

A Year of Encompassing Torah



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Parashat Tzav

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This is how we shall accrue our mitzvah points:

**Barukh atah Adonai,  
Eloheinu Melekh ha-Olam,  
Asher kidishanu b'mitzvotav  
v'tzivanu la'asok b'divrei torah...**

**Praised are You Adonai, our God,  
The Sovereign of all worlds,  
Who has made us holy with your mitzvot,  
And commanded us to engage ourselves  
with words of torah.**

***To be fully engaged with Torah  
Is to wrestle with Torah –  
To challenge our tradition while loving it,  
To question it while celebrating it.***

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An Added Blessing For Spiritual Direction

*"Yihyu l'ratzon imrey fi v'higion libi
lifaneycha Hashem Tzuri v'Go'ali*

May the expressions of my mouth
and **the thoughts of my heart**
find favor before You, G-d,
my Rock and my Redeemer."



Parashat Tzav 5768 D'var Torah for Board Meeting

Tzav means command. This week challenges us to look ever closer at the demands that Judaism places upon each one of us who follows in the footsteps of the priestly tradition. In the time of Moses and when the Temple stood in Jerusalem, people brought their animals to be sacrificed as offerings to God. Today, people offer God their words of dedication. As replacements of the priests, we are expected to take individual responsibility for the holiness of our world, to bring blessings into this world through our words and our deeds (our actions).

The Torah portion begins this process of our becoming "priests" by sharing with us the instructions for keeping a perpetual fire burning on the altar. Although we may no longer have altars to maintain in a physical sense, we all a fire that burns inside each of hearts that requires the same type of vigilance if we are to maintain our sense of spirituality in this world, out connectedness to all things holy. **We are challenged each and every day to look at the events in our lives and how they have influenced us, and demand from us answers to questions that probe our motivation and our desires that in some cases support the fire that burns inside of our hearts, and in other cases that threaten to extinguish that fire.**

To tend to those fires that fuel our inner lives requires constant attention and care. So, we are prompted to ask ourselves:

- **What is it that will fuel my attempts to be open and receptive to the needs of others, as well as to my own needs?**
- **What actions will fan the flames to keep them burning strongly?**
- **Just as the priest is commanded to remove the ashes at the end of each day to make sure that the fire does**

not smother itself, how will I remove the “schmutz” that has accumulated on my altar so that the events and the emotional turmoil that is a part of my past may not be allowed to accumulate and thereby limit my ability to function properly in the future?



Sermon Parashat Tzav 5768

Perhaps the Torah can shed some light on these burning questions when it comes to the ceremony that consecrates the priesthood, located at the end of the Torah reading for this week. We are told that the priests were blessed with blood of the ram on the right ear, the right hand, and the right foot. I remember this passage because it was my first sermon assignment when I entered rabbinical school. We had to explain why the priests were consecrated in these three specific locations.

Touching the EAR is to remind us that we are obligated, in the same way that God is obliged, to respond to the cries of the oppressed. This is easy to do when the cries are out loud, and can be heard. However, what about the still small voice that is in our hearts and in our souls, that is shy in letting the world know that it is in pain and in need of healing! Only the most attentive ear can hear these cries.

Touching the HAND is to remind us to dedicate ourselves to reaching out to others, as we sing in the *Ashrei* prayer, “*Potei’akh et yadekha*” -- “*God opens His hand; God’s favor sustains all the living...*” Even though we are all beneficiaries of God’s loving-kindness, God relies on our hands to distribute that bounty equitably.

Touching the FOOT is to remind us what it means to walk in God’s ways in our own journeys through life.

May we, as leaders of this congregation, find ways to guide our community on the right path as we look to celebrate our first 100 years of service to Beverly as well as in our work to finance our future, determining how we can connect to one another, to ourselves, to the community in general, to Israel, and to our sense of spirituality.

We all cherish our routines – whether it be washing the dishes, walking the dog, going to the gym, dealing with the commute. Even though we may not be completely satisfied by these things, when we look at these activities through a different lens, we begin to see that there is some merit to them and the blessings that can be found in their completion. The routine is what provides us with stability and a sense of structure, freeing us up to do other things, like allowing our thoughts to drift into more spiritual matters of higher cognition.

Rabbi Nehemia Polen points out the significance of such a routine in the daily practices of the priests who tended to the various offerings that have a part of our Torah reading for the past couple of weeks. He adds his own comment to the actions of the priests as outlined in the opening verses of the Torah portion for this week. Every evening a sacrifice is brought to the altar and left until morning, and the ashes are then removed and a new sacrifice is brought in the morning until evening when it, too, is replaced. In this rhythmic and ritual fashion we read, “*tukad bo, lo tikh’beh...*” – (*the fire on the altar shall be kept burning, not to go out...*) (Leviticus 6:5) A few words later we read, “*baboker baboker,*” meaning “*every morning*” this occurs. Just by the repetition of the one word we sense the cadence by which the priests conduct their daily routines, and the sense of spirituality it can create for them. The repetition also suggest a sense of continuity their work as though there is an unbroken chain of transmission occurring here, that can lead to healing in a world that can be so unpredictable in nature.

As I look at this passage and the message it is attempting to convey to me, I am reminded of a recent visit to the doctor who assessed the medications that I have been taking. In changing my regimen he said to me, “Steven, I want you to take one of these every morning and one of these every evening.” In growing older, I am learning that the number of pills we take and the frequency by which we take them can become a

lot more complicated as the number of ailments increase. Having a routine can help us feel more secure in how we feel. How much more so would the other aspects of our lives have that same feeling of relief and security if we were to have a set routine for our prayers and our devotions to God!?!

Following the example set by the words of the Shema in another section of the Torah, the rabbis suggest that we recite these words of obligation, these words of healing, these words of relating to one another out of love and respect, not once but twice each day, evening and morning, when we lie down and when we rise up. One of the actions that brings wholeness and peace, as well as security, to my relationship with Lynn is when I check in with her during the course of the day. She knows that I love her. However, it is reassuring to her when I check in with her during the day with no other purpose than to tell her that I love her. God has us doing the same thing each morning and evening when we recite the Shema. We check in with each other to profess our love and devotion to one another.

However, this is not the only way in which we establish a routine that enhances our relationships in life, bringing healing and wholeness. In the world of the priests, a purification offering was made each morning, to keep them holy in their daily devotion to God. We, too, have a ritual that enables us to be holy throughout the day when we offer words of atonement each morning and evening in our prayers. We are taught by the sages of the Talmud that a person is eligible to repent their sins – and be forgiven – up until one day before their death. This leads us to the question, “But when will I die?” Since none of us really know when that moment will come, it is expedient for us to recite words of forgiveness each and every day, morning and evening, so that nothing is left over for the next day. So, we are given the opportunity to begin each day anew – in holiness – with our relationships to others, to ourselves, and to God.

The atonement offering that the priests made each morning is paired with the “*zevach shlamim*” offering, the wholeness offering, and the thanksgiving offering each evening. The sages teach us that these two rituals represent the *ma’ariv* and the *shacharit* services, the evening and the morning services, that are a

part of our daily routine, for those who pray on a regular basis.

Evening and morning – we pray for repentance, we pray for forgiveness, we pray for healing, we pray for thanksgiving, and we pray for peace. This ritual brings comfort and healing to unsettled souls. So we shall be healed by our routines. We return once more to the original phrase that introduces us to a perpetual fire, “*tukad bo*”. “Bo” is one of those words that can be understood on more than one level. We often translate it as saying that “the fire on the slaughter sight is to kept blazing *upon it...*” In some mystical sources the same words are sometimes translated as “upon *him...*,” referring to the notion that it is incumbent upon each one of us to keep the fire burning within each of our own hearts and souls. Our routines are what enable us to flame the passions that are a part of who we are, and what we wish to become – in the quiet moments of our lives, when we heighten our sensitivities to the world around us and pay greater attention to them in a relaxed state.

On this Shabbat, may it become our spiritual practice to develop a routine that will enable us to reach the inner core of our being, the place where the fire burns strongest, and establish a way to keep that fire burning brightly as we seek out ways to make our actions in this world more meaningful, and by strengthening the relationships that will allow us to grow in new directions, both evening and morning!