

Walk through the Parsha

with **Rabbi David Walk**



EXCITED ABOUT ROUTINE

Tzav

It is very clear from the beginning of this week's Torah reading that we're dealing with a very different kind of KORBAN (offering or sacrifice) than last week's parsha. Last week we began the book of Vayikra: When any of you presents a KORBAN (Vayikra 1:2). On the other hand, this week's reading begins, Command Aharon and his sons: This is the ritual of the burnt offering (6:2). Those are very different perspectives on the service in the Beit HaMikdash.

Last week we dealt with human desire to bring offerings; this week God demands offerings. Which scenario is correct? Well, of course both!

I have no idea which came first. In my personal approach to Judaism, I would like to posit that God has no need for our offerings, but allowed them because we displayed an urgency to show our affection in ways then acceptable to humankind. (Rambam: But the well-known custom which was common then, and the general mode of worship in which

the Israelites were brought up consisted of sacrificing animals... It was in accordance with the wisdom and plan of God... that God did not command us to give up and to discontinue all these manners of service. For to obey such a commandment would have been contrary to the nature of man, who generally cleaves to what he is accustomed to; in those days.)

So, that, perhaps, Judaism will never return to animal offerings. The Third Temple might be Vegan?

On the other hand, one could construct a spiritual landscape where only through these specific offerings can we truly achieve a mystical connection to the Infinite. God, of course, doesn't require these offerings, but our souls require them to find connection to the Ineffable. In that case, obviously the Third Temple will include the entire panoply of offerings.

Take your pick. But one thing is clear to me: Torah has both compulsory and voluntary paths. One can't choose to be a Kohen or Levi, but one can choose to be a rabbi or a doctor or a truck driver. One can serve God by teaching Torah or by farming the Land or by being a MENTCH.

Clearly, there are routes which are

required and those which can be freely chosen. Warfare is clearly one of those areas in which the two options are definitively delineated. We have optional wars (MILCHEMET R'SHUT) and obligatory wars (MILCHEMET MITZVA).

When a Jewish king or government decides that war is a good option for political or economic reasons, then there are many exemptions from military service (D'varim 20:1-9). On the other hand, when we are attacked, then this war which has been thrust upon us allows for no exemptions.

As Rambam wrote: What is considered as MILCHEMET MITZVA? The war against the seven nations who occupied Eretz Yisrael, the war against Amalek, and a war fought to assist Israel from an enemy which attacks them (Laws of Kings & Wars, 5:1).

The Mishna is clear about when these exemptions can be claimed: In what case are all of these statements, with regard to the various exemptions from war, said? They are said with regard to elective wars. But in wars whose mandate is a mitzva, everyone goes, even a groom from his room and a bride from her wedding canopy (Sotah 8:7).

Clearly, in our modern context, the army has to decide who is helpful and who should stay home, but I can't understand anyone who claims to be observant applying for an exemption to military service today. We are under attack by a vicious enemy. No one should shirk.

But I want to get back to the parsha. On the verse, 'Command (TZAV) Aharon and his sons', the Talmud says: The school of Rabbi Yishmael taught that any place where it is stated: "Command", it is nothing other than an expression of galvanization both immediately and for generations (Kiddushin 29a).

I like that translation 'galvanize'. The Hebrew is ZIRUZ, usually translated as with alacrity or enthusiasm. This is like the famous expression ZRIZIM MAKDIMIM L'MITZVOT (Pesachim 4a).

The Chizkuni explains that it makes sense that the Torah would demand ZRIZUT for a chore like 'removing last night's ash from the Altar, or making sure that there was always an adequate supply of wood at hand on the Altar, it is human nature not to relate to this with exceptional haste'. Let's be honest (always the 'best policy'), it's hard to get enthusiastic about tasks which are regular and not exciting.

I just had great enthusiasm for delivering SHALACH MANOT on Purim. It happens once a year and it's a lot of fun. But what about davening every AM? What about BENTCHING for lunch on Wednesday afternoon? It's hard to get the excitement level up for those routines.

Now we can understand and relate to what our great commentaries are getting at. The Torah went out of its way to shout TZAV at us for a daily grinding assignment.

It is critical that we find ways of energizing those spiritual assignments which can become (God forbid) mundane or rote. Before SHACHARIT, I quote the Magen Avraham about saying that my prayers must fulfill V'AHAVTA L'REI'ACHA KAMOCHA ('love your fellow like yourself'), and then I try to think of someone or something specific who or which needs a prayer. You can come up with your own ideas to keep your davening fresh and relevant.

This parsha carries that momentous message: Don't give in to boredom or ennui; keep the ZRIZUT, enthusiasm, eagerness, emotion and energy! 