

*Terumat hadeshen* was performed before sunrise and lacked the public honor associated with the offering of the sacrifices. The work of removing the ashes to ready the Temple for the new day's sacrifices could be seen as meritless, messy drudgery. However, in an ironic way, *terumat hadeshen* could also challenge the kohen to confront what has been lost and to grieve. By lifting up the ashes, the kohen was prompted to remember the holiness of yesterday's sacrifice, honoring what it had been. *Terumat hadeshen* models for us a daily practice for grieving day-to-day loss.

### **2. Connect with others as an ordinary person**

Simcha Bunim also finds interpersonal meaning in the ritual of *terumat hadeshen*. By requiring the kohen to change into ordinary clothes and leave the holy precincts of the Temple, the Torah is seeking to ensure that “he never forgets his link to the ordinary people who spend their days in mundane pursuits” (Etz Hayyim Commentary). By literally stepping out of the professional space, by acknowledging his own humanity, and by being willing to be seen this way, the kohen created the possibility for his own receiving of care from others.

### **3. Be flexible and innovative**

Systems for care and service sometimes need to be modified or redesigned. The Talmud provides a cautionary tale of how the system for terumat hadeshen went awry and needed modification. The Mishnah explains that initially it wasn't imagined that many priests would want to do terumat hadeshen and so no lottery system was necessary, unlike other areas of Temple service that were popular and sought after by many priests ([BT Yoma 22a](#)). Whoever wanted to do terumat hadeshen on a given day would simply "run and ascend up on the ramp" leading to the altar ([M Yoma 2:1](#)).

But there was an unintended consequence of leaving this role to whomever would volunteer. One time two kohanim were "running and ascending on the ramp, and one of them shoved another and he fell and his leg was broken." Henceforth, the kohen was chosen by lottery ([M Yoma 2:2](#)). Times had changed and the culture changed. However, this led to a new challenge. Once the lottery was established, enthusiasm for doing terumat hadeshen diminished to the point of insufficient numbers of kohanim to meet the need. As an incentive, it was then established that the priest who conducted terumat hadeshen would also play the special role of "laying out the arrangement of wood on the altar" ([BT Yoma 22a](#)).

How can we understand the ambivalence and swings in attitudes and enthusiasm for doing this ritual? Perhaps it reflects the struggle the kohanim experienced to stay connected to the difficult work of terumat hadeshen. Their behavior reflected the ebbs and flows of human nature when doing meaningful yet difficult work. They adjusted their system to ensure that service continued and that it responded to the needs and wellbeing of the kohanim.

### **4. Stay connected when you feel alone**

Like so many leaders and caregivers today, the designated priest for terumat hadeshen acted alone. The Mishnah describes: "No person would enter with [the priest]." Furthermore, "with no lamp in his hand, he would walk by the light of the arrangements. The other priests would not see him, nor could they hear the sound of his steps" ([M Tamid 1:4](#)). The kohen is solitary and in the dark when confronting the grimmest part of the work.

But, in fact, the kohen is not alone. While he performed the ritual by himself, his brothers and other kohanim kept watch for him to return and listened for signs of his completion of the tasks at hand ([M Tamid 1:4, 2:1](#)).

The ritual of terumat hadeshen helps us when we might feel alienated from our sense of purpose and resigned to burnout. It offers us ways to embrace our sense of purpose even if it feels fragile. Terumat hadeshen reminds us: When we begin the day, before starting a new task, let us do something that connects us to yesterday's work as it will keep us connected to our sense of purpose. Let us spend time each day as ordinary people, changing from our professional clothes to regular clothes if need be. Let us change our procedures if the old one becomes

dangerous and let us partner with colleagues to update systems to create professional communities that are caring to us as well. Finally, even when we act alone and even when we feel solitude, let us know that there are others who are with us. Though we might not see them, they are listening for us. *(Naomi Kalish is the Harold and Carole Wolfe Director of the Center for Pastoral Education; Assistant Director of Pastoral Education at JTS)*

### **Yahrtzeits**

Bob Woog remembers his uncle Ralph David Fertig on Thursday March 24th (Adar II 21)  
Rabbi Lisa Vernon remembers her friend Abner Herbst on Friday March 25th (Adar II 22)