

(Dvar Torah continued from front page...)

Combining all of these elements, we can learn that the regular meeting of human and divine bears witness to the specialness of their relationship; it is a re-enactment of the ultimate meeting of the human and divine at Sinai that brought forth Torah.

Viewed this way, one might literally call the Torah “the Witnessing.” And the Israelites witnessed so much—the birth of the Jewish people going out of Israel, the revelation at Sinai, and ultimately coming into the Promised Land. On Passover, when we are asked to imagine ourselves as if we ourselves are Israelites freed from bondage, we are asked to witness what they have seen and felt as the most meaningful way of understanding the Jewish story.

So too today is an age of witnessing. Think of the #metoo movement or the struggle to understand how best to witness the strife of Dreamers in the United States or asylum seekers in Israel—all people crying out for their stories to be heard and compassionate solutions to their struggles to be found. Perhaps most poignantly in the United States, we watch with a mix of broken hearts and pride as teenagers—among them many USYers—demand witness around issues of gun control.

And what does it mean to witness? A closer look at the root of *edut* reveals a possible link with the word *ad*, which means, among other things, “up to” or “until.” *Edut* is something like a threshold, a knowledge full to the point of bursting. It’s the transfer point, the transom, the place of crossing over. Maybe this is why Jewish thresholds contain a *mezzuzah* with a protective holy text for moments of transition. The text serves as sign of witness for us.

In ancient Greek the word for “witnessing” can be translated as “martyrdom.” Sadly, Judaism has a long history of martyrs, but to pass the threshold of life to death is considered a choice of last resort. The ultimate Jewish value is to “choose life,” not to die for a cause. Indeed, in our age of witnessing, asylum seekers, victims of sexual abuse, and teen survivors of gun violence are refusing to be martyrs. They are raising their voices as individuals so that the community will witness them. Their very lives depend upon it. To live is to witness, and one can never be a witness alone.

For Discussion: What kinds of relationships require us to show up, regularly, as a kind of testimony to their specialness? What larger issues in society do you feel are pulling you personally to “show up” and bear witness?

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TORAH SPARKS

Parashat Vayikra

Shabbat Rosh Hodesh | Shabbat Hahodesh

March 17, 2018 | 1 Nisan 5778

Annual | Leviticus 1:1-5:26; Numbers 28:9-15

Etz Hayim p. 585-605; 930-931; Hertz p. 410-423; 695

Triennial | Leviticus 3:1-4:26; Numbers 28:9-15

Etz Hayim p. 592-599; 930-931; Hertz p. 415-419; 695

Maftir | Exodus 12:1-20 Etz Hayim p. 380-385; Hertz p. 253-257

Haftarah | Ezekiel 45:16-46:18 Etz Hayim p. 1290-1294; Hertz p. 1001-1004

D'var Torah: Meeting & Witnessing

Dr. Stephen Arnoff, Executive Director, Fuchsberg Jerusalem Center

We have just finished *Sefer Shemot* (Book of Exodus) and its multiple chapters describing the donation of raw materials and the building of the Mishkan (Tabernacle). *Sefer Vayikra* (Book of Leviticus) marks a change, opening as it does with a calling, a speaking, and a meeting/witnessing.

The opening line is *Vayikra el Moshe* (and [God] called to Moses), *vayidaber Adonai elav* (and God spoke to him), *m'ohel mo'ed* (from the Tent of Meeting). The word “*mo'ed*” is a complex one. Here it means meeting, but elsewhere it also refers to a festival (we say *Moadim L'Simcha* during the intermediary days of *Sukkot* and *Pesach*). Taking into account both uses, we can understand *mo'ed* as a regularized meeting of the human and the divine.

Mo'ed also contains the word *ed*, which means “witness,” and not surprisingly the *Ohel Mo'ed* is also referred to (see *Shemot* 38:21 and *BaMidbar* 1:50) as *Ohel Ha'Edut*, the Tent of the Witnessing/Testimony. Sitting at the center of the Israelite camp, the *Mishkan/Ohel Mo'ed/Ohel Ha'Edut* holds what is called *Ha-edut* (the Testimony), literally the tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written—the sign/record of the covenant between God and Israel.

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D'var Haftarah: Passing Through

Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty

The second part of this week's special haftarah for *Shabbat HaHodesh*, the last of the four special maftir readings leading up to *Pesach*, reads like the stage directions for special events. It tells us which of the gates to the Temple should be opened or closed for a particular special day, whether Shabbat or festival, and it coordinates pedestrian traffic patterns in the Temple for those days as well. No detail seems too trivial for mention as we note in the following regulation: "But on the festivals, when the common people come before the Lord, whoever enters by the north gate to bow low shall leave by the south gate and whoever enters by the south gate shall leave by the north gate." (46:9)

Seemingly, Ezekiel's purpose, in this innovation, was to keep the mass of attendants moving in an orderly fashion so that the Temple would not become snarled by the large turnout of pilgrims. Rashi (France, 1040-1105 CE) alludes to another possible reason. He asserts that since it was a mitzvah on the pilgrimage festivals to be seen in the Temple, Ezekiel's ruling allowed for maximizing people's participation in this Temple ritual.

The Talmud builds on this later rationale when it applies this idea to synagogue life: Said Rabbi Helbo said Rav Huna: "One who enters a synagogue to pray is permitted to make it a kapandaria, as it says: 'But on the festivals, when the common people come before the Lord'" (Berachot 62b). A "kapandaria" is a shortcut or a way of traversing from one place to another. In other words, Rabbi Helbo teaches that if one goes to pray in a shul, it can be used as a means for getting from one place to another.

The Talmudist Rabbi Yitzhak Alfasi's (Algeria, 1013–1103 CE) had a version of the Talmud text that read that it is even "obligatory" to make the synagogue a "kapandaria". Why? According to Rabbi Nissim Gerondi (Barcelona, 1320-1376) since it extends one's stay in the synagogue, it shows how much the person loves being there.

There is much to be said for this idea. Loving being Jewish is not an instant experience. It takes investment. One of the best ways to "invest" is to spend time in shul – as an individual, as a family – the more time spent, the greater the inspiration, the greater the familiarity and sense of feeling at home, the greater the love.

For Discussion: What is your relationship with synagogue? Is it a place you try to spend a lot of time, or a little? How can we make our kehillot places that people love to be, so much so that they would just pass through on their way someplace else?

Parashat Vayikra Self-Study

Vered Hollander-Goldfarb, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty

We are starting the third book of the Torah – *Vayikra*. Our *parasha* deals with *korbanot* (sacrifices) of various types, from various sources, and for various reasons.

- 1) The first two *parashot* of the book of *Vayikra* teach about *Korbanot*. How does that connect to the end of the book of *Shemot*, which we finished reading last week?
- 2) In an unusual opening, we are not only told that God spoke to Moshe, but also that He called to Moshe (*Vayikra* 1:1). What might this experience have been like for Moshe? (Consider how this might be different from a call by a human being, what the physical and emotional feeling might be like.)
- 3) Should a person bring a *korban* (sacrifice), he (or she) is not the only human involved in the process (1:3-9). Who else is involved? Why do you think that there was no option given to allow a person to do all the aspects of the *korban* by himself?
- 4) When the animal to be used as *korban* is described, the word *tamim* – whole, is often used to denote a blemish free animal (1:3,10, 3:1,6, 4:3,23,28,32). Why do you think that the Torah stresses this aspect of the animal?
- 5) While a person may need to bring a *korban*, he/she may not be able to afford to bring a large animal, such as a goat. What can he/she bring instead (5:7)? Why do you think that the Torah did not go the extra step and absolve him from bringing a physical *korban*?

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