

Shemini	Eighth	Building Spiritual Momentum
Torah:	Leviticus 9:1-11:47	
Haftarah:	2 Samuel 6:1-7:17	
Brit Chadashah:	Hebrews 7:1-19	

Today we go back to the regular Torah Reading Cycle and pick it up in the second portion of the Book of Leviticus. I fully admit that Leviticus can be difficult to read and understand. It is a technical book and was intended to be a guide for the Levites as they performed their priestly duties among the people. At the incident of the golden calf, the Levites formed up around Moses and Aaron as a kind of body guard and attacked the leaders of the rebellion.

Two things. First, the people should have stood up to the idolatrous core and prevented them from forcing Aaron and the seventy elders to have the golden calf molded. This would have specifically been applied to the first born sons whose lives were spared by the Angel of Death and belonged to G-d as the priests of their families.

Secondly, people often talk about two levels when it comes to G-d's will. They say that there is first His perfect will where people do what He wants, the way He wants it done. Then there is His permissive will, where things are not done the way He wants and a kind of compromise is made.

I find this distinction problematic not because G-d has had to see things not always happen according to His Word as a kind of defeat, but His will is always conditional and the outcomes depend on the choices or responses which we make. When my kids were growing up I used the three step approach to discipline. Step one, I told them exactly what it was that I did not like that they were doing. Step Two, I gave them a choice, or they would face a consequence. Step Three depended on the choice they made with Step Two.

It is like that with G-d. When we do not do what G-d wants, the way He wants it done, He gives us a choice or a consequence. Moses cried out and asked who was on the L-rd's side and the entire tribe of Levi responded. The first born among the people failed in their priestly duties and consequently lost the priesthood.

We need to learn to do what G-d wants us to do, the way He wants us to do it or He will find someone else who will. First, He gives us a chance to repent and if we do, then we end up doing what He wants us to, the way He wants us to. He does not reject us when we sin, we reject Him when we do not repent. Sometimes it takes a long time for us to come to our senses and to repent, similar to the prodigal son. But G-d's will is never thwarted because we were created to choose and His kingdom will be accomplished with or without our participation. His Kingdom will never be overthrown and His will, will never be defeated.

There are three things from this portion I want to deal with about: the transfer of the Shichinah glory to the newly erected tabernacle, the incident of the strange fire and the principles of biblical kosher. There are other things which the passage deals with and I leave that to your private reading, along with the Haftarah and Brit Chadashah portions. Regularly digging into the Bible is always an incredibly enriching experience.

The chapter begins with the first sacrifices made in the newly completed altar in front of the tent of meeting. It was a double sacrifice, once for Aaron and his sons and then again for the people. This double sacrifice became the norm for tabernacle worship from this point forward. Once the sacrifices were made and fresh blood was sprinkled over the furnishings and the altar of the tent of meeting, something incredibly amazing happened.

After the incident with the golden calf, Moses moved his tent outside the camp and the Shechinah presence came down the mountain and hovered over his tent. When the people wanted to consult G-d they came to Moses' tent and he would come out and speak to them for G-d. This was the period of time when His face shone and he had to put on a veil when he came out of his tent.

Suddenly, once the tent of Meeting was blessed, the Shechinah presence moved from Moses' tent and permanently hovered over the Tent of Meeting. For the first time G-d actually dwelt in the midst of the people and when they offered their first sacrifices, they did not have to add fire, because fire came out from before YHVH and consumed the burnt offering. The people were so astonished, that they cried out for joy and all fell on their faces.

This brings us to the strange fire. The fire which was to burn day and night before the L-RD had to originate from the fire which came out from G-d. They were not to add any of their own fire. Instead of taking from the fire of G-d to light their incense, the two sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu lit their incense from fire from the camp. They should have known better and not have performed an act of equivalent idolatry.

They were killed by the fire, but apparently their priestly garments were not singed and they were carried out to be buried by their two remaining brothers. No one was allowed to mourn because divine justice had been carried out and the people were not to express any sadness for the righteous action of G-d.

The passage goes on to speak of the first set of offerings which were not consumed by fire. Guilt offerings had to be eaten by the High Priest and his sons for the ritual to be complete and for forgiveness to be achieved. Aaron could not eat his allotted portion right after his sons perished and Moses approved of his refusal. All subsequent forgiveness (expiation) offerings had to be eaten by the priest and in some cases by the worshiper in order for the ritual to be complete.

The L-RD now moved on to teach the people the principles of biblical kosher. Let me first distinguish between biblical and Talmudic kosher. Talmudic kosher forbids the mixing of dairy with meat and there are other rules that are so complex that it takes a rabbinic specialist to determine whether food is kosher or treffe (unclean). We do not follow Talmudic Kosher and only accept what the Bible teaches about Kosher.

Kosher only deals with what meat is clean and which meat is unclean. The animals are put into five categories and sometimes several examples in each category are given. As I said, before Talmudic Jews will eat a new kind of food, they first have to determine whether it is Kosher or treffe and the rules are often arbitrary and extremely complex. The Bible gives us a clear presentation of which kinds of meat are clean. Kosher should only refer to meat which is clean. It discusses animals which walk, animals which swim. It goes on to deal with animals which fly, which crawl and which slither.

Sometimes food was used to gain ritual power and two pagan practices are given which should be avoided. We should never eat an animal alive, because the life is in the blood. We have to kill it before we eat it. Also we should never boil a baby goat (a kid) in its mother's milk. This was done in Canaan to get both the life force of the baby goat and the sexual or reproductive power of the mother. Food should never become a source of spiritual power. Our spiritual power should only come from faith in G-d and in obedience to His Word.

The first category of animals are those who walk. There are three requirements for a walking animal to be kosher. First it must have hooves and not paws. Next, these hooves must be split and separate. This refers to hoofed animals that really have the equivalent of three separate hooves on each foot. Lastly the animal must ruminates or chew the cud. This means they must have four stomach compartments. Food is first broken down in the first stomach and is regurgitated back into the mouth to be chewed again. Finally, the cud is swallowed again and broken down and is finished being digested.

Rabbits and all animals with paws are never kosher. Crocodiles and lizards are also never kosher because they also have paws and not hooves. Hoofed animals whose hooves are split but not separate, like horses and camels are not kosher. Pigs' hooves are split and separate, but they do not ruminates, so pork is never kosher. All members of the deer family are kosher as are all goats, all sheep and all cattle.

The passage moves on to animals which swim. They must have scales and fins and this is the only category where a carnivore can be kosher (tuna). Whales, seals, dolphin, are not kosher because they do not have scales, even if they have fins. Cat fish and sturgeon also have fins, but with sharks, they have skin and not scales. They are not kosher.

Next, comes animals which fly and only animals with feathers are kosher. Bats, flying squirrels and flying lizards are not kosher. Only feathered animals which fly are kosher. It also cannot be a carnivore or a carrion eater. Eagles and osprey are not kosher, neither are vultures or owls. Ostriches, rheas, emus, cassowaries, kiwis, penguins and all other flightless birds are not kosher. Wild chickens and wild Turkeys can fly, even if their domesticated cousins are too overweight and lazy to do much flying, so they are kosher.

Song birds, pheasants, quail and ducks are kosher. Sea gulls are not. Pigeons, parrots and even peacocks are kosher, but not kookaburra, because they eat fish. The Talmud considers flamingos kosher but they are omnivores and eat both vegetation and meat. No omnivore is kosher. Finally, no sea birds are kosher because they eat fish. The big four kosher birds are chickens, ducks, geese and turkeys. I do not think I could eat a parrot, but I might try peacock.

The fourth category deals with animals which crawl. In order to be kosher, they must possess jumping legs. Spiders do not have jumping legs, nor do ants. Honey is kosher, but bees are not. Grasshoppers and locust are flying insects who also have jumping legs.

Finally, there are animals that slither and they are never kosher.

Kosher only deals with animals which are safe to eat and those which are not. We should neither add to or delete from the biblical guidelines for kosher. Kosher is dietary holiness.

Sermon: Paying Tribute to The Many Heroes of the Holocaust

The date for the Jewish observance of the Holocaust was selected because on the 26th of Nissan, in 1943, the remaining Jews in the Warsaw ghetto rose up against their German captors. That year the 26th of Nissan fell on the 19th of April. The uprising lasted nearly one month, until May 16th, 1943. The Germans were repeatedly expelled from the ghetto and some consider this the first military defeat the Germans suffered.

This year, Holocaust Memorial Day fell on Thursday, April 8th. So much has been written about the Holocaust and with so many official Nazi documents recording the large scale execution of the Jews, it is really impossible to deny that it happened or to downplay the scope of the carnage which the Nazis inflicted on the Jewish people in the lands which fell under Nazi occupation. It was so horrible that some want to pretend it did not happen

The Nazis issued more than 6 million death certificates for Jews who were executed officially, but no one counted those who fell to Nazi death squads as the German armies poured into Eastern Europe. The number of Jews who were killed is probably closer to some 12 millions. Also, it is not true that the Jews did not fight back once they were herded into the Ghettos and into the death camps. One source said there were about 100 rebellions, both in the ghettos and in the death camps. All those who fought back, even at the cost of their lives, are the first group of heroes of the Holocaust that I want to mention this morning.

As well, many Jews fled into the mountains and forests to join up with partisan fighting groups, and this is the second group of heroes I want to mention. Others hid or were hidden by their Gentile neighbors. And this group of brave Gentiles is the third group of heroes which I want to mention. Antisemitism has always troubled our people, but during WWII, there was a solid core of Gentiles who resisted this poison and put their lives at risk to hide our people. Some Gentile people even took in Jewish children and claimed that they were theirs. Others forged certificates so that Jews could pass for Gentiles.

Why did the Holocaust happen? Hatred of the Jews is satanic because you cannot love the King of the Jews, if you do not love the Jews. Paul said that the advantage of being Jewish was great in every way (Rom. 3: 1,2). He was also saddened because so many Jews resisted the Gospel and even said that he was willing to be cursed and separated from the Messiah on their behalf, because his love of the Jewish people was so great (Rom. 9:1-3). Nowhere in the New Testament are believers ever encouraged to hate or despise the Jews.

When Paul said that the blood of the Jews was on their own heads, he was referring to a specific segment of the Jewish community in Corinth and not to all Jews in general. When he referred to Jews being under the curse of the Law, he was referring to their attachment to teachings and traditions which they had developed to add to the Law. The term law can refer to the written Law of G-d or to the traditions of men. You must draw a distinction between the teachings of men, which can be a curse and the written Law of G-d, which is always good.

Yeshua said that He came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets, not to do away with them. Paul said that the Law is good, provided you use it legitimately (I Timothy 1:9). John said that the love of G-d consists of obeying the commandments because they are not grievous. None of the apostles called for an end to Judaism and the Bible never says that Jews are cursed and should be exterminated because they killed the Messiah. He came to die for sinners, both Jewish and Gentile and it is only those who twist the meaning of the Bible who use it to justify persecuting Jews and exterminating them. Now, I want to talk about some Gentile heroes.

Probably the two biggest Gentile Heroes of the Holocaust are Raoul Wallenberg and Oscar Schindler. Raoul saved as many as 100,000 Hungarian Jews, while Schindler saved over 1,000 Polish Jews. I saw a book which listed those Gentiles who saved Jews during the war and you may be surprised to learn that well over half of them were Polish.

They defied the Nazis, even though they were told that all living members of their family would be executed if they were caught sheltering any Jews. They got hold of false papers and found places for the Jews to hide. Many Polish Jews also joined the Polish resistance and survived by hiding in the woods and fighting with the Polish underground.

A Muslim community in Paris hid a few hundred Jews in the tunnels under their mosque. The King of Bulgaria refused to round up his Jews and turn them over to the Nazis. Even Mussolini refused to systematically round up Italian Jews and nearly 80% of them survived. A Polish lady snuck over 100 children out of the Warsaw ghetto before she was caught. The Nazis broke every bone in her body, but she survived and just passed away recently.

Most of the Jews in Denmark were transported secretly to neutral Sweden. What is not so well known is that the German soldiers occupying Denmark were mostly older WWI veterans. Even though they knew what was happening, they turned a blind eye and allowed the Jews to escape. The Danish government also refused to require Jews to wear yellow stars and most Danes supported their small Jewish population and cooperated in their escape before the Germans were able to organize a large scale deportation of Danish Jews.

The Vatican is often criticized for not speaking out more against the murder of Jewish people in Europe. The Pope did not speak out against the Holocaust to avoid increasing acts of violence against priests and their flocks. One of my teachers was a Catholic priest who became a Nazi party member to protect his flock. Instead of being a coward, the Pope spearheaded a rescue network that saved around 860,000 Jews throughout Europe. When the round up of Jews escalated, he warned Hitler to leave the Jews of Rome alone or he would lead a massive protest movement. This saved around 7,000 Roman Jews. Across Europe, Catholic authorities issued around 80,000 fake birth certificates to save Jews.

In 1940, before the Soviets were attacked by the Nazis, the Japanese consul in Lithuania, Chiune Sugihara, issued false transit documents to nearly 6,000 Jews who needed exit papers to escape from Germany through the Soviet Union. He is often referred to as the Japanese Schindler. This happened before Japan entered the war in 1941.

There are so many stories of heroism among Gentile people who lived under the Nazi occupation and while too many cooperated with the Nazis to round up Jews for extermination, many others did their best to save their Jewish neighbours. Though many Jews survived the horror of the extermination camps, others were hidden and were not found by the Nazis.

There was a Catholic priest in Italy who moved members of a Jewish community between monasteries and convents to prevent them from being captured by the Nazis. One Jewish boy hid among the Nazis by pretending to be an eastern European German. He was nearly executed by the Russians when he was captured as a German soldier.

I am greatly perturbed by the horrors our people suffered during the Holocaust, but I remain grateful for those Gentiles who defied the Nazis and sheltered Jews in very creative ways. Their great courage meant that over a million more of our people survived being executed.

We are called to speak out for the orphans and the widows and for those who are downtrodden. I still mourn for all those Jews who perished at the hands of the Nazi monsters. I am still enraged by all those who cooperated with the Nazis and even participated in rounding up and killing so many Jews. All the perpetrators deserve to be prosecuted and punished for their crimes, but I know that too many of them escaped prosecution by changing their identities and were often hiding in plain sight.

I am disgusted that even though some 600,000 Austrians became Nazis, the Austrian government has done nothing to prosecute them. I am happy that it is still a crime in Germany to deny the Holocaust, as it is in Poland. Too many survivors have not been compensated for all that they lost and some of them were even beaten and killed when they tried to reclaim their homes. So many Jewish possessions and treasures have not been recovered, because so many of their former owners did not survive.

It is hard to understand why the Holocaust was allowed to happen and that Christians in Europe did not make more of an effort to shelter or rescue their Jewish neighbours. Many question why G-d allowed it to happen and did not directly intervene.

There are so many stories of great courage especially among believing Christians that we should see this as a form of divine intervention. I consider that one of the reasons that the incredible horrors of WWII were allowed to happen was that the enemy was trying to cause YHVH to intervene and bring on the end of the world before all the kingdom purposes of G-d were accomplished. G-d will never be goaded and all of His kingdom purposes will be fulfilled.

I also find comfort that many who escaped punishment in this life will stand before the Messiah on the Day of Judgment and receive the punishment they deserve in the next life. I am grateful for the Heroes of the Holocaust, both Jewish and Gentile who risked their lives to save Jews and help undermine the Nazi war effort. If the war had not ended when it did, untold numbers of more Jews in the camps would have been executed. It may be hard to believe, but one of Adolf Eichmann's regrets that he expressed during his trial was that he was not given enough time to finish his job and kill all the rest of the Jews in Nazi custody.

All of us are born with free will and while we cannot always decide what will happen to us, we can always decide how we respond to the whatever's which come our way. Some people who suffer greatly choose to make others suffer even beyond that which they themselves suffered. Others are able to forgive those who hurt them and live meaningful lives despite the horrors they suffered. I want to be part of this group. There is too much pain in the world.

As believers it is our job not to let pain and hatred dominate our lives and not use the hurt we have suffered as an excuse to hurt others. Forgiveness does not mean we have to be grateful for what we have suffered and think of it as good that we suffered. Paul said that he did not consider the suffering of this life is worthy to be compared to the immeasurable weight of glory which will someday be revealed to us. This is what we need to focus on.

You will never hear about a holocaust survivor who becomes vindictive and terrorizes people for what the Nazis did to the Jewish people. How we respond should never make the situation worse, nor cause pain because of the pain we have suffered. I am grateful for all the heroes who helped our people during the Holocaust, whatever role they played.

Some took up arms and resisted the Nazis at the cost of their lives in the camps and in the ghettos. Others joined various underground groups to disrupt the Nazis by the use of sabotage. Many Jews in the British Mandate of Palestine joined the British army and fought the Nazis. Jewish soldiers from around the world also fought bravely against the Nazis. Many Gentiles helped their Jewish neighbours and their stories are sometimes amazing.

Sometimes survivors and their descendants find it difficult to talk about the horrors they experienced, but I wanted to tell you about those brave souls who did not sit back and do nothing. They took great risks and prevented well over a million more Jews from being slaughtered. They did not do it to receive a reward or to become famous. They knew that they had to do something and it is this kind of courage we need to learn from as we walk through our darkening world. Do you know what the something is you are being called to do?

It is my hope that another holocaust does not happen again and that our people are not once again slaughtered in their millions. Some believers believe that there is still another great slaughter waiting for our people before the end of the world. Three things.

Whatever is going to happen should never cause us to abandon our faith or our trust in the Messiah. We should never let the dark forces of evil overwhelm our faith and turn us into the same monsters who mass murdered our people. There have been far too many genocides committed in our world and this is one case where we need to determine not to fight fire with fire. We need to speak out against evil and never become part of it.

Next, we need to remain committed to goodness, mercy and justice in how we respond to all that is happening in our world. We need to be heroes and not villains as we follow in the foot steps of people who have stood up and shone in moments of great darkness. Upholding the rule of Law may sometimes mean that we resist those who make unjust laws, but our resistance should never turn into a vendetta where we do unto others what they have done to us. We always want to do what we can to make things better and not worse.

And even as we see our world once again continue sinking into darkness on a global scale, we need to cling more strongly to our faith and do everything in our power to promote the light of G-d's kingdom. What the Nazis did to our people and to millions of others, may be one of the darkest chapters in human history, but it does not have to become part of our history.

We should never let darkness and suffering be what motivates our response. We cannot just stand by passively and not speak up, but we are citizens of the world to come and the values which under gird our lives need to be kingdom values. We need to want to help as much as we are able. We need to trust G-d to raise up heroes who will resist evil, even as it intensifies. We may see darkness grow as it moves to cover our world again, but we should never let it grow in our hearts and lives. We must never let unrighteous and evil become our response or even impact our response, in whatever happens to us.

We want to be heroes who not only proclaim the wonder of the coming kingdom, but whose lives give people a foretaste of that kingdom. Many Gentiles became heroes who did their best to save as many Jewish people as they could. Some were only able to save one or two, while others saved hundreds and even thousands. When we do what we can, we are serving the coming kingdom and G-d will use us to bring others into the kingdom. We are all called to be heroes. Shabbat shalom and shavua tov.