

## What Can I do?

This week's Torah reading, *Tezaveh*, like last week's Torah reading, focuses on the Temple. But in contrast to last week, which highlighted the vessels and structure of the Temple, *Tezaveh* ignores the structure and looks at the people who maintain the institution; namely, the Kohanim, the priests. If a Kohen were told to act as a Kohen in the Temple it would not be immediately obvious what he would be expected to do. Onkelos' Aramaic translation of 'Kohen' defines the role as service. (Ex 28:4)

In the simplest form, the Kohen was a custodian. He would serve God and he would serve the people. A priest conjures a particular image in our minds of an exalted, saintly person – usually a man – engaged in esoteric, sacred rites. The Kohen, though, was not a glamorous figure. His life was filled by restrictions and limitations. The Kohen was landless. God was where the Kohen claimed his home. So the Bible needed to protect the Kohen from being neglected and vulnerable by offering him the first fruits and the Terumah gifts.

Yet, the Kohen was indispensable to the functionality of the Temple. Without the human intervention of the Kohen, God would be absent from the Temple. In Jewish life, human initiative always went hand in hand with Divine intervention.

Even the most extreme Biblical example of Divine intervention – the exodus from Egypt – demonstrated a union between God's act and man as agent. Though God could perform the wondrous deeds on His own, Moses uses his staff throughout the process, serving as an emissary to deliver messages to the Pharaoh. At the splitting of the sea, God first demands – almost as a precondition – that Moses speak to the people and then go forward. Rabbinically, the figure of Nachshon as the first one wading into the water, up to his neck, is consistent with the theme of man acting as an of God.

This Shabbat is one of the four special Shabbatot on the calendar. It is known as Shabbat *Zachor*, the Shabbat of Memory, when we recall the evil ambush by the Amalakites as the Children of Israel left Egypt. During that battle, the people face Amalek with uncertainty and battle hangs in the balance. But when Moses goes to the mountaintop and raises his arms heavenward, the people would succeed in battle. The Mishna explains that Moshe's arms needed to be risen so that the people would remember where their victory was truly coming from. God needed Moshe to redirect the people's awareness in order to help them defeat the Amalekites.

Finally, we are on the eve of celebrating Purim. The Purim story is the opposite of the Exodus story. God's intervention is muted. God is the hidden character of the Purim story. While Haman, the evil Amalekite, uses his dirty tricks, again, to ambush the Jews of Persia, Mordechai remains resolute not to bow. With her access to the king's inner chamber, Esther crafts Haman's demise. In this story, man's active agency reveals God's hidden intervention.

With the confluence of the Torah readings about the priests, Amalek, and the celebration of Purim, and approach of Pesach, we need to ask ourselves: What can I do to serve as God's agent? How can we reveal the divine hand in the world around us?

Shabbat Shalom Umevorach and Chag Purim Sameach  
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