

ויקח משה משמן המשחה ומן הדם אשר על המזבח ויז על אהרן על בגדיו ועל בניו ועל בגדי בניו אתו ויקדש את אהרן את בניו ואת בניו ואת בניו אתו:

“And Moses took some of the anointing oil and some of the blood that was on the altar and sprinkled it upon Aaron and upon his vestments, and also upon his sons and upon their vestments. Thus he consecrated Aaron and his vestments, and also his sons and their vestments.”—Leviticus 8:30

TZAV (“*Command*”)

LEVITICUS 6:1–8:36



MAKING SACRIFICES: THE LORD BREAKS down the details of sacrificial procedures for Moses to relay to Aaron and the priests. The critical issues of how long a burnt offering should last, what the priest should wear, and where the waste should be disposed of are explored. Moses is also instructed to ensure that the altar fire burns perpetually.

Procedures for sin offerings, guilt offerings, sacrifices of well-being, and meal offerings are also clarified, including exactly how much the priests can keep to eat themselves.

THE ORDINATION OF THE PRIESTS

Moses invites the entire community to assemble at the entrance of the Tent of

Meeting with the priests, their clothing, anointing oil, a bull for sin offering, two rams, and a basket of unleavened bread.

During the ceremony Moses motions Aaron to step forward, then washes and dresses him as the Lord commanded. He takes the oil and uses it to consecrate the Tabernacle by sprinkling it on the altar before pouring some on Aaron's head. After

TZAV (“*Command*”)

that, he dresses Aaron’s sons, who then help Moses pull the bull and rams to slaughter to consecrate the altar. Moses pours oil and blood on the priests’

clothing and concludes the ceremony by ordering them to remain in the Tent for seven days to complete their ordination.



RACHEL LEVIN

I am only a few lines into the Torah portion that is *Tzav* and my eyes have already glazed over. Burnt offerings, linen raiment with linen breeches, ashes, vestments, smoke, fat, flour, fire. The details are exhausting, and I have yet to reach verse seven.

I think of stopping, but I have been assigned to write about this passage, and I am at my core the dutiful oldest daughter of a rabbi, a follower of directions. So I begin again, and that is when I notice him—a kindred responsible older sibling. It is Aaron, the brother called in to speak to Pharaoh for Moses, the one left to deal with a bunch of complaining Israelites when his younger sibling climbed up a mountain for forty days.

Here he is being given a new task; he is to become a priest. *Tzav*, I now see, is Aaron's instruction manual, a ninety-seven-verse "to do" list dictated by God via Moses: Prepare flour on a griddle, divide meals into morning and evening portions, eat the leftovers of a sin offering. The directives are endless, the prescriptions exact. Yet Aaron does not complain once. In fact, throughout the entire Torah portion, Aaron does not utter a single word.

I am irritated for him.

As kids, my sisters and I promised one another that we would never become rabbis. Being a rabbi's daughters had taken its toll on us—the seemingly endless "short" stops at the hospital on our way to dinner; comments of praise or derision about our father, which somehow seemed equally appropriate to share with his children; couches re-covered with a mistaken fabric but not able to be returned because they were done as a favor by a congregant. Yes I complained, but I also understood that this job of modern priest required offerings to be made morning *and* evening—that when our portion was the leftovers, we could not be picky.

My father, who shares his Hebrew name with Moses, not Aaron, was bound to his duties, but not so easily compliant. He chafed at being told what to do. He had his own creative approach to the rabbinate and saw

his job as interpreting tradition in a way that was relevant and less about how things should be done. This meant that at a young age, I already knew about disgruntled synagogue presidents, split board votes, and what it meant to leave a synagogue with half the congregation to start one of your own. Around that time my mother moved to Arizona. Being the rabbi’s wife had taken its toll on her as well.

These old memories return as I read Aaron’s new job description, and I feel suddenly that this time, someone must speak for Aaron, must say what he himself does not, cannot, say. “Wait, God,” I call out. “I OBJECT. This new duty may be what is needed for the people, but what about Aaron? What of his children, his sons, who will also be forced to be priests?”

I have read ahead and know how the story will end: Two of Aaron’s sons will get too close to the fire when making an offering and will be consumed by flames. The sacrificers will become the sacrificed.

And yet, years later I am in Jerusalem at a dinner party, sitting on one end of a meticulously set table with thirty other guests. I suddenly notice a woman staring at me. She calls out, “Are you Martin Levin’s daughter?” Yes, I nod. Knife to wineglass, she silences the other conversations. “Listen,” she says. “I have a story to tell.” The story is of her son who is mentally disabled and how one morning, many years ago in synagogue, a rabbi gave her son a spur-of-the-moment bar mitzvah, something she had never thought possible. The rabbi called him up to the Torah and then led the entire congregation in dancing so joyous that it spilled out into the street. The congregation was celebrating her son, welcoming him as a full member of the community. “I will never forget what your father did for my family,” she says. Suddenly, she is crying and I am crying, too.

I have seen through the years how rabbis have special access to people because they are present when people are at their most joyous, most vulnerable, most pained, most in need of hope. My father knows that in these moments, there is possibility, and that has always been more than enough for him.

I whisper through the letters of the text, “Was that enough for you, Aaron?” And I wait.