

Tsav	Command	Setting up Ritual Access
Torah:	Leviticus 6:8(1*)-8:36	
Haftarah:	Jeremiah 7:21-8:3; 9:23, 24 (Malachi 3:4-24 [3:4-4:6])	
Brit Chadashah:	Hebrews 9:11-28	
Reading:	Sherri B. p. 177 and Ps. 107. Jewish hero: Joseph. Torah carrier: Bernie	
Shabbat HaGadol		

Once the tabernacle and the tent of meeting were set up, Moses had to also set up the rules regarding both the sacrifices and the priests who would be performing them. This was so that the people could have permanent ritual access to YHVH, who dwelt in their midst through the fire and the cloud. The sacrifices had to be performed with ritual precision, so that the people understood that while G-d dwelt in their midst, He was separate and holy – and they had to continually separate themselves from their sin and defilement and be holy, in order to approach Him and be in good relationship with Him. They had to maintain this ritual tension between His nearness to them and the great distance there was actually between YHVH and themselves.

There was a process they had to go through to have access to the presence and to consult with the L-RD whose presence hovered over them and which would lead them home to the Promised Land. This portion finishes up describing acceptable rituals for the sacrifices and for the permanent fire which was to burn upon the altar. It moves on to the ordination (consecration) of Aaron and his sons who were to supervise the people's regular access to the presence, over and above Moses' special, non transferable access.

Moses took five ritual elements and put Aaron and his sons through a ceremony which would prepare them to be a permanent connection between the people and the presence. For us, we have the resurrected Messiah who won the right to be our permanent access to the Father over and above any ritual access – we have actual access in Him.

Once he had washed them, Moses anointed them, and dressed them in their priestly garments as a sign that they would be a visible connection with the invisible presence. Then he sacrificed the bull of atonement and placed its blood all around the altar and purified it. This meant that both they and the altar were ready to purify the people and separate them from their sins.

Next Moses burned the ram of the burnt offering on the altar as a sign that the sins which were to be atoned for by the priests, was both completely paid for no longer existed as a barrier between them and G-d. Now in order to perform these special rituals, Moses took the ram of ordination (consecration) and placed its blood on the ear lobes, the right thumbs and the right big toes of the priests as a sign that they were set apart to perform these rituals of access on behalf of the people.

Finally, he took a basket of unleavened bread (cakes) and burned a portion it upon the altar. He then anointed the priests a second time as they took their portion of the breast of the ram and the remainder of the bread which was in the basket and ate both the bread and the meat the entrance to the tent of meeting. They remained at the entrance of the tent of meeting for seven days, night and day, in order for the ordination ritual to be completed.

It was an elaborate ritual which turned both the ordinary elements which the people had built and the chosen priests who were selected from among the people and turned both of them into instruments which would guarantee a permanent ritual access between the hovering presence and the people who dwelt in the camp around the tent of meeting.

Even in our day, we have to understand that G-d is completely "other" and though He dwells in our hearts through faith, He is totally separate from this fallen world in which we dwell. He provided His people with permanent rituals of access so that they could know Him and walk with Him according to His Word, both on their way to the Holy Land and for as long as they were to dwell in the Holy Land. This marvellous system was set up to keep the balance between the inaccessible G-d who was present with them and the rituals which would give them access to that which they could neither approach nor really see in its fullness.

In the fullness of time, G-d sent His Son to fulfil in reality all the ritual requirements of this system, so that we could be provided with permanent access to the Father through the Son by His Spirit who dwells in our hearts through faith. The distance between the inaccessible G-d and us is still maintained as long as we are stuck in these bodies as we walk as pilgrims through this age which is withering and passing away, generation by generation.

However, it is our glorious hope and firm assurance that one day, when He returns, that we will be liberated from our mortal bodies and liberated from this mortal world and see Him for who He truly is and dwell forever with Him in the new heavens and on the new earth which we so earnestly long for. The temporary priesthood was set up in all of its glory and ceremony and the people were guaranteed permanent access to the Father until the time when all the promises were to be fulfilled and the permanent priesthood of the Son would grant us eternal access to the Father through the blood which He shed for us on the cross.

His ordained priesthood showed His desire to walk with us and be involved in our lives, without leaving or violating His inaccessible glory. Are you taking advantage of the new and living way we have in our blessed Messiah and keeping the spiritual channels open between you and the Saviour? All the rituals and ceremonies point to the reality we have in the Messiah. We still need to be forgiven and cleansed and we still need to hear His voice and to walk according to His Word.

In a very real sense, we are the camp of the L-rd, living our lives around His presence and regularly accessing this presence which the priesthood of our Messiah continues to grant to us. What the people had through rituals, we have through our blessed Messiah. How is your access to the L-rd doing? Is He the centre around which your life revolves? Are you letting Him to keep you purified and free from the stain of sin in this fading world?

Today is also Shabbat HaGadol and the regular Haftarah portion is replaced with the final chapter of Malachi. In some Bibles, chapter three goes on to verse 24, in mine, chapter 3 ends at verse 18, and chapter 4 has 6 verses – the same content, just different versification. It deals with the sad state of Israel who had forgotten the wonder of the old days when we first began to walk with the L-rd. Since the L-rd does not change, we are called to return to the place where we have fallen, as we await the glorious day of His returning, when judgment, healing and restoration will occur in their fulness.

In the interim, we are not to forget the Law of Moses and we are to walk in the light of His Word, both in obedience and in anticipation. As we prepare to observe Passover for one more year,

we need to remember that our deliverance from Egypt was only the first stage in a wonderful saga of redemption which has a two stage culmination. The first culmination was when our Messiah fulfilled all the sacrificial requirements and came to dwell in our hearts by faith. The second and final culmination will be once He returns and all the folly and darkness of this fading world is swept away as His glorious eternal kingdom is set up forever over all the nations and generations of mankind.

May we walk with Him, remembering what He has done as we earnestly anticipate that which is still to come. At our Seder we end with these words: next year in the New Jerusalem.

Sermon: Organizing the Camp and setting Free its Full Potential

Passage: *And He gave some to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be evangelists, others to be pastor teachers for the perfecting of the saints in view of the work of the ministry and the edification of the body of Christ, until we have all arrived at the unity of faith and of the knowledge of the son of G-d, and are mature, reaching to the very heights of the perfect stature of our Messiah.* (Eph. 4:11-13).

Right from the onset, Abraham knew that he was called to be different and that his descendants were to accomplish great things and bring the scattered generations of the children of Adam and Eve back into fellowship with G-d. The process began slowly and was sustained by both the faith and the obedience of the architects of the great nation which would one day burst forth from Egyptian captivity and return to the Promised Land. There, our people were destined to become a light and a beacon to the nations, showing them the way home to the Father, so that they too could escape out of pagan darkness and walk in His marvellous light.

As Moses led the people through the wilderness to the foot of the Holy Mountain, He had to teach the people what it meant to walk with the L-rd as free people, and not just as former slaves celebrating their deliverance. First he walked them seven days until they were out of Egyptian held territory, then he had them purged of Egyptian parasites at the waters of Mara and taught them to be Sabbath powered as they learned to rely upon His provision, supplying them with daily manna, once their grain supplies were depleted.

They also had to fight off bushwhackers who tried and divert them from their kingdom focus. They had not yet become a single camp with a single purpose and as they camped around the Holy Mountain, Moses tried to teach them all that they would need to know to think and act like the people of G-d. It was a long process and soon Moses became bogged down and, if the truth be told, the camp was beginning to unravel because they had not been told how to live their lives according to the priorities of G-d.

Moses, father-in-law showed up and helped Moses recognize the leadership potential of the people by organizing them into leaders of ten, fifty, one hundred and a thousand. In that way the people could use their giftedness to settle issues of increasing importance so that only the weightier matters were brought before Moses.

You see, there will always be two levels of relating to G-d as we walk with Him through this life and they are our individual walk with the L-rd and our community expression of that walk. I know of too many believers who have given up on community for any number of reasons, ranging from their own inability to learn to get along with people to the fatigue which comes

when communities generate endless disputes which are not resolved according to the Word.

Moses had a large community which he wanted to organize so that its potential could be tapped and not dissipated because people wrongly felt that they could do their own thing and not pay attention to the Word which Moses was organizing them to receive. Our walk with the L-rd requires a certain level of group maturity where we relate well to each other and sort out our differences according to the principles of G-d's Word.

The challenge I want to present to you on this Shabbat HaGadol is to ask how seriously do we take our calling to actually be a community in our blessed Messiah and not just a group of people who meet together once a week to sing songs and hear a sermon. Now as I prepared this message, I became aware of a potential misunderstanding in how I give leadership to the community which G-d is calling us to form.

I realize the complexity of life and the number of complications which we all live with and have to come to terms with, so I do not harp on the lack of attendance at our weekly Prayer Meeting and Yeshiva Bible Study. But this lack of pressure is not a sign that I am content for people to fill their lives with excuses and make so many exceptions that their spirituality takes a back seat to other things which have wrongly become more important in their lives. Because I live with complicated health concerns, I understand how complicated life can get and want to encourage people to exercise as much flexibility as they need to, so that their walk with the L-rd does in fact become the hard drive which powers their life.

It is too easy to make excuses and come up with so many different, valid sounding reasons not to gather together and bond as members of a dynamic community of overcoming disciples. And instead of rising up and overcoming the obstacles which want to prevent us from full community participation, we end up stalling ourselves and putting off what we know we need to do, because we are not yet quite willing to figure out how to get them done. Some of the excuses sound so reasonable, but anything which prevents us from making the effort to find our place in full community involvement, makes no sense in the long run.

I have been a believer for some forty six years and I have watched people come to the L-rd and drift away, some peacefully and some violently. I had a considerable lot of baggage when I gave my heart to the L-rd and many of my friends and detractors said that I would not last six months before I returned to the party, drug culture out of which I was delivered. I am glad to have disappointed them, but at the same time I have been disappointed as I watched others who have come into the faith over the years, slip back out into the world because they did not sink down roots into the Word and into the community of believers – because sheep do not last long without a sheepfold to shelter in.

Now I know that communities have their difficulties and people do not always get along and hurt feelings and misunderstandings can make us want to gather up our toys and find some other people to play with – or worse yet, determine that becoming part of an imperfect community is not worth the effort when we can have a much better time all by ourselves. Part of the turnover we experience as we welcome newcomers has to do with any number of reasons people use not to become plugged in to our wonderful family of believers.

I definitely want to people to feel welcome and I want them to feel appreciated and I do not want to push obligation and bully them into greater community participation because that is not my job as I see it from the Scriptures. Being willing to become a participating community member

must come from a personal understanding that this is part of our calling in the L-rd and must be followed up with a bold determination to do the work and make the effort and find our place of service in this diverse, talented group of people.

We do not all live in the same neighbourhood and some of us have quite a distance to travel and all of us must juggle the tyranny of the urgent and the busyness of life so that we leave room for the community involvement we are called to. Our Shabbat school is a prime example and does not require a direct call to be a volunteer, as much as it requires a firm commitment to our children, whether we have done our part raising our own or have never had the privilege of herding rug rats from the cradle to adulthood.

Bible Study and Prayer need to occur individually and corporately, as does worship and outreach and you cannot have fellowship all by yourself. Moses wanted the people to be organized to serve and to grow and to learn to walk with the King as they left their slave habits behind and did not pick up any new bad spiritual habits. Life is lived through a series of stages and each one of them throws us so many curve balls that we are in constant danger of being knocked out of play because we have not learned to recognize and to take the ways of escape which the L-rd always provides for us in every situation we encounter.

My welcoming, gentle approach should not be seen as seeking to provide people with excuses not to become involved in the life of our community, but as a recognition that it takes flexibility, effort and even discipline to work through our issues and become rooted in community life. This is so that we can be growing towards spiritual maturity, instead of forever hanging out in the shallow end and living on baby milk when the L-rd is calling us to move on to a diet of meat in His Word and in Prayer.

I am both very satisfied and also very troubled by what is going on and what is not going on in our community, both because I see our great potential in the L-rd and because I see the time and effort which it will take to make and to maintain any serious progress in the L-rd and some of us seem to be slow in grasping this essential truth. We seem to have convinced ourselves that we already have so much on our plate that any further community involvement will sink us – when the opposite is true. Community involvement, both in our weekly meetings and in the various ministries in our Shabbat services and in meeting together to help and fellowship during the week (which includes Sundays) opens us up to blessings and strength and growth which we can get no other way.

Together we have to decide what kind of community we want to become as we enter our fifteenth year of operation. I have always said that we will always be willing to change both what we do and how we do it, if improvements can be made that will benefit us as we grow and mature as a community of Jews and Gentiles who are really committed to actually be Sabbath powered and Festival driven. I would like to see our Youth Group get off the ground again, even as we wait for our older children to enter into the wonders and the pitfalls of their turn at adolescence.

The list could almost be endless – we need a functioning elders board, a dynamic ladies group and a men's fellowship and I could use an assistant and our leadership could use an administrator to help us get things done in an organized, timely manner. Help came to Moses from an unexpected source and I am hoping for the same in our community. I believe G-d is calling some of us to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor teachers, encouragers,

administrators and some of us even just to be willing to pitch in wherever any help is needed.

Our problem will never be a lack of gifting from the L-rd. Our problem will never be a lack of provision and protection in the L-rd. Our problem will always be the challenge of organizing our lives so that both our personal and our corporate spirituality remain the top priorities we give our best time and energy to. Now any opportunity has a limited shelf life and when we miss it, we must wait for it to come around and we need to use our time "in the mean time" to prepare ourselves to pounce when the door is opened again for us.

There will always be spoilers and bushwhackers who take pleasure in dismantling community effectiveness by gossip and negative politics, pushing their own agenda to their own advantage, instead of seeking for that which would spur growth and health as we attend to the practical affairs of our community. I know it will never be an easy task and sometimes the road can get really bumpy, but we have three choices when it comes to getting organized as a spiritual community in the L-rd.

We can just quit and high tail it back to the pointless flesh pots of Egypt. We can also refuse to unpack our spiritual baggage and do laps around the same issues which we refuse to resolve, getting nowhere fast as we make excuses and do not seek for reasons and positive strategies which would break us out of the ruts we have gotten stuck in.

The last option is the best, but it comes with a big price tag which is well worth the cost. We can set ourselves to work out our issues and build a generationally sustainable spiritual community, so that our children's children will still be serving the L-rd, long after we have gone to our reward. People are not always easy to deal with and misunderstandings and hurt feelings are far too common, but they are part of the big price tag we have to be prepared to pay, if we are serious about building and maintaining a dynamic community of praise which digs deep into the Word and Prayer.

We are a specialized ministry, called by the L-rd to be both a bridge between the Jewish world of the synagogue and the Gentile world of the church and to be a place where people can unpack their baggage in a Messianic setting and learn to actually grow in grace and knowledge on their pilgrimage from the cradle to the grave.

We will not be able to solve every issue we encounter and we will have to learn to sometimes agree to disagree, but if we understand what it is that we are trying to build, then we can place our giftings before the L-rd and before the community and watch it grow and deepen and prosper in the L-rd, no matter what tries to get in our way.

In our Bible Study, I used an illustration which I would like to close with. It is impossible in a single sermon to deal with all the issues and concerns involved in building and maintaining a healthy, dynamic community, but I definitely want to start a conversation and keep it going so that we grow and prosper as we explore how this can become a reality in our midst.

We need to see ourselves as those who are seated on chairs, inside a circle that is defined by the basic teachings of our faith. We may discuss the same things which are discussed outside the circle of faith, but we remain focused on building the kingdom within this circle and on protecting it against invasion and violation.

Here are the five non negotiable fundamentals which define the circle of faith we are seated inside and which we will protect and defend: (1) The Bible is the Word of G-d. (2) Yeshua is G-d the Son. (3) He was born of a virgin. (4) He died on the cross for the sins of the world. and (5) He arose, ascended and will one day return. Inside the circle of these beliefs we will work out the issues we need to resolve so that we can remain a dynamic spiritual community of praise, well within the circle. Some will become ensnared and wander out of the circle and some times we will struggle to live in harmony and grow together inside the circle.

But when all is said and done, we will organize ourselves and search for flexible strategies to make sure that His Word is applied in our lives and that no darkness of the world is allowed to cross the line and dwell in our midst. We will welcome anyone and everyone who shares our vision and who is willing to discover their gifting and apply it to the various ministries of our shul and not try to bring divisions and negative politicking into our shul family. As we prepare to once again celebrate our deliverance from Egyptian slavery, may the L-rd grant us to live lives of spiritual liberty as we grow together in the grace and the knowledge of our Messiah through His Word. How seriously are you taking our call to be an actual community? Are you sitting in the circle, especially with the things you listen to? Are you finding reasons to become involved in our community life or are you stuck with excuses that prevent your growth?