Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Tzav/Shabbat Hagadol
April 12, 2025 *** 14 Nisan 5785

Tzav in a Nutshell

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/2858/jewish/Tzav-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The name of the Parshah, "Tzav," means "command" and it is found in Leviticus 6:2.

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.

Shabbat Hagadol Haftorah in a Nutshell: Malachi 3:4-24

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/6412134/jewish/Shabbat-Hagadol-Haftorah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

The haftarah begins with the word ve'arvah ("and it will be pleasant"), as the prophet foretells the time when G-d will take delight in the offerings of the Jewish people.

At that time (the era of Moshiach), there will also be swift judgment meted out against those who cheat or otherwise oppress the helpless.

G-d then asks Israel to bring their tithes to the Holy Temple, famously inviting them to test Him out, to bring their tithes and see how it will cause many blessings to shower down upon them.

This section is the concluding portion of the entire corpus of Prophets, and so Malachi issues, in G-d's name, a ringing call to "remember the Torah of Moshe My servant" even when there will be no prophets to reinforce its messages. But he then concludes by foretelling the day when prophecy will return—in the person of Elijah the Prophet, who will arrive to herald the Redemption and inspire humanity to return to G-d. May it happen soon!

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The Thanksgiving Offering: Tzav by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l (5769)

https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/tzav/the-thanksgiving-offering/

Among the sacrifices detailed in this week's Parsha is the *korban todah*, the thanksgiving offering:

> If he offers it [the sacrifice] as a thanksgiving offering, then along with this thanksgiving offering he is to offer unleavened loaves mixed with oil, unleavened wafers spread with oil, and loaves of fine flour well-kneaded and mixed with oil. Lev. 7:12

Though we have been without sacrifices for almost two thousand years, a

trace of the thanksgiving offering survives to this day, in the form of the blessing known as *Hagomel*: "Who bestows good things on the unworthy", said in the synagogue, at the time of reading of the Torah, by one who has survived a hazardous situation.

What constitutes a hazardous situation? The Sages (Brachot 54b) found the answer in Psalm 107, a song on the theme of giving thanks, beginning with the best-known words of religious gratitude in Judaism, *Hodu la-Shem ki tov, ki le-olam chasdo*, "Give thanks to the Lord for His lovingkindness is forever" (Psalm 107).

The psalm itself describes four specific situations:

1. Crossing the sea:

> Some went out on the sea in ships;
> they were merchants on the mighty waters . . .
> They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths;
> in their peril their courage melted away . . .
> Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble,
> and he brought them out of their distress.
> He stilled the storm to a whisper;
> the waves of the sea were hushed.

2. Crossing a desert:

> Some wandered in desert wastelands,
> finding no way to a city where they could settle.
> They were hungry and thirsty,
> and their lives ebbed away.
> Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble,
> and he delivered them from their distress.

3. Recovery from serious illness:

> They loathed all food

and drew near the gates of death.
Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,
and he saved them from their distress.
He sent forth his word and healed them;
he rescued them from the grave.

4. Release from captivity:

Some sat in darkness and the deepest gloom,
prisoners suffering in iron chains . . .
Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,
and he saved them from their distress.
He brought them out of darkness and the deepest gloom
and broke away their chains (Brachot 54b).

To this day, these are the situations of hazard (many nowadays include air travel as well as a sea voyage) on which we say Hagomel when we come through them safely.

In his book *A Rumour of Angels*, the American sociologist Peter Berger describes what he calls “signals of transcendence” - phenomena within the human situation that point to something beyond. Among them he includes humour and hope. There is nothing in nature that explains our ability to reframe painful situations in such a way that we can laugh at them; nor is there anything that can explain the human capacity to find meaning even in the depths of suffering.

These are not, in the classic sense, proofs of the existence of God, but they are experiential evidence. They tell us that we are not random concatenations of selfish genes, blindly reproducing themselves. Our bodies may be products of nature (“dust you are, and to dust you will return”), but our minds, our thoughts, our emotions - all that is meant by

the word “soul” - are not. There is something within us that reaches out to something beyond us: the soul of the universe, the Divine ‘You’ to which we speak in prayer, and to which our ancestors, when the Temple stood, made their offerings.

Though Berger does not include it, one of the “signals of transcendence” is surely the instinctive human wish to give thanks. Often this is merely human. Someone has done us a favour, given us a gift, comforted us in the midst of grief, or rescued us from danger. We feel we owe them something. That ‘something’ is *todah*, the Hebrew word that means both ‘acknowledgement’ and ‘thanks’.

But often we sense something more. It is not just the pilot we want to thank when we land safely after a hazardous flight; not just the surgeon, when we survive an operation; not just the judge or politician when we are released from prison or captivity. It is as if some larger force was operative, as if the hand that moves the pieces on the human chessboard were thinking of us; as if heaven itself had reached down and come to our aid.

Insurance companies tend to describe natural catastrophes as “acts of God”. Human emotion does the opposite. God is in the good news, the miraculous survival, the escape from catastrophe. That instinct - to offer thanks to a force, a presence, over and above natural circumstances and human intervention - is itself a signal of transcendence. That is what was once expressed in the thanksgiving offering, and still is, in the Hagomel prayer. But it is not just by saying Hagomel that we express our thanks.

Elaine and I were on our honeymoon. It was summer, the sun was shining, the beach glorious and the sea inviting. There was just one problem. I could not swim. But as I looked at the sea, I noticed that near to the shore it was very shallow indeed. There were people several hundred yards from the beach, yet the water only came up to their knees. What could be safer, I thought, than simply to walk out into the sea and stop long before I was out of my depth.

I did. I walked out several hundred yards and, yes, the sea only came up to my knees. I turned and started walking back. To my surprise and shock, I found myself suddenly engulfed by water. Evidently, I had walked into a deep dip in the sand. I was out of my depth. I struggled to swim. I failed. This was dangerous. There was no one nearby. The people swimming were a long way away. I went under, again and again. By the fifth time, I knew I was drowning. My life was about to end. What a way - I thought - to start a honeymoon.

Of course someone did save me, otherwise I would not be writing these lines. To this day I do not know who it was: by then I was more or less unconscious. All I know is that they must have seen me struggling. They swam over, took hold of me, and brought me to safety. Since then, the words we say on waking every day have had a deep meaning for me: “I thank You, living and enduring God, for You have restored my life to me: great is Your faithfulness.” Anyone who has survived great danger knows what it is to feel, not just to be abstractly aware, that life is a gift of God, renewed daily.

The first word of this prayer, *Modeh*, comes from the same Hebrew root

as *Todah*, ‘thanksgiving’. So too does the word Yehudi, ‘Jew’. We acquired the name from Jacob's fourth son, Judah. He in turn received his name from Leah who, on his birth, said “This time I will thank [some translate it, ‘I will praise’] God” (Gen. 29:35).

To be a Jew is to offer thanks. That is the meaning of our name and the constitutive gesture of our faith.

There were Jews who, after the Holocaust, sought to define Jewish identity in terms of suffering, victimhood, survival. One theologian spoke of a 614th commandment: You shall not give Hitler a posthumous victory. The historian Salo Baron called this the ‘lachrymose’ reading of history: a story written in tears. I, for one, cannot agree. Yes, there is Jewish suffering. Yet had this been all, Jews would not have done what in fact most did: hand on their identity to their children as their most precious legacy.

To be a Jew is to feel a sense of gratitude; to see life itself as a gift; to be able to live through suffering without being defined by it; to give hope the victory over fear. To be a Jew is to offer thanks.

Can We Sanctify Incivility?- Shabbat Hagadol Tzav
by Rabbi Gordon Tucker

Parashat Tzav opens with instructions for the olah, the offering (primarily the twice-daily sacrifice) that is entirely burnt on the altar. The ninth chapter of the talmudic tractate Zevahim, notes that the word olah, which means “ascending,” can be understood both as denoting an ascent to heaven from earth, and equally, an ascent up the ramp of the altar to the

place from which it is offered. The double meaning gave rise to a principle that is articulated in the opening mishnah of that ninth chapter. But some background is necessary before citing that principle.

The Temple was a center of holiness and purity, and the altar was, within that larger precinct, the very epicenter of purity. No part of a sacrificial animal that had become ritually impure was permitted to approach the altar, and certainly not to be offered in the sacrificial fire that burned there. The impurity could have arisen by a dead insect having fallen on the animal's carcass after the slaughter; or a host of other conditions might have arisen, any one of which would have created a certain revulsion to the guardians of the sacred precincts. We cannot today reconstruct precisely why impurity and revulsion were said to arise from particular things in ancient times, but there were such deep aversions.

Now comes the principle given in the mishnah I referenced earlier: "Hamizbeah mekadesh et hara'ui lo," "the altar sanctifies every thing that is fitting for it." The Sages took the repetition of the word that means "going up" to signal that there are things that ought never to have been taken up the ramp to the Temple altar, but once having been brought there, should not be removed. Although they would normally be disqualified from the altar because of some blemish on their sanctity or purity, having reached the altar, by happenstance, the altar itself overrides both the impurity itself, and the revulsion that impurity would generate. The impure flesh that was an affront to the altar from afar,

having touched the altar, now became fit, and could be treated and handled like any other object whose purity was uncompromised.

The principle here is by turns counterintuitive and intriguing. Counterintuitive, because how could impurity ever be allowed to coexist with the very center of purity, even if the juxtaposition arose unintentionally? Shouldn't something profane and impure immediately be removed from the epicenter of sanctity? But it is intriguing at the same time because there is something fascinating and alluring about the idea that there are places, things, perhaps phenomena, that are so suffused with the force of holiness that they can completely eclipse and overwhelm even those things that stand in opposition to it. We are taught, for example, that a mikveh—a ritual pool that is used to return to a state of purity—can itself never become impure or polluted. No matter what may fall into it, its purity is unchanged. The Torah itself has that property. Contrary to centuries-long misogynist misreadings that were calculated to keep women away from the Torah, there is nothing that can impart impurity to a scroll of the Torah.

So it's at least a curious twist in the annals of ancient Temple and priestly rules. But for us, today, is it harmless?

Are there things that are so sacred, that are of such ultimate importance, that they serve as solvents to dissolve all flaws that come into contact with them? Are there contemporary sancta that can and should have the power to wash away all manner of stains that we would normally treat

with the same revulsion and disgust with which our ancient priests treated their sources of impurity?

In particular, I have in mind a matter of serious concern regarding discourse within the Jewish community today. Does a profession of love and support of the Jewish people and the Jewish state, and a determination to identify and defeat antisemitism, have the power to sanctify and cleanse the impurities of rank incivility and malicious slander? The latter are rightly reviled, and no one would think of raising them up to the altar, as it were. They are as unwelcome and as noxious as hametz is on the upcoming festival of Pesah. Were such incivility and slander to be practiced by foes of the Jewish people, we would rightly take such offensive character traits as being of a piece with hostility to Jews and Israel. But what shall we say and do when the very people who profess to love us and have our best interests at heart—our own Jewish confrères—display the very same defiling traits towards their fellow Jews of different opinions? Should that not at least cast some serious doubt on whether they truly get who we are and what our mission and cause is? Should we allow ourselves to get pushed to the point at which expressions of love of the Jewish people and the Jewish state become like the ancient altar, dissolving and washing away all sins and impurities? Even observant, practicing Jews can be targets of incivility and slander when they raise concerns about the policies and practices of Israeli governments. The same happens to Jews who, while deploring antisemitism, do not see it in all the places at which they are told they

should see it. Often they are demonized, tagged as wolves in sheep's clothing, and as enemies of the Jewish people. There is far too much contempt for those of other opinions.

We all, under normal circumstances, reject vulgarity, contempt, and slander. Yet some may maintain that the Rabbis in Zevahim were on to something; that in our day the dangers we all agree that Israel and the Jewish people face should have the power that the ancient altar had and should dissolve the impurities of language and deed that we would normally reject in normal times. But there is a word in the Rabbis' mishnah to which we have not paid much attention until now. "The altar sanctifies everything that is fitting for it." What does "fitting" mean in that context? If the flesh of a sacrificial lamb were made impure, then its having reached the altar would sanctify it nonetheless, because lamb flesh is fitting for the altar. But not so for the flesh of something unfit for sacrifice. The flesh of a deer, and certainly that of a swine, does not get sanctified by the altar; only that which is minimally fitting for the sacred place to begin with does.

So which is it? Should the incivility, slander, and even vulgarity that too often gets directed at honest and conscientious questioners of mainstream assumptions be overlooked when wielded in a professed solidarity with Israel, or concern for antisemitism? Or are they so unfitting, so incongruous to who we are and what our values are, that our contemporary holy of holies cannot cleanse them?

I end with these questions. We will all answer them as we will. But we cannot avoid conscientiously grappling with them. *(Gordon Tucker is Vice Chancellor for Religious Life and Engagement and Assistant Professor of Jewish Philosophy at JTS)*

Pesach: A Labor-Intensive Passover
by Rabbi Preston 'Pesach' D. Neimeiser
https://truah.org/resources/preston-neimeiser-pesach-moraltorah_2025_/

The current administration continues to offer us opportunities to sport our T'ruah "Resisting Tyrants Since Pharaoh" swag as it attempts to strip federal employees of their collective bargaining rights. Therefore, it behooves us to reflect on the upcoming Passover holiday through the lens of one of the central pillars of our work: worker justice. After all, as Sarah Horowitz wrote in an article in The Atlantic more than a decade ago, the story we tell over the Passover table is essentially "the first great moment in labor history. The parallels come easily. The workers (Israelites) asked their union rep (Moses) to stand up to the boss (Pharaoh) about their terrible working conditions." ("Let My People Bargain")

One of our fellow members in the chaverim network, Cantor Vera Broekhuysen, borrowed this framing in her acceptance speech when she received the Abraham Joshua Heschel Award from the New England Jewish Labor Committee at their 25th annual Labor Seder last month. What made the metaphor so potent and brought together more than 300 Jews, labor organizers, and working folk at the IBEW local 103 hall was

this essential truth: Labor is an intersectional value. Our identity as workers must be as indispensable to us as that of once having been slaves in Egypt.

For almost 140 years, Jews have been at the forefront of the American Labor Movement. Dayeinu, it would have been enough for us, if our ancestors had only leveraged their collective power to improve working conditions for all folks regardless of their identity as Jews. However, in ways that are nothing short of miraculous, it was precisely that Jewish identity that inspired them to advocate for social justice. As early as 1888, with the founding of the United Hebrew Trades (UHT) union, Jews have organized with our identity as a central foundation of the work. The UHT and others made familiar use of the social justice imperatives of the Hebrew prophets and references to modern-day Pharaohs to tie their contemporary struggles with those of our people throughout the ages. When Jews show up in support of worker justice, we tie ourselves to the grand tradition of American Jews who are compelled by our shared sacred history to make sure all workers are treated fairly. We do so as #tomatorabbis advocating that corporations join the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' Fair Food Program; we do so locally and nationally in collaboration with diverse and directly impacted partners as part of a faith-based movement in solidarity for worker justice; we also do so by making sure our communities' Passover celebrations are as free from worker exploitation as they are of chametz (leavened food that is forbidden during the holiday).

Worker justice is a central pillar of our work because it is essential to our story — not just in the relatively short American context. At the Pesach seder and far beyond, Jewish tradition asserts and reasserts the dignity of work as a foundational aspect of a just society. Pirkei Avot gives us the words of Rabban Gamliel, son of Rabbi Judah HaNasi: “The study of Torah is beautified when combined with a worldly occupation.” (Mishnah Pirkei Avot 2:2) As we see from the detailed instructions of this week’s Torah portion, Parshat Tzav, our communities depend on skilled labor. If not for the priestly guild’s maintenance and service of the Tabernacle, the people might not have had the means to commune with God. The priests, in turn, could not perform this public service without the contributions of the artisans who lent their expert craftsmanship to construct God’s abode. Ancient Israelite society depended on organized labor to realize their collective aspirations.

However, unlike Pharaoh’s exploitative objectification of the Israelites as a means to serve his own selfish ends, the people of Israel have a different experience under new management in the desert. The Holy One respects the union’s right to procure the best possible deal for its membership. In his commentary on the Torah, the 12th-century French Rabbi, Yosef Bekhor Shor, notes that even as the Israelites are redeemed from Egypt, they remain indentured to the Eternal. Bekhor Shor qualifies that the defining feature of this transition from one master to another is that our God provides the people with the necessary tools for liberation through the scaffolding of covenant, law, and sacred relationship.

This Passover, perhaps even with a tomato on our seder plates, let us rededicate ourselves to solidarity with working folk. Just as we are obligated to see ourselves as having been personally redeemed from Egyptian bondage, we are obligated to support workers' right to organize and liberate themselves from the oppression of tyrannical bosses and would-be Pharaohs. Because, as my favorite union-printed t-shirt declares, we have been "Resisting Tyrants Since Pharaoh." This Pesach, along with the songs Dayeinu, Chad Gadya, and Vehi Sheamdah, let us sing the anthem of the union: "Solidarity Forever."

(Rabbi Preston 'Pesach' D. Neimeiser (HUC-JIR NY '21) is the associate rabbi of Temple Beth-El of Providence, RI. His family history is intertwined with that of the American labor movement, to which he credits many foundational aspects of his life and work.)

" I will be what I will be": Three Passover Lessons from a Fascinating Midrash – Pesach 5785 by Rabbi Prof. David Golinkin

https://schechter.edu/i-will-be-a-timeless-message-of-presence-dialogue-and-teaching-pesah-5785/

We learn in the tractate of Megillah folio 15a and parallel sources: כל האומר דבר בשם אומרו מביא גאולה לעולם. "Whoever says something in the name of the person who told him, brings redemption to the world". Therefore, I wanted to tell you that I got the idea for this dvar torah from my brother Cantor Abe Golinkin. We trade divrei torah on the phone every week. He suggested a few days ago that I use a very interesting Midrash found in the Talmud, Berakhot, folio 9b, and he even shared with me two of the three ideas which I will present.

Here is the passage in Hebrew:

״אהיה אשר אהיה״ — אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא למשה: לך אמור להם לישראל: אני הייתי עימכם בשעבוד זה, ואני אהיה עמכם בשעבוד מלכיות. אמר לפניו: ריבונו של עולם, דיה לצרה בשעתה! אמר לו הקדוש ברוך הוא: לך אמור להם: ״אהיה״ שלחני אליכם.

It says in Exodus chapter 3 that God tells Moses that His name is אהיה אשר אהיה, I will be what I will be.

“Said the Holy one blessed be He to Moses: go tell the Jewish people, I was with you in this oppression, and I will be with you in the oppression of future kingdoms.

Moses said to God: Master of the universe, it is enough to talk about this trouble in its proper time! God replied, go say to them ‘I will be’ sent me to you”.

In other words,God called himself “I will be what I will be”, saying that I am with you in this trouble and I will be with you in future troubles as well. Moses said that talking about the future troubles of the Jewish people would depress them now, and therefore God changed His name, and told Moses to tell the people that “I will be” sent me to you.

I would like to derive three lessons from this amazing midrash, and connect them both to the Holiday of Pesah and to our current situation in Israel:

The first lesson is that God was with us in Egypt, and he will be with us in all of our future troubles. This is similar to the message of והיא שעמדה which we sing at the Seder every year:

“And this promise has stood for our ancestors and for us. For not only one enemy has risen against us to annihilate us, but in every generation,

there are those who rise against us to annihilate us. But the Holy one, blessed be He, saves us from their hand."

Throughout history, our enemies have tried to destroy the Jewish people: Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Haman, the Greeks in the time of the Maccabees, the Romans in the year 70, many medieval kings, Chmelnitzki, the Nazis, and Hamas ימח שמם. All of those enemies disappeared from the face of the earth, yet we are still here to recite the Haggadah 3200 years later.

The second lesson is very relevant to our current political situation in Israel. In this amazing midrash, God actually changes his mind as a result of His dialogue with Moses. Moses says that the name "I will be what I will be" will cause the Jewish people to be depressed, so God then changes his mind and changes his name!

The lesson is, that if God is willing to conduct a dialogue with a human being and change His mind, how much the more so must human beings conduct a dialogue with each other and be willing to change their minds! If we will imitate God, *imitatio dei*, in the State of Israel today, we will be in a much better place.

Finally, there is a variant version of this Midrash in Exodus Rabbah (ed. Shinan, p. 128) which adds one sentence at the end. After God changes his name to אהיה, I will be, God says לךָ אני מודיע, להֶם אֵי אני מודיע

To you I say my full name; To them I do not.

In other words, rabbis or teachers or Seder leaders need to tailor their message to their audience. Moses was capable of understanding God's

full name אהיה אשר אהיה, I will be what I will be; the Jewish people who were still slaves in Egypt were not — so God shortened His name.

So it is at the Seder. We need to explain the Exodus in different ways to adults or teenagers or young children.

I have here on my desk the package of Seder questions prepared by the TALI staff, both in Hebrew, and in the new English edition. There are 4 different sets of cards here, and each set of cards is aimed at a different age group. This is an excellent educational approach, and I use these cards every year with our grandchildren at the Seder.

In summary, we learn three important lessons from this brief midrash found in Berakhot fol. 9b:

1. 1)God was with us in Egypt, and He will always be with us, no matter what challenges we face.
2. 2) If God can change His mind as a result of His dialogue with Moses, then we too must conduct dialogue with those who disagree with us and be willing to change our minds.
3. 3) A rabbi, or an educator or people leading a Seder must adjust their language and their message according to the understanding or age group of their audience.

Hag sameah from Schechter!

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