



## AROUND THE SHABBAT TABLE

### TZAV/SHABBAT HAGADOL 5764 APRIL 2-3 2004

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#### **Introduction**

This week's parsha, *Tzav*, describes in depth the various *korbanot*, sacrifices, that appear in last week's parsha, *Vayikra*. Here, these sacrifices appear in the most minute detail, identifying the procedure for making the particular sacrifice, the ingredients or components, and the specific ritual. The detail is very explicit and precise: even the measurements of the flour and oil for the meal offering are described. The *olah* (burnt offering), *minchah* (grain offering), *chattat* (sin offering), *asham* (guilt offering), and the *zevach hashlamim* (sacred gift of greeting) are all outlined, with instructions directed to those individuals who will perform these rituals—Aaron and his sons. Within this section, we read of the fire used for the *olah*, which burns constantly, evoking the *ner tamid* which burns “eternally” in our synagogues. Daily sacrifices are performed throughout each day, corresponding to various times and restricted to particular times as well: certain sacrifices must be eaten or offered within a limited time frame, recognizing the particular process and the importance of the practice of the ritual.

The second half of the parsha is yet another finely detailed description of ritual, but instead of sacrifice, we read of the beginnings of religious celebrations that mark formal worship. Unlike the previous sections on sacrifice, these chapters are not legal texts but a narrative depiction of the consecration of the altar and the *mishkan*, the Tabernacle, and the ordination of Aaron and his sons as priests. Moses takes an active role here as the one who ordains the first priests, instructing them in their duties. These are highly ritualized events which, like the passages concerning sacrifices, contain minute details about the actual ceremonies and performance of rituals surrounding these ceremonies. The ordination ceremonies take seven days, and are followed by an eighth day celebrating the *mishkan* itself and God's presence inside it. Here is one of many examples of the significance of the number seven in Jewish tradition, followed by an eighth day on which a pivotal ceremony takes place. The *mishkan*, translated as Tabernacle, comes from the root verb *shachan*, to dwell. In this way, the *mishkan* was not complete until God came to dwell within it.

Parshat Tzav coincides this year with *Shabbat HaGadol*, the Great Shabbat which precedes Passover. We read a special *haftarah* as well, *Malachi 3:4-24*. “The Great Shabbat” is thought to refer to the custom of giving sermons on this particular Shabbat: rabbis did not

usually teach Torah on Shabbat morning, and here, they would give sermons about the intricacies of keeping the laws of Passover. Services took much more time than usual, hence the name “The Great Shabbat.” Another reason for the name is that it is thought that in the year of the Exodus, the 10<sup>th</sup> of Nisan fell on Shabbat. It was on that day, as told in Exodus 12, that God instructed the Israelites to take a sheep into their home and keep it there until the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan in preparation for the *Pesach* sacrifice. Since the Egyptians worshiped sheep as gods, this was a great act of defiance on the part of the Israelites. This Shabbat is called *Shabbat HaGadol* because it was on this Shabbat that the Jews began to declare their independence from the Egyptians.



### **Questions for Your Family's Discussion**

When your family sits down together this Shabbat, here are some questions for you to wrestle with:

1. The process of giving each offering is listed in great detail. Every person's role is outlined, even down to the clothing that they are to wear. Why do you think the Torah is so specific? Do we need all of the little details? What do the little details tell us?
2. Many people say that this part of the Torah, the texts that deal with the sacrifices, is boring. Even though we don't practice the ritual of sacrificing and making offerings today, what can we learn from the description of these rituals in this parsha?
3. Once Moses gives Aaron the instructions for his work as the *Cohen Hagadol*, the high priest, he dresses him in a specially made uniform which is described in verses 8:7-9. We learn from this that the clothing one wears has a specific function, and that uniforms tell us about what kind of work a person does. Why is what Aaron wears important? Think about uniforms that various kinds of people wear (doctors' white coats, police officers' uniforms, etc.). What do those uniforms tell you about these jobs?
4. Aaron and his sons had very specific clothing to wear when they performed the rituals of the sacrifices. In the same way, we have specific clothing we wear when we come to synagogue or go to religious school. Do you think it is OK to wear sneakers to shul? How does the way we dress tell others how we feel about ourselves or what we are doing?
5. The position of “priest” is one that is passed down from the male descendants of Aaron and is only acquired through heredity. Debate the hereditary status: is it preferable to have someone who is trained from birth for this position, or is it important to bring new people into the process? Why do you think that it is a hereditary position in the Torah?
6. The *zevach hashlamim*, the sacred gift of greeting, was offered as an expression of gratitude. How do you express your gratitude to others?
7. The *zevach shlamim*, the sacred gift of greeting, also includes the use of the *zevach todah*, the thanksgiving sacrifice. These offerings expressed an individual's gratitude to God

for deliverance from danger or misfortune. As part of our synagogue liturgy, we recite *Birkat HaGomel*, a special blessing which thanks God for having helped us through a challenging time (extended travel, an accident, giving birth, escaping harm, etc.). What would you say to God as a thank you?

8. Time is a very important component of the ritual of the offering of the various *korbanot*. A sacrifice can only be offered at a particular time or within a time limit. Do you have enough time to do everything you need to do? What are the kinds of things you do that must be done at a specific time or within a time limit? Do you respond well to deadlines? Why or why not? How do you decide what your priorities are?

### **Some Texts to Wrestle With**

#### *Becoming a priest*

Only a life lived for others is a life worthwhile.

–Albert Einstein

#### *The Significance of Time*

Time is the best teacher.

–M. Ibn Ezra, *Shirat Yisrael*

#### *The Importance of Sacrifices*

A handful of flour brought by a poor man voluntarily is more precious than two handfuls brought by the High Priest.

–Isaac Nappaha

#### *Why are the details so important?*

To recognize causes is to think, and through thought alone feelings become real knowledge and are not lost, but become real and begin to mature.

–Hermann Hesse, Siddhartha

And though your beginning was small, your end will be great.

–Job 8:7

### **Towards an Action Agenda**

1. The clothing that Aaron and his sons wear in *Parshat Tzav* is for a very particular purpose. What happens when clothing no longer has a purpose for you or a family member? Together as a family, collect your clothing and donate it to a local Goodwill or family shelter.
2. Time is a very important component of the ritual of the offering of the various *korbanot*. Certain offerings must be made at certain times, within a particular time limit. Some say that this reminds us of the sacred nature of time. Use the example of the *korbanot* to set aside time with your family each week on Shabbat to do something together, like study, read aloud or play a game. Make a list of priorities with your family as to how you will spend your time together.
3. With Passover coming, be sure to look at some sites to help you prepare for your holiday:
  - a. [http://www.bjeny.org/erc\\_Passover.asp?dept=Educational%20Resources](http://www.bjeny.org/erc_Passover.asp?dept=Educational%20Resources) – The Board of Jewish Education of Greater NY gives ideas for how to learn

and teach about the holiday, including many ideas that can be adapted for your family's use.

- b. <http://www.ritualwell.org/Rituals/overview.html?catId=178> The Ritual Well site has creative rituals as well as holiday information. It is particularly useful for integrating women's ritual into the Seder.
- c. [http://www.jhom.com/arts/gallery/four\\_sons.htm](http://www.jhom.com/arts/gallery/four_sons.htm) This site offers a fun way to learn about the Four Children: Looking at the way they have been depicted through the artwork of Haggadot throughout history.



Best wishes to you and your loved ones for a Chag Sameach...a happy and enjoyable Pesach.

Please join together in learning with other families by sharing your family's discussions and ideas by posting them on our web site. Simply respond with your thoughts and ideas to [RavADS@bjeny.org](mailto:RavADS@bjeny.org)

Around the Shabbat Table is a project of the Board of Jewish Education of Greater New York. If there is any way we can be of service, please contact Rabbi Arnold D. Samlan, project coordinator at the BJE Nassau Queens Center, 516-876-6535, or see our web site: [www.bjeny.org](http://www.bjeny.org)

*This project is supported through the generosity of Joyce & Fred Claar.*

*BJE is an agency of UJA-Federation of New York*

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