

INSIGHTS

Into The Weekly Parsha

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This week's Insights is dedicated in loving memory of Isser ben Feivush,
Dr. Isser Herman. "May his Neshama have an Aliya!"

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10 NISSAN

Based on the Torah of our Rosh HaYeshiva HaRav Yochanan Zweig

PARSHAS TZAV

Installation Coronation

Take Aharon and his sons with him and the anointing oil [...] (8:2).

In this week's *parsha*, we find Hashem giving Moshe instructions for the official installation of Aharon and his sons as *kohanim* – the priestly class of Bnei Yisroel. Moshe then gathers all of Bnei Yisroel to watch as he follows a step-by-step process for initiating Aharon and his sons as the *kohanim*.

Aside from the steps that might be expected in the process of elevating their status – immersion in a *mikveh*, dressing them in priestly vestments, applying and sprinkling the special anointing oil to all the vessels in the Mishkan and to Aharon and his sons as well, etc. – we find a very unusual ritual.

Several sacrifices were offered: a bull was brought as a sin offering, a ram was brought as a burnt offering, and a second ram was brought as a peace offering (see 8:22 and Rashi ad loc). Moshe then applied the blood of the peace offering to Aharon's and his sons' right ear lobes, right thumbs, and right big toes.

This ritual is only performed in one other place in the Torah: by the purification of a person who has been struck by *tzora'as* – commonly (and incorrectly) translated as leprosy.

What is the meaning of this enigmatic ritual and what is the relationship between initiating the *kohanim* and

cleansing one who has recovered from *tzora'as*?

Aharon and his sons were being elevated to a new status over the rest of the Jewish people. They were now receiving forevermore one of the three crowns that Hashem gifted to this world; they were receiving the crown of *kehuna*. Without proper perspective, being crowned can be a dangerous affair as it can easily lead one to harbor false notions of self-importance. A person can actually begin to believe that he is receiving this honor because there is something intrinsically great about himself.

The unique ritual of placing the blood on the ear lobe, thumb, and big toe is intended to address this issue. The unifying connection between all of these parts of the body is that the ears, fingers, and toes represent the person's extremities. When a person gets cold, the first parts that are affected are the extremities – namely the ears, fingers, and toes – because they are the furthest from the core of the body. Yet, when a person is asked to point to himself, he always points to his core. Thus, by emphasizing the extremities, this ritual demonstrates that the position is not about them personally, it's about what they can do for others.

The message they receive is that while being anointed a *kohen* is an honor, it is more significantly a great and awesome



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responsibility. The Talmud has a dispute about whether the *kohanim* are agents of the people to Hashem or agents of Hashem to the people, but everyone agrees that they are merely agents. In other words, they are facilitators not principals. This is the message conveyed by placing the blood on the extremities.

This is also true of a person who has been struck by *tzora'as*. This punishment comes as a consequence of speaking *loshon hora*. The core motivating force of one who speaks *loshon hora* is the desire to elevate oneself by putting others down. While every sin contains an element of self-centered behavior, *loshon hora* is the sin of focusing on the perceived importance of oneself and trying to elevate the opinions of others regarding one's own self-importance. This is why a person needs a *kohen* to declare them unclean and the process of purification is the same as the *kohen's* initiation. The message they are supposed to receive and internalize is that they need to focus less on themselves and their own importance.

Neither Liberal Nor Conservative

And Aharon and his sons carried out all the matters that Hashem commanded through Moshe (8:36).

The very end of this week's *parsha* informs us that Aharon and his sons performed all procedures as they had been instructed by Moshe Rabbeinu. Rashi (ad loc) makes an unusual comment, "This is to tell their praise, that they veered neither to the right nor to the left." In other words, they did exactly as they were told by Moshe.

Rashi's illustration is a little odd. Typically, Rashi would merely say they did as they were told without altering anything. Why does Rashi take poetic license here and state that they veered neither to the right nor to the left? Furthermore, why is this a great "praise" that they actually followed the process that Moshe laid out for them? Wouldn't we expect as much?

The initiation process of the *kohanim* is discussed both in this week's *parsha* and in *Parshas Tetzaveh*. The commentators try, at length, to reconcile the discrepancies in the details as well as the seeming differences in intention of particular

activities discussed in both of these *parshios*. Rashi in his final comment on this *parsha* seems to be addressing the overarching issue.

The Jewish people have both a written Torah and an oral Torah. Much, if not all, of the oral Torah was given to Moshe at Mount Sinai. In addition, we have another aspect of Torah known as Gemara. The Gemara is primarily Klal Yisroel's interpretation of Torah. That is, the discussions of succeeding generations and the application of those discussions to everyday law as interpreted by the greatest minds of each generation, is all part of Klal Yisroel's contribution to Torah.

This ability of the leaders of each generation to interpret and create binding laws as part of Torah is authorized by the verse "you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge who shall be in those days, and inquire; and they shall declare to you the law" (*Devarim* 17:9). Klal Yisroel are likewise enjoined to follow their

leaders' interpretations of the law – "according to the judgment which they shall tell you, you shall do; you shall not decline from the ruling which they shall declare to you, to the right nor to the left" (ad loc 17:11).

This is exactly what Rashi is alluding to here. In *Parshas Tetzaveh*, Hashem told them exactly what was to be done, while in this week's *parsha* we are dealing with Moshe's interpretation of Hashem's commandments (see Rashi 8:5). In fact, there are some actions of the process that Moshe required them to do that Rashi points out that he is unaware of the source for those actions (see 8:11).

While Moshe is authorized to interpret what Hashem has commanded him to do, one might perhaps think it is acceptable to be more stringent or to maybe find a leniency because the rule wasn't expressly outlined by Hashem. Aharon and his sons are thus praised for following Moshe's instructions, not veering to the right nor to the left.

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